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## Socio-educational development of pre-school children in Eastern Cape: Factors militating against fathers' readiness to participate

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Past studies on South African fathers' less or non-involvement in their children's development have either approached it qualitatively, with rural dwellers that are less educated than participants, or those that were quantitatively limited in terms of their focus and methodology. There is, therefore, a dearth of quantitative data on factors affecting South African fathers' readiness to participate in their children's development. It is precisely this realisation that has prompted this research paper. For this study, a descriptive survey research design with a sample of 300 university students was adopted. A questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was used to collect data, and both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in the analysis at 0.05 level of significance. Absence of father at home (weighted average = 3.72), relationship with the mother of the child (weighted average = 3.63), and financial factors (weighted average = 3.46) are identified as those factors conspiring against South African fathers' readiness, while fathering skills (weighted average = 3.41) are not one of these factors. The conclusion drawn, based on the findings of this research, is that counselling service units ought to be established in all communities in South Africa to work with families so as to help facilitate and maintain positive and cordial relationship amongst them.

**Keywords:** childhood education; father-mother relationship; fathering skills; fathers' participation; financial factor; gender; pre-school children; race; socio-education development

### Introduction

There is a growing body of literature suggesting that the participation of men and fathers in the early education of their children is very low in South Africa in particular (See for example, Idemudia, Maepa & Moamogwe, 2016; Mncanca & Okeke, 2016; Richter, 2006; Swartz, Bhana, Richter & Versfeld, 2013). The first social stimulation that a child is exposed to outside the home and, most of the time, excluding the parent, is the pre-school education given at a formal centre. Although much attention has been focused on the participation of fathers in the early year socio-educational development of children, not many research questions and empirical investigations have been directed at understanding the factors that conspire against fathers' participation. Unearthing answers to the question as to what factors conspire against fathers' readiness to participate in the socio-educational development of pre-schoolers will provide empirical evidence with policy implications. There is a lack of a cohesive body of knowledge regarding the factors that conspire against fathers' readiness to participate in the socio-education development of their preschool children from the perspectives of the South African youth. Most studies focus mainly "on father absence as a result of migrant labour" (Makofane, 2015:23). This paper, therefore, adds to the knowledge base not only in South Africa, but also internationally, providing valuable empirical information on an under-researched and under-reported population.

### Fathers' Participation in Socio-Educational Development of Children: International Perspective

It is recognised worldwide that childrearing practices are the responsibility of both parents, and when fathers play their roles in full, their children experience holistic development (Nyanjaya & Masango, 2012; Peeters, 2007; United Nations (UN), 2011). Fathers' behaviour and roles, however, vary across different societies and socio-cultural contexts, and have an intense influence on the total development of the children (Gray & Anderson, 2015). In a study carried out by Eerola (2015) in Finland, the responsibilities of fathers in the welfare of their children were narrated from the father's perspective. Eerola reports that a responsible father is the one that takes a notable share in the nurture and care work (Male care highly emphasised) towards the development of his children. In a global view, the United Nations also reports the low contributions of fathers in the socio-educational development of their children to be a global issue. The major factor that was associated with the low participation was an economic factor. According to the UN (2011:14):

This is occurring at the same time that men in many low-income countries are experiencing greater difficulty in earning a living, and yet not significantly increasing their contributions to unpaid care activities and household labour. This being said, researchers from diverse settings are finding that men do participate in caregiving, albeit sometimes in ways that are not always counted in time-use surveys ...

Roopnarine and Yildirim (2016), in their study of fathering in USA, South Africa, Canada, Brazil, Russia, Bangladesh and Australia, noted that the central role of the father is taken to be 'breadwinning' and that the majority of these countries can be found agitating for fathers' greater participation in the socio-educational development of their children. South Africa is one of the nations in the world where fathers' low participation in the socio-educational development of their children is particularly pronounced (Malherbe, 2015; Mncanca, Okeke & Fletcher, 2016). This social problem can be traced back to the time when many black families were

marginalised during the apartheid era (Malherbe, 2015). Even after a democratic government came to power in 1994, the problem would seem to be increasing (Gould & Ward, 2015; Mncanca & Okeke, 2016). Statistics show that 50 percent of children in South Africa grow up in households where there is no fathers' support (Gould & Ward, 2015) and that only about one third of pre-school children in the country are co-residing with their fathers (Makusha & Richter, 2015).

In the quest to know the major causes of this problem, some qualitative research studies were carried out. Richter (2006) reports that the major factor causing fathers' low participation or absenteeism were the economic issues faced by the fathers. Mufutau and Okeke (2016) found out that mothers (based on their relationship) and the level of education of the fathers have a significant influence on the fathers' involvement in their children's education. There remains a dearth of quantitative studies examining the factors influencing fathers' readiness to participate in the socio-educational development of their children.

#### Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study is to determine the factors conspiring against South African fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational development during formative years in one Education District in the Eastern Cape Province. Specifically, the study will aim to determine: i) which factors of financial, absence at home, fathering skills and relationship with mother conspire against fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational development; ii) whether the gender of the respondents has a significant influence on their submissions on factors conspiring against fathers' involvement in the early socio-educational development of children; and iii) if the race of the respondents has a significant influence on their submissions on factors conspiring against fathers' involvement in the early socio-educational development of children.

#### Research Question

To what extent could factors such as financial problems, absenteeism, fathering skills and relationship with mothers affect fathers' readiness to be involved in their children's socio-educational development, as perceived by university students?

#### Research Hypotheses

*H<sub>1</sub>*: Submission of university students about financial factors will not be significantly influenced by gender and race.

*H<sub>2</sub>*: Submission of university students about father absence from home will not be significantly influenced by gender and race.

*H<sub>3</sub>*: Submission of university students about the fathering skills factor will not be significantly influenced by gender and race.

*H<sub>4</sub>*: Submission of university students about the relationship between mothers and fathers will not be significantly influenced by gender and race.

#### Theoretical Framework

The link "between one's theory, the method that one uses, and one's analytic strategies" (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, Rachana & Karnik, 2009:198) have been highlighted in the broader research. The goal of this section is to demonstrate how bio-ecosystems theory has been applied in the current study. According to this theory,

*a child's development is shaped by varied systems of the child's environment and also by the interrelationships among the systems. The relationship and the child as he saw it is reciprocal; the environment influences the child, and the child influences the environment* (Krishnan, 2010:5).

This theoretical model forms the basis of the current study. The model consists of four major cardinal points as: Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Guhn & Goelman, 2011; Krishnan, 2010; Tudge et al., 2009). The process is seen from two propositions (Krishnan, 2010). The first proposition is that human development takes place in a complex, reciprocal interaction between active, evolving biopsychological human organisms in a person, objects and symbols in the immediate external environment, which must occur regularly over a period of time. This enduring interaction in the immediate environment is termed proximal processes (Guhn & Goelman, 2011). The second proposition is that the effect of the proximal processes varies as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person; the environment (both immediate and remote); the developmental outcomes and social continuities and the changes occurring over time (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

A person is described in this model through three personal characteristics that can influence proximal processes. The first is demanding characteristics such as age, gender or physical appearance, which set the processes in motion. The second is resource characteristics, which are mental and emotional resources such as experience, intelligence, skill, material resources (housing, education and caregivers). The third characteristics are called force characteristics, which are the variations in motivation, persistence and temperament. It was noticed that even when children have equivalent access to resources, the drive to succeed and persist in the face of hardship would shape the courses of their development. Context is the environment in which the child is developing. This is how it is explained in ecological systems theory. The microsystem describes the environment, such as the home and school where children interact; the mesosystem explains the interaction among microsystems; the exo-system describes events that

have a direct and significant influence on development; the macro-system is the culture or feature of the group to which the child belongs, and the chronosystem describes the historical circumstances that affect context at all other levels.

Time is also described at three levels, namely, micro-, meso- and macro- (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Micro-time refers to what is happening during a specific episode of proximal processes; meso-time refers to the period over which the processes occur (days, weeks or years), and macro-time refers to shifting expectancies in wider culture, which affects the proximal processes across the lifespan. This model explains how the holistic development of the children could be influenced by the involvement of the father (Guhn & Goelman 2011; Krishnan, 2010; Tudge et al., 2009). The presence of the father during proximal processes for a good number of time and period, which is explained by meso-time in the socio-culturally influenced microsystem, would lead to socio-emotional, physical and intellectual development in an environment where the child feels secured and protected. Conversely, the absence of the father will have a direct effect on the richness of the environment, and sense of security and protection of the child, which will have an indirect influence on the other domains of development.

#### *Constraints on fathers' participation in children's early education*

It has been noted above that providing empirical data that may help provide answers to the factors that conspire against fathers' readiness to participate in the socio-educational development of pre-schoolers will be germane to the provision of policy-backed intervention strategies. Many studies have approached this particular issue from a deficit perspective, which appears anti-interventionist, as men are perceived as parents who do not want to get involved in lives of their own children. This is how Swartz et al. (2013:1) represent the scenario:

*Media images that describe young fathers as choosing to be absent and uninvolved are not correct. Many young fathers have a strong desire to play active, positive roles in the lives of their children. Many do so, while others are prevented from doing so. Yet others are initially slow to come forward but may well do so over time. Of course, some young fathers do remain uninvolved and disinterested.*

Swartz et al. (2013) highlights the fact that, although the participants in their study demonstrated increasing interests in caring for the educational development of their children, the men confessed being constrained by three main factors. These include the financial, cultural and the relational obstacles they have experienced. Fathers are constrained by the general public perception of men as child abusers. Studies have equally shown that men and fathers involved in the care and

education of their children are often viewed with great suspicion, even in circumstances where men appear to be doing well. One of the male teacher participants in Joseph and Wright's (2016:216) study, Reuben,

*believes that men who teach young children are generally regarded with suspicion. While such views are difficult to escape, he believes that less suspicion is directed towards men who teach at the primary school level. Reuben also believes that if men in early childhood education adopt a professional attitude as well as an effective teaching style, there is likely to be less suspicion from parents, teachers, and the public at large.*

While the setting for Joseph and Wright (2016) was the school, this sort of perception pervades broader societal impressions about men and fathers with regards to the care of children. So, what we present here is the proposition that men and fathers may actually desire to get actively involved but, nonetheless, appear to be discouraged by the apparent derogatory perception from the society, mainly held by women. Studies have also shown that the attitudes of mothers can impose severe constraints on the nature and level of father involvement in the education of their children. For instance, Volker (2014:2) suggests that there is "a positive correlation between the affirmation and appraisal of paternal parenting behaviours [...] when a mother encouraged a father's behaviour during child interactions, fathers were inclined to engage more frequently with their children." Fathers may be discouraged when the reverse is the case. On the other hand, Volker (2014) equally notes that the attitudes and beliefs of fathers may constitute a major constraint on the level of father involvement. The author notes that "fathers who reported more child-focused parenting attitudes, in comparison to more traditional or authoritarian attitudes, also reported a higher level of perceived involvement with their child" (Volker, 2014:2).

Although we did not formulate a hypothesis to measure mothers' readiness to participate in the socio-education development of their children, it becomes imperative to these authors to acknowledge and to highlight the roles that mothers play, given that children do not just live in nuclear families. Of course, given that many children are raised without the presence of a father figure, women in South Africa have to go the extra mile to ensure that their children experience some level of childcare, although in the absence of a father figure, as Makofane (2015:27) notes, "childrearing in South Africa has been characterised by multi-caregivers in the lives of the children such as grandmothers and members of the extended family." Notwithstanding this, research by Roman, Makwakwa and Lacante (2016:9) suggests that there are stronger relationships between mothers and their children than between fathers (and other caregivers) and the children. Perhaps one ex-

planation for this scenario is the fact that mothers are naturally more involved in the lives of their preschool children, and play greater roles than any other group of caregivers.

Having said that, it ought to be pointed out that constraints on men's and fathers' abilities to participate in the early years' education therefore appear to be multifaceted. It is against this background that this study will employ a quantitative method of socio-scientific research to determine, not only the factors militating against fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational development, but also the influence of gender and race, based on the submissions of the university students.

### Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted to carry out this study. This design enabled the researchers to adequately describe the factors affecting fathers in becoming involved in the socio-educational development of their children, as perceived by university students. The population of the study comprises all students in the faculty of education. These students were chosen because of their educational level and experience in the field of education, with the majority of them being natives of the study location and the experience they have in either being fathers/mothers, children of fathers in the province, or someone that experienced the behaviours of fathers while growing up. The sample chosen from this population is 300 education students randomly selected. Of the sample of the study, 43 percent are male, while 57 percent are female university students. The largest proportion of the students are black – 78 percent, 13 percent are white, seven percent are coloured and two percent are Indian. A self-designed questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. The questionnaire has three sections, namely, Section A, B and C. Section A measures the demographic information of the participants with five items. Section B measures the factors hindering fathers' participations on a five-point Likert scale of "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Undecided", "Agree" and "Strongly Agree", using 19 items and one open-ended question. Section C, like Section B, uses a five-point Likert scale to measure the challenges faced by children during their early Socio-educational development with 16 items and one open-ended question. The instrument was validated and the psychometric property was tested using Cronbach's alpha, which gave the coefficient of 0.78. Analysis was done using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage mean and standard deviation, while inferential statistics of *t*-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significant.

## Results

### Research Question

To what extent could factors such as financial challenges, absenteeism, fathering skills and relationship with mothers affect fathers' readiness to be involved in their children's socio-educational development, as perceived by the university students?

Table 1 presents a summary of analysis of the submissions of the university students collected using a five-point Likert scale. The mean values as well as the weighted averages of the means were calculated, and these show that the university students submitted that the *absence of father at home* (weighted average = 3.72), *relationship with the mother of the child* (weighted average = 3.63) and *financial factor* (weighted average = 3.46), in that order of magnitude, to be those factors conspiring to a large extent against fathers' involvement in the socio-educational development of their children. However, the students did not agree that fathering skills (weighted average = 3.41) have much effect on the fathers' involvement.

### Testing the Null Hypotheses

*H*<sub>1</sub>: Submission of university students about the financial factor will not be significantly influenced by gender and race.

Table 2a shows that there is no significant difference between male and female university students in their submissions on financial factors' conspiring against fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational development ( $t = 1.33$ ;  $df = 298$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 1a is not rejected; that is, submissions of university students about the financial factor are not significantly influenced by gender.

Likewise, Table 2b shows that there is no significant difference among races of university students in their submissions on financial factors' conspiring against fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational development ( $F(3,296) = 1.84$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 1b is not rejected; that is, submissions of university students about financial factors are not significantly influenced by race.

*H*<sub>2</sub>: Submission of university students about absence at home will not be significantly influenced by gender and race.

Table 3a shows that there is no significant difference between male and female university students in their submissions on the absenteeism factors conspiring against fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational development ( $t = 0.24$ ;  $df = 298$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 2a is not rejected; that is, submissions of university students about the absenteeism factor are not significantly influenced by gender.

Likewise, Table 3b shows that there is no significant difference among races of university students in their submissions on the absenteeism factors' conspiring against fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational development ( $F$

(3,296) = 1.44;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 2b is not rejected; that is, submissions of university students about the absenteeism factor are not significantly influenced by race.

**Table 1** Factors influencing men's participation in the early social development of their children

| Item No                      | Financial Factors   | <i>M</i>        | <i>SD</i>        |
|------------------------------|---|-----------------|------------------|
| 1.                           | Money is the basic factor that hinders men from participating in the early social development of their children.                              | 3.510           | 1.406            |
| 2.                           | Unemployment is the biggest problem.  | 3.707           | 1.280            |
| 3.                           | Lack of work opportunities prevent fathers from actively participating.   | 3.487           | 1.328            |
| 4.                           | Fathers don't have the financial resources to make a contribution to the social development of their children.                                | 3.143           | 1.413            |
|                              | Weighted Average  | 3.46<br>(69.3%) | Third<br>Factor  |
| Absenteeism at home          |   |                 |                  |
| 1.                           | Some fathers work and come back very late and tired.  | 3.870           | 1.170            |
| 2.                           | Fathers work long hours and neglect their responsibilities over their children.   | 3.433           | 1.311            |
| 3.                           | Distance between the father and his child may hinder him from participation in their early social development.                                | 3.860           | 1.148            |
|                              | Weighted Average  | 3.72<br>(74.4%) | First<br>Factor  |
| Fathering skills             |   |                 |                  |
| 1.                           | Fathers take too much alcohol, hence find it hard to participate in the early social development of their children.                           | 3.497           | 1.234            |
| 2.                           | Fathers do not have the necessary fatherly skills.  | 3.403           | 1.317            |
| 3.                           | Some fathers' engagement in criminal activities hinder them from participating in the social development of their children.                   | 3.697           | 1.221            |
| 4.                           | Poor education hinders fathers from participating in the social development of their children.  | 3.170           | 1.391            |
| 5.                           | Lack of skills hinders fathers from participating in the social development of their children.  | 3.283           | 1.340            |
|                              | Weighted Average  | 3.41<br>(68.2%) | Fourth<br>Factor |
| Relationship with the mother |   |                 |                  |
| 1.                           | Fathers are hindered from participating in the early social development of their children when their children are staying with their mothers. | 3.440           | 1.259            |
| 2.                           | The lack of close relationship between men and the mothers of the children may be a hindrance.  | 4.080           | .971             |
| 3.                           | Divorce and separation prevent fathers from participating in the early social development of their children.                                  | 3.443           | 1.296            |
| 4.                           | Fathers are hindered because of the many rights that children appear to have nowadays.  | 3.010           | 1.340            |
| 5.                           | Having multiple partners prevents fathers from actively participating in the early social development of their children.                      | 3.867           | 1.158            |
| 6.                           | Failed relationships cause women to obstruct the fathers' participation in their children's social development.                               | 3.923           | 1.111            |
|                              | Weighted Average  | 3.63<br>(72.5%) | Second<br>Factor |

**Table 2a** Summary of *t*-test showing the difference between male and female university students on financial factor

| Variable         | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | Sig. | Remark    |
|------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|
| Financial factor |          |          |           |          |           |      |           |
| Male             | 128      | 14.164   | 3.392     |          |           |      | <i>ns</i> |
| Female           | 172      | 13.611   | 3.706     | 1.326    | 298       | .186 |           |

**Table 2b** Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing difference among races of university students on financial factor

| Variable         | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>df</i> | Sig. | Remark    |
|------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|
| Financial factor |          |          |           |          |           |      |           |
| Black            | 234      | 13.761   | 3.587     |          |           |      | <i>ns</i> |
| White            | 41       | 14.902   | 3.576     | 1.844    | 3,296     | .139 |           |
| Coloured         | 20       | 12.800   | 3.088     |          |           |      |           |
| Indian           | 5        | 13.400   | 4.219     |          |           |      |           |

**Table 3a** Summary of *t*-test showing difference between male and female university students on absenteeism factor

| Variable           | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | Sig. | Remark    |
|--------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|
| Absenteeism factor |          |          |           |          |           |      |           |
| Male               | 128      | 11.203   | 2.379     |          |           |      | <i>ns</i> |
|                    |          |          |           | 0.238    | 298       | .812 |           |
| Female             | 172      | 11.134   | 2.582     |          |           |      |           |

**Table 3b** Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing difference among races of university students on absenteeism factor

| Variable           | <i>N</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>df</i> | Sig. | Remark    |
|--------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|
| Absenteeism factor |          |             |           |          |           |      |           |
| Black              | 234      | 11.034      | 2.559     |          |           |      | <i>ns</i> |
| White              | 41       | 11.634      | 2.256     | 1.441    | 3,296     | .231 |           |
| Coloured           | 20       | 11.300      | 2.203     |          |           |      |           |
| Indian             | 5        | 12.800      | 1.643     |          |           |      |           |

*H*<sub>3</sub>: Submission of university students about the factor of fathering skills will not be significantly influenced by gender and race.

Table 4a shows that there is no significant difference between male and female university students in their submissions on fathering skills as a factor militating against fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational development ( $t = 1.63$ ;  $df = 298$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 3a is not rejected; that is, submissions of university

students about fathering skills are not significantly influenced by gender.

Table 4b shows that there is no significant difference among races of university students in their submissions on fathering skills as a factor militating against fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational development ( $F(3,296) = 0.95$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 3b is not rejected; that is, submissions of university students about the fathering skills are not significantly influenced by race.

**Table 4a** Summary of *t*-test showing the difference between male and female university students on fathering skills

| Variable         | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | Sig. | Remark    |
|------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|
| Fathering skills |          |          |           |          |           |      |           |
| Male             | 128      | 17.461   | 3.727     |          |           |      | <i>ns</i> |
|                  |          |          |           | 1.628    | 298       | .104 |           |
| Female           | 172      | 16.744   | 3.803     |          |           |      |           |

**Table 4b** Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the difference among races of university students on fathering skills

| Variable         | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>df</i> | Sig. | Remark    |
|------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|
| Fathering skills |          |          |           |          |           |      |           |
| Black            | 234      | 17.141   | 3.720     |          |           |      | <i>ns</i> |
| White            | 41       | 17.244   | 3.618     | .946     | 3,296     | .419 |           |
| Coloured         | 20       | 16.050   | 4.236     |          |           |      |           |
| Indian           | 5        | 15.200   | 6.017     |          |           |      |           |

*H*<sub>4</sub>: Submission of university students about the relationship with mothers will not be significantly influenced by gender and race.

Table 5a shows that there is no significant difference between male and female university students in their submissions on the relationship with mothers as a factor conspiring against fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational

development ( $t = 1.03$ ;  $df = 298$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 4a is not rejected; that is, submissions of university students about the relationship with mothers are not significantly influenced by gender.

Table 5b shows that there is no significant difference among races of university students in their submissions on the relationship with mothers

as a factor conspiring against fathers' involvement in their children's socio-educational development ( $F(3,296) = 0.25; p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 4b is not rejected; that is, submissions of university students about relationship with mothers are not significantly influenced by race.

**Summary of Findings**

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the fieldwork data, the following are the summary of findings:

- The absence of a father at home, the relationship with the mother of the child and the financial factor, in that order of magnitude, are the factors conspiring against fathers' involvement in the socio-educational development of their children, but fathering skills is not one of the factors;

- Submissions of university students about the financial factor are not significantly influenced by gender and race;
- Submissions of university students about the absenteeism factor are not significantly influenced by gender and race;
- Submissions of university students about fathering skills as a factor conspiring against fathers' involvement in the socio-economic development of their children are not significantly influenced by gender and race; and
- Submissions of university students about relationship with mothers as a factor conspiring against fathers' involvement are not significantly influenced by gender and race.

**Table 5a** Summary of *t*-test showing the difference between male and female university students on relationship with mothers

| Variable                 | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | Sig. | Remark    |
|--------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|
| Relationship with mother |          |          |           |          |           |      |           |
| Male                     | 128      | 22.031   | 3.697     | 1.026    | 298       | .306 | <i>ns</i> |
| Female                   | 172      | 21.564   | 4.045     |          |           |      |           |

**Table 5b** Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the difference among races of university students on relationship with mothers

| Variable                 | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>df</i> | Sig. | Remark    |
|--------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|
| Relationship with mother |          |          |           |          |           |      |           |
| Black                    | 234      | 21.744   | 3.938     | .250     | 3,296     | .861 | <i>ns</i> |
| White                    | 41       | 22.146   | 3.798     |          |           |      |           |
| Coloured                 | 20       | 21.250   | 3.932     |          |           |      |           |
| Indian                   | 5        | 21.600   | 3.715     |          |           |      |           |

**Discussion**

The first finding of this study is that the absence of a father at home, the relationship with the mother of the child and the financial factor are the factors militating against fathers' readiness to participate in the socio-educational development of their pre-school children to a large extent, and that fathering skills are not one of these factors. This finding should not be jettisoned, not only because the source was education students in a university who have some experience about fatherhood, knowledge about child development, and are natives of the study location, but also because the finding makes some logical sense. To start with, the absence of a father at home might be as a result of the father assuming the position of provider for the family. This is in line with the cultural beliefs in Africa that a man ought to be able to provide for his family while the mother, who might not be strong enough, stays at home to care for the children. Besides, it might be because fathers believe that the contribution of the father to the life of the child ought not to be based on hands-on care alone, but ought to be constituted likewise by financial, social, human and protection support. This corroborates the submissions of Lesejane (2006), Madhavan, Richter, Norris and Hosegood (2014) and Richter (2006) that fathers are the providers

and protectors of the typical African family before the advent of western imperialists; that fathers' participation in the development of their children is not just based on hands-on care alone, and that, even nowadays, fathers provide financial support for the development of their children, even after the union between father and mother has been dissolved.

The relationship with the mother of the child could be in two forms, that is, either positive or negative. If the relationship between father and the mother of the child is positive and cordial, the father will see to the needs of the whole family, including that of the child, as his responsibilities and will be ready to provide for them, even if he is not the biological father. But if the relationship is negative and hostile, and where the child appears to be socialised into hostility against the father, he might no longer see the child as his own, and might not be ready to provide for the child or the family as a whole. This is in line with Mufutau and Okeke's (2016) finding that a mother's relationship with the father has a strong impact on the extent of support and attention the father provides in the development of the children.

The finding about the financial factor conspiring against fathers' readiness to participate in the socio-educational development of their

preschool children could be as a result of the fact that there is a high level of unemployment among the fathers, bearing in mind the fact that fathering children at preschool stage is capital intensive. There is a high demand for money to take care of feeding, health-related issues, clothing, toys, educative materials, school fees, protective resources and so on. Therefore, if the father is unemployed or, has a job that is not lucrative, he might want to provide but it would appear that he is not ready. This is in line with Eddy, De Boor-Thomson and Mphaka (2013) who were of the view that a father spent a lot of money to provide for his family and children.

The finding that the aspect of fathering skills is not a factor conspiring against the fathers' readiness to participate in the socio-educational development of their pre-school children might be as a result of the fact that what are termed fathering skills are acquired by men while growing up, appears not to hold true for the participants in the present study. The growing boy child could still learn what constitutes good fathering from his society. This means that if a boy had a bad experience of being fathered while growing up, such a boy would still learn that such behaviour is not acceptable to the society. Therefore, if such a child has all it takes to be a good father, he might not exhibit bad fathering skills. This contradicts the submission of Mufutau and Okeke (2016) that men that experienced bad fathering while growing up will exhibit such bad fathering habits as fathers too.

The other four findings revealed that both gender and race of the university students did not influence their submission about the factors militating against fathers' readiness to participate in the socio-educational development of their pre-school children. This finding is also important because it negates such thoughts that findings and opinions about fathers' participation in their children's developmental needs are gender and race biased. This also gives credence to the fact that the findings of this study on factors conspiring against fathers' readiness to contribute to their children's development are devoid of bias, and hence ought to be reckoned with.

### Conclusion

On the discussion of the causes of fathers not being ready to participate in the socio-educational development of their children in preschool in Eastern Cape Province, in particular, and South Africa more generally, this study has established that the major causes are absence of fathers at home, the relationship with the mother of the child and financial factor. The study also established that the finding is devoid of gender and race bias. Any intervention ought to be directed towards these factors in order to have effective solution to this societal problem.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are proffered in order to ensure quick interventions that can resolve the problems faced by South African children during their developmental stage:

- There is the need for societal reorientation on the fact that fathers' participation in children's socio-educational development should not be measured by hands-on home care alone but also through other aspects such human, financial, social and protection contributions. This could be achieved through government's and non-governmental organisations' interventions by way of launching proactive awareness campaigns using all possible media outlets.
- There is a need for family/marriage counselling services in all communities in South Africa, in general, and Eastern Cape in particular that will work on couples through house-to-house visitations and other means to ensure that couples are guided and encouraged to maintain positive and cordial relationships in their families. If possible, extra marital affairs should be outlawed in the country so as to entrench the relationships of married couples.
- South African boys should be further encouraged to acquire higher education certificates in order to get more lucrative jobs that will empower them to certify their desire to provide for their family. Those that cannot acquire much education should be empowered through vocational training so as to acquire better jobs. Casual jobs should be created by the government and other employers of labour for men.

### Limitation to the Study

A major limitation of this study relates to the selection of the participating education students from only a single university in the Eastern Cape Province. Although the selection of participants from a single institution was in line with the aim of the study, the authors were well aware that a larger sample of student participants from more than one university within the Province could have offered more reliable and generalisable findings. The authors, therefore, would advise the readers to be cautious about how a generalisation could inaccurately be made from the findings of a study. Notwithstanding this, the authors still endorse the fact that, given that as high as 300 university students took part in the study, the findings can still be generalised to the situation of all students in other Districts of the Eastern Cape, in particular, and to other Districts in South Africa where this problem is prevalent.

### Possible Areas for Further Research

Given the above limitations, further research on this problem ought to explore youths from other higher institutions in the Eastern Cape Province in order to obtain a more representative sample to the population. Further research could alternatively be directed to the examination of mothers in the Province and across provinces in the country.



Correlational studies that could draw attention to the impact of some demographic variables on how university students may perceive the factors militating against their fathers' readiness to participate in their socio-education development may offer very useful empirical data.

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### Note

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