

Crises impacting South African men's participation in early socio-education development of children and possible useful interventions

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to establish the factors that hinder men from actively participating in the early socio-education development of their children. An exploratory sequential design and semistructured interviews were used to engage 25 purposively sampled fathers who live in communities within the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. Qualitative data were analysed through analytic induction and grounded theorising and presented descriptively. Coleman's social capital theory provided the theoretical lenses that enabled an understanding of men's crises that impacted the rationale for the nature of the interventions suggested in this article. Findings indicate that participants experienced extreme crises that impeded their ability to genuinely participate in early socio-education development of their children. Fathers reported experiencing huge crises, some of which appeared self-imposed. The social system that immensely stereotypes men appeared to further deepen their crises, which resulted in their inability to contribute to children's socio-education development. Most current explanatory models on men's participatory experiences in children's early social development are largely deficient, derogatory, and recriminatory. The author suggests that such interpretive models may be counterproductive. If fathers are to genuinely contribute to children's socio-education development, father-specific support programmes must be put in place. Some helpful interventions have been suggested.

Keywords

Childhood development, early education, father inability, father participation, social capital theory, support programmes.

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There is currently overwhelming evidence in literature corroborating what researchers know about fathers' involvement in the early education of children, generally, and their own, in particular. Internationally, a number of studies support the notion that having an involved father in the early years' developmental trajectory of children is something not only children but also their mothers and other adults in their lives would most definitely desire (see, for instance, Ball & Moselle, 2016; Doku, 2014; Ratele, Shefer, & Clowes, 2012; Richter, 2006; UNICEF, 2015).

However, in South Africa, there is a very common practice for the child to experience his or her early beginning without really ever knowing who the father is (Adams, 2016; Makusha & Richter, 2016; Mathwasa & Okeke, 2016; Mncanca & Okeke, 2016; Ratele et al., 2012). An abundance of evidence suggests a scenario where men who desire to be good fathers often find themselves not knowing how to be the fathers they want to be. This is simply because they never experienced life with a father figure, and so had no role model (Adams, 2016; Mncanca, Okeke, & Fletcher, 2016; Richter, 2006; van Rensburg, 2013). Studies also suggest that fathers, irrespective of their ages, are confronted with uncertainty about what it means to be an involved father, let alone how to participate in their children's lives (Mercer, 2015; Nduna, 2014).

A critique of existing literature on father participation

Notwithstanding the growing interest among researchers in the roles fathers and men play, or do not play, with regard to the early development of their children, a number of disturbing observations have been made in existent literature. First, previous and recent research on the fathers' and men's participation appears to be produced by predominantly female researchers. Without disregarding their genuine contributions, it is argued that a scenario in which men are not actively coresearching their affairs and are predominantly researched by females favours interpretations that may be unwittingly gendered. Perhaps that was what Richter (2006, p. 54) meant when she noted that 'our knowledge of parenting has been constructed from what is called the maternal template . . .'. This is a case that is worth noting by fatherhood researchers.

Second, research on the factors affecting a father's participation in his family appears to be saturated with a reliance on the historical perspectives. Although in post-apartheid South Africa familial relationships continue to be shaped by aspects of these historical antecedents, the author suggests the need for research that focuses on the contemporary lifestyles of men, particularly African men, and on how these aspects may be constraining men's ability to actively partake in the development of their children. Richter, Chikovore, and Makusha (2010, p. 2) had argued that ' . . . the apartheid policy controlled the movement of people in ways that entrenched migrant labour and disrupted family life'. Thus, such over-reliance on historical perspective led previous studies to primarily attribute fathers' absence to the migrant labour originating from the apartheid era, which led to men's detachment from family responsibilities (see, for instance, Adams, 2016; Morrell, 2005; Ratele et al., 2012; Richter, 2006; Talitwala, 2005; van Rensburg, 2013).

While the historical perspective continues to offer explanations to the familial vicissitudes, particularly within Black families, researchers are challenged to dig beyond this perspective for a more explanatory model to this situation. While the lingering effect of apartheid (mainly on Black families) cannot be denied, this article argues that research may benefit more if a shift to a more contemporary interpretation is embraced to complement what has been achieved by South Africa fatherhood research. Notwithstanding, it must be acknowledged that trying to understand fathering and fatherhood as well as the constraints affecting fathers' participation therein presents a continuous challenge for researchers.

Within the South African research tradition, there appears to be a lack of a South African body of knowledge on the factors impeding men from taking an active part in the socio-education

development of their preschool children. Most studies have focused on analyses on fathers' low or nonparticipation from a causal link with South Africa's historical antecedents. For instance, Makofane (2015, p. 23) 23) argues that previous studies tend to focus mainly on 'absent father as a result of migrant labour'. While the effects of migrant labour continue to linger in post-apartheid South African men's relationships with their children, this article argues for a paradigm shift on how research on the constraints on men's ability to actively partake in the development of their children is conducted. Despite the growing researchers' attention on fathers' low or nonparticipation in their children's education, it would seem that not much progress has been recorded in terms of effective interventions. Perhaps research would generate more plausible knowledge if researchers can embrace a shift from this historical perspective to some more contemporary ways of understanding the impediments on fathers' ability to participate actively participate in their children's socio-education development.

Thus, given this over-reliance on the historical perspectives, there is, therefore, dearth of comprehensive and well-articulated information about the influences on fathers' ability to actively participate in the early education of their children. Little is known, for example, about how the everyday lifestyles of men, and particularly African men, may be impacting on their abilities to make choices regarding their active involvement in their children's lives. The over-concentration of literature on the historical antecedents and their impact on family lives may limit the unearthing of empirical evidence on the everyday issues affecting the contemporary South African men, particularly African men, with regard to their participation in children's matters. Fathers' inability and failure to guide their children towards a positive transition to adulthood, therefore, provides fatherhood researchers the opportunity to investigate a deep-seated issue of what is it that impacts fathers' ability to actively participate in the childhood developmental trajectories of their children in South Africa. The objectives of this study, therefore, were to establish the crises that hindered men from actively participating in the early social development of their children and to identify the kind of interventions that can be put in place to support young adults to enable them transit into positive fatherhood. The study was conceptualised in terms of Coleman's (1988) social capital theory, which is discussed in the next section.

James Coleman and father participation in children's social development

The study was informed by the conceptualisation of Coleman's social capital theory. This theory draws attention to the impact of various networks of relationships that exist between the man and the wife, parents and their children, parents and their child's teachers, as well as the network of relationships among individuals within a particular neighbourhood. The quality of the networks is germane to the production of meaningful individuals within the society. Social capital is a productive resource that makes possible the achievement of certain ends (Coleman, 1988; Mufutau & Okeke, 2016). Social capital of the family comes through changes that facilitate action from father and mother, parents and teachers, fathers and teachers, and father and child. Such family changes include those that are stable and those that experience less vicissitudes; families with the presence of responsible parenting, with little or no over-indulgence in social ills such as unnecessary divorce, gender-based violence, alcohol, and other substance abuse, may be a good source of high-quality social capital resource for the child.

Coleman's theory implies that the relationship between the man and woman or husband and wife represents either a productive or unproductive source of social capital that impacts the nature of relationship between the parent and his or her child (Adams, 2016; Coleman, 1988; Mncanca & Okeke, 2016). Parents who exhibit a positive relationship in the presence of their children

will impact a particular kind of social capital. When parents are not part of their children's lives, perhaps as a result of excessive work commitments, or as a result of their social habits (as with the rising incidences of divorce or other social habits such as inabilities resulting from excessive alcohol consumption), such children would be deficient in their own social capital accumulation. According to Coleman (1988), there are different elements in life that undermine social capital both within and outside the family. For instance, any change in the family structures may directly or indirectly lead to a deficit in the amount of social capital available to that family. This theory helped in addressing the objectives of this study.

Father participation and implications

Research suggests that having an involved father at home can make a big difference. A highly involved father would, of course, represent a high-quality social capital resource, not only for the child but also for the child's mother as well. It would then appear that fathers who spend time with their children, those who help them through their everyday emotional vicissitudes, and those who find time to engage their child in positive interactions would really positively make an impact on the lives of such children. According to Rosenberg and Wilcox (2006, p. 11)11), 'fathers have a direct impact on the well-being of their children. It is important for professionals (and mothers) working with fathers . . . to have a working understanding of the literature that addresses this impact'. Men Care Advocacy (2015, p. 45)45) highlights the fact that 'fathers matter in the lives of children . . . fathers matter for children's emotional, social, and intellectual development'.

Studies also suggest that children with involved and caring fathers normally have better educational outcomes (Ball & Moselle, 2016). Rosenberg and Wilcox (2006, p. 11) 11) also suggest that 'toddlers with involved fathers go on to start school with higher levels of academic readiness'. Richter et al. (2010) note that having involved fathers at home is highly beneficial, not only to children but also to their mothers and even to fathers themselves. Even more research (Chaudhary, 2016) describes the essential role of fathers in the lives of children in the United States, Brazil, and Australia. Mncanca et al. (2016, p. 202), p. 202) also highlight the fact that 'fathers' participation in the early childhood development can positively affect children's education and social development'. This scenario renders the link between social capital and human capital development more visible (Coleman, 1988).

Research suggests that father participation in the early years' socio-educational development of children is constrained by a number of factors. Notably, research by Makusha and Richter (2016) and Mncanca et al. (2016) suggest that there is a relationship between fathers' socio-economic background and their ability to participate in the early years' development of their children. For example, Mncanca et al. (2016, p. 209), p. 209) note that from 'an economic perspective, it is self-evident that Black fathers appear to be struggling with many post-apartheid economic realities in South Africa'. Makusha and Richter (2016, p. 31) 31) also add that 'due to high poverty and unemployment, some Black South African men suffer damage to their identity, masculinity, self-esteem and confidence to act as fathers because of their sense of failure to provide financial support to their children and families'. It would seem, therefore, that the economic factor plays a major role in determining how fathers get involved in the early years of their children.

Other factors constraining fathers' ability to participate in the early years' development of the children have some cultural dimensions. For instance, Mufutau and Okeke (2016) suggest that men's perceptions of the gender roles and the status of childcare as women's responsibility can be a hindrance to fathers wanting to participate in their children's affairs. Both Chauke and Khunou (2014) and Byaruhanga, Dladla, Pietersen, and Schmid (2015) arguably show that the social construction of fathers' roles, divorce, separation, and remarriage are some of the cultural elements

that constrain fathers from taking part in the early years' development of their children. However, research by Mohi (2015) reports that separation and divorce do not always result into a negative outcome for the woman. Irrespective of how the man may have been affected or how he may have interpreted the incident of divorce or separation, Mohi's (2015) study shows that there may be justifiable reasons why separation and/or divorce may be the only option for the other partner to avert a more serious or life-threatening scenario.

In addition, Makusha and Richter (2016, p. 31) note that 'cultural norms such as the payment of damages by a man to a woman's family for impregnating her before marriage and lobola . . . contribute to the social and residential separation of biological fathers from their children'. In such a situation, it becomes really very difficult for fathers to positively participate in the early years of their children. The father–mother relationship, fathers' own lifestyle (Chaudhary, 2016; Chideya & Williams, 2013; Mufutau & Okeke, 2016), absence of male role models, and lack of experience on the part of the fathers (Doku, 2014; Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012) have all been mentioned in the literature as major constraints to fathers' participation in the early lives of their children.

Method

Participants

The sample size comprised 25 purposively selected fathers (aged between 22 and 37 years), who reside in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. The purposeful sampling technique enabled the researcher to select participants who were most likely going to provide reliable and credible information relating to the objectives of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Although the fathers had among themselves fathered between one and three children, only two of the participants were living in the same house with the mother of the child at the time. It was also observed that the fathers lacked basic skills. None of the fathers had completed matric, and they did not have any steady means of livelihood. They all depend on casual manual labour as the main means of income. Perhaps, it is important to note that during the interviews, most of the participants reported to not having been raised by their fathers.

Instrument

An exploratory sequential design and semistructured interviews were used to engage 25 purposively sampled fathers who live in communities within the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions in line with the research questions. The choice of semistructured interviews and open-ended questions was justified by the researcher's intention to disturb the flow of the participants' responses. By so doing, fathers in the study had the opportunity to respond in a more natural approach. It was also the intention of the researcher to engage the fathers in a negotiation that allowed them the freedom to interact more naturally rather than taking questions and providing answers. Semistructured interview was necessary because it enabled the researcher to obtain the fathers' actual words, which improved the data trustworthiness.

Procedure

The author of this article was the sole researcher in this study. The fathers were approached by the researcher in their individual homes with the help of an informant who was selected from the 2016 cohorts of the researcher's BEd Hons students. Fathers were approached and they agreed to

be interviewed in the evenings at their homes. One important aspect of this arrangement was that individual fathers chose a convenient place in their homes where the interview was held. The need for the use of a tape-recorder was explained to each father during the introductory part of the interview. Once the individual father agreed to the use of the recording device, interviews were tape-recorded, partly in English and in isiXhosa languages. The fieldwork lasted for 6 weeks during which all the 25 fathers were interviewed. All interviews were conducted by this researcher, and the interview transcripts were produced in English by an experienced scripts transcriber.

Ethical issues

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Fort Hare, Alice. Further clearance was also obtained from the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality overseeing the various suburbs where the fathers, who took part in the larger study, resided. Involvement was voluntary and the researcher clearly explained the purpose of the study to the participants. Participants then signed an informed consent letter. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms replaced the participants' actual identities. Further caution was also taken to ensure a total prevention from harm; for instance, how previous literature had represented father involvement in the development of their children. The researcher was aware of children's lives as well as the possible impact of the interview discussions on the participating fathers. For instance, the researcher made an adequate attempt to ensure that participants were clearly aware of the objectives of the study. The researcher also explained to them that they were free to cancel the interview at any time they felt uncomfortable. The researcher was also aware that it is possible that some fathers may feel that they had let their children down, should the interviews make them to realise their failures. As a result, the researcher had referral forms available to refer such participants to the services of professional counsellors. The researcher left contact details with the participants, should they have a need to reach him.

Data analysis

Qualitative data obtained from fathers were analysed through the analytic induction and grounded theorising (Creswell, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Analytic induction is a process whereby the researcher attempts to develop theory from an explanatory model that satisfactorily accounts for some phenomena that have assumed prominence in the course of the fieldwork. Grounded theorising is a process which emphasises the generation of theory through data from empirical studies (Okeke, 2009). Within these analytic frameworks and through the lenses of social capital theory (Coleman, 1988), the researcher was able to transcribe, synthesise, organise, analyse, and interpret the data. Synthesising and organising of data involved a coding process that allowed for data reduction in order to sieve data of impurities from within the emerging themes and categories. Findings are presented descriptively.

Results

Crises affecting fathers' availability in the social development of their children

The participants brought to the fore a range of feelings that fully captured the crises they faced that impacted their abilities to make meaningful contributions to the early education of their children. These crises are outlined below.

Excessive abuse of alcohol and other substances. Alcohol consumption is a major challenge in the lives of the fathers who participated in the study. As the interviews took place in the evenings at the homes of the participants, it was clear to the researcher that the participants may have had some serious issues, such as the use of alcohol and other substances. Perhaps, the timing of the interview may have presented some challenges, especially given that some of the participants returned to their homes under the influence of one form of alcohol or another. However, to ensure that data remained trustworthy, participants who were observed to be under the influence of alcohol had their interviews rescheduled. Most of the participants reported to having engaged in excessive alcohol consumption and to the use of hard substances such as dagga and cocaine. Musi noted that things were not okay with the fathers 'because we have a high number of fathers drinking alcohol'. Zenze also alluded to this fact when he said, 'no not everything is alright, they behave unfatherly like, fathers drink a lot of alcohol in our days'. It would then appear that excessive alcohol intake among the fathers impacted their abilities to actually recognise their roles as fathers. On one hand, such an individual is bound to unwittingly neglect some (if not all) of his family responsibilities. On the other hand, even if such a father is living under the same roof with his children, it may be difficult for such a father to function within the framework of social capital.

Poor relationship with mother of the child. Within the framework of social capital, it is quite obvious that the nature or quality of the relationship between the father and the mother of the child can have serious implications specifically on the early development of that child. In a family where both the man and the woman are experiencing a cordial relationship, the children appear to experience a positive socio-educational development. This was how Mulamu described the synergic importance between mother and father relationship to the child's upbringing, 'for now, I think she will grow up to be a good person because her mother and I, are in good terms, we understand each other'. And for Kweque, 'we don't get along. She doesn't even phone me. I think she has moved on. I only contact her sometimes for the sake of our child'. Most of the participants reported to having been involved in serious domestic issues such as gender-based violence, lack of attention from the partner/wife including cases where the man laid claims over the woman's body, thereby resulting to nonconsenting sexual act or 'classified rape'. According to Ayandile, the relationship with his child may have a negative impact on the daughter 'because her mother might tell her bad things about me including my drinking habits'. Once a good relationship is impossible or strained, the multiplier effect of alcohol consumption became obvious.

Keeping multiple concurrent partners. One common demographic among participants in the study was that even though they all had at least a child, none of the men was married, meaning that they were all single and uncommitted to any form of matrimonial arrangement. Within the frame of social capital, it is suggested that the relationship between the man and woman or husband and wife represents either a productive or unproductive source of social capital that impacts the nature of the relationship between the parent and his or her child. As fathers in the study reported to multiple concurrent partners in their lives, it would have been common sense to suggest that the equality of such relationships would be poor. In the absence of any committed relationship, fathers in the study reported keeping as many sex partners as possible. The social and economic implications of keeping multiple concurrent partners included associated financial and physiological stress, inability to maintain the child as a result of being in a continuous state of financial distress, and the absence of a nurturing relationship. The quality of social capital that may be available for use by these fathers would invariably be very poor.

Unemployment and poverty. The two scourges of unemployment and poverty featured greatly in the responses of the fathers. Unemployment and poverty among the fathers meant that they did not

have to stay in the same environment with the child and the mother. All the fathers were unskilled and unemployed. This was quite noticeable from the manner they responded to the question that served the purpose of 'entry behaviour' to the interview settings from the researcher: 'what is your typical day like?' The question was really not meant to find out whether participants were employed or not; however, the responses were indicative of a scenario of severe unemployment. This was confirmed by April, who noted,

since I am not employed, I do not have much to do around here, in thoughts there are many things I can live by but still I lack the means to. I want to do something so that my children can have a good life as well. So in my days I do less like chilling and assisting in home chores and so on.

It was seemingly the case for the participants that an unemployed father cannot think about the welfare of anybody including the education of the child or any other child. It is a situation of hopelessness. Amandela put the situation thus,

everyday I wake and go looking for a job. I go from shop to shop asking if they have a job for me. Some days are going to the dump site to look for something to eat or sell. I also beg for money.

It is not so much that the fathers do not want to cater for their children, but the conditions, which define them as unemployed and poor, appear to determine the manner they respond to roles and responsibilities expected of a father in the house.

As unemployment is associated with poverty, it is, therefore, a huge crisis in the lives of the fathers as that severely impacts their ability to cater for their children. An unemployed father is very likely to be poor and desperate. According to another father,

most fathers that I have observed commit suicide either by hanging themselves or poisoning themselves with the poison that is meant to kill cockroaches. I think it is because they are poor and can't find jobs. They even resort to robbing people. (Amandela)

Poverty is therefore positioned as a major constraint in the lives of the fathers.

Intervention strategies

Amid the participants' bemoaning of the crises in their lives, their views on possible interventions emerged. Below are the participants' suggestions with respect to intervention strategies.

Personal behaviour change. Most of the participants acknowledged the urgent need for fathers and men to develop a positive attitude that may engender change. A good sense of responsibility will be a good start for all men. Shongwe notes that fathers 'must try and change the way they behave. They should not be selfish but think of their children too'. Participants emphasised the need for fathers to learn discipline and to serve as role models to the younger ones. Fathers must be exemplary. Kweque added that fathers must demonstrate behaviour change 'by learning from their fathers' mistakes and staying away from drugs and alcohol'. Personal behavioural change extends to the fact that men who cannot demonstrate love to kids should not have them. According to Tula, 'they must be people who love children in order for them to be good fathers. If you are not into kids, then you have no business being a father'. Positive behaviour change falls within the realm of social capital of the family that can facilitate nurturing actions from the father to his child.

Fathers' workshops on regular basis. Men's periodic workshops organised by men themselves was mentioned as a good intervention strategy that would assist men and fathers to learn good fathering behaviours. Listening to fellow men, those who have successfully undergone transition from 'living rough to living responsibly' is something fathers see as beneficial. Ayandile suggested that men 'should establish workshops aimed at equipping young adults with fathering skills'. Another father, Ganqa, concurred by saying that 'fathering must be taught at workshops in the communities we stay in'. Maka alluded to Ganqa's views by saying, 'I think the community should organise some sort of workshop for us young fathers to be advised and to be trained to be good fathers'. Fathers' workshops featured greatly in the responses of the participants as key to their improvement with regard to learning fathering skills for positive fatherhood.

Formation of men's support groups. Participants were of the opinion that the establishment of support groups aimed at teaching young males about the importance of fatherhood, among other things, would go a long way towards assisting them to develop appropriate habits for positive fatherhood. Shongwe suggested that 'there should be support groups for fathers and fathers to be to help them by giving them skills on how to be a positive father'. In support of the idea of support groups for men, Nkosiwe added that 'fathers in the community can form a sort of support group that is aimed at teaching young males about importance of fatherhood. I think that would be of great help for young males'. The establishment of support groups for men by men themselves was seen as a good strategy for helping men to deal with most of their challenges.

A need for men's department and men's centres. Participants thought that the establishment of a men's department where issues concerning men and fathers would be professionally dealt with was long overdue. Participants maintained that staff of the men's department should comprise only men and social workers whose responsibilities include attending to men and fathers in need. According to Nkosiwe, 'the government should have a father's department as they do for women and children. Secondly, the laws that they pass shouldn't be biased toward mothers and children'. And, in Siviwe's view, 'the government should also show support for the fathers not only to the mothers'.

Organising fathers' and mothers' day. To help both men and women develop more cordial relationships, the participants were of the opinion that periodic events such as mothers' and fathers' day would not only teach young people good parenting but also help to strengthen relationships between men and women. Shabalala was convinced that such events offered huge potential for positive relationships between men/fathers and women/mothers. According to him, 'the government should organise events during the fathers' day and mothers' day to teach young people about how to be a good parent'.

Coleman's social capital theory draws attention to the impact of various networks of relationships that exist among individuals within a particular neighbourhood. It has been noted that men and fathers, and mothers alike, may benefit from such networks as men's support groups, men-specific departments and centres as well as special events as the joint celebration of father-mother day. Coleman argues that such events and activities have the potential to facilitate the formation of strong and valuable networks of relationships that will facilitate the strengthening of the kind of social capital that will benefit children in general.

More employment opportunities for fathers. Unemployment weakens the ability and resolve of a father to participate in the socio-educational development of his children. To deal with this situation, participants in the study were unanimous in the call for more employment opportunities to be created. Participants thought skills acquisition by fathers through government-organised training workshops would also help equip unskilled fathers. According to Mulela,

government can teach them work and skills so they can be able to work for their families. They can work in community jobs like cleaning the streets and so on. The government must teach them skills and work so they can make a living for them.

However, one demographic that was common to all participants was the fact that they were mostly illiterate and unskilled. Thus, the idea of skills acquisition was very important to them.

Discussion

The main theme of the findings of the study was the desire to understand the crises bedevilling fathers' participation in the early years' socio-educational development of their children. Coleman (1988) suggests that crises-ridden fathers are social capital deficient; such a father is a liability to his family, especially to the children. Excessive abuse of alcohol and other substances, a poor relationship with the mother of the child, keeping multiple concurrent partners, and unemployment and poverty were some of the main crises that appear to constrain fathers' efforts at participating in the early childhood development (ECD) of their children. Although fathers could have had an interest to contribute in the early education of their children, they appeared to be caught in severe crises which crippled any resolve in them to meaningfully support their children.

The participants bemoaned the poor relationship between them and the mothers of their children. Fathers expressed a lot of emotional frustrations at being caught in a dilemma, where lack of resources meant that they were not able to stand up and be counted as complete men. This emotional state represents a huge source of stress for men. Failure to demonstrate the ability to cater for one's child, then, precipitates a secondary situation in which the mother of the child could decide to ignore the man's existence because of his inabilities. Eddy, Thomson-de Boor, and Mphaka (2013) demonstrate that fathers' inabilities to especially provide financial support for the upkeep of their children can be a huge source of tension between them and the mothers of their children. The mothers could decide not to entertain any positive feelings for the man, who subsequently becomes isolated; a crisis situation that further constrains the man's capabilities to participate in the life of his child.

Excessive abuse of alcohol and other substances, as well as the keeping of multiple concurrent partners are additional crises that were revealed from data. The negative effects of alcohol and substance abuse cannot be overemphasised. However, previous studies have found that uncontrolled consumption of alcohol can affect how a man performs his duties as a father. Sharma et al. (2016) have shown that a father who engages in excessive consumption of alcohol may be prone to numerous errors in the manner he conducts himself and may even neglect some of his family responsibilities. As most of the fathers were unmarried and, therefore, uncommitted, they were prone to keeping multiple concurrent partners, with its devastating consequences; a finding that is congruent with those by Richter et al. (2010) and Mercer (2015). Mufutau and Okeke (2016), in their study, argue that being a single father should not be a licence for multiple concurrent relationships.

Fathers' own perspectives about the intervention strategies that may support them to actively participate in the early socio-education development of their children appear to implicate future policies on fathers' participation in ECD. Among the intervention strategies mentioned by the participants, the need for Men's Department and Men's Centres, organising fathers' and mothers' day, and the creation of more employment opportunities for fathers appear to take preeminence. Fathers' perspectives on the strategies further demonstrate a clear willingness on their part to cooperate in any attempts that may assist in ameliorating their conditions. But it is important to note that individuals alone cannot achieve these interventions. Perhaps some policy commitments

from various levels of government, and specific institutions, as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and designated educational institutions, may assist in achieving some of these intervention strategies.

A major limitation of this study that the researcher would like to mention here relates to the selection of 25 fathers for this important study. Although such a limited number of participants fall within the framework of a qualitative research approach, the sample size, however, discourages any efforts at generalisation from sample to population. A conscious spread of the sample size across various Education Districts within the Eastern Cape would have generated more credible findings. A further study, therefore, should explore fathers from multiple Education Districts in the Eastern Cape Province. Perhaps a quantitative research design, in which a large number of fathers from different Education Districts serve as participants, would encourage more generalisable empirical findings that will influence policies.

Conclusion

Fathers who took part in the study are experiencing numerous crises that negatively impact their capabilities to participate in the early social and educational development of their children. There is, therefore, great need for further and continuous research on fathers, especially by male researchers. Arguments for this have been sufficiently advanced within the body of this article. In addition, having more men doing research on, and with fathers, holds an enormous promise for the better understanding of the situation with men and fathers within the context of ECD. The strategies suggested by fathers who took part in this study are not ideal ones. Policymakers in the field of early childhood development should, therefore, appreciate the findings of this study as a springboard for better father-friendly ECD policies in South Africa.

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