

IV. IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

FATHERHOOD: SEVERAL CHALLENGES OF FATHER ABSENCE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN LANDSCAPE

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Abstract:

The focus of this paper is on father absence in the South African context, a growing concern with significant implications for family well-being, relationships, morality, and children's development. Father absence poses a considerable social challenge for many communities across South Africa, necessitating efforts to address and restore family cohesion. Research indicates that men often struggle to confront their identity crisis, which in turn hinders effective fatherhood and exacerbates the issue of father absence. Addressing this challenge is crucial for promoting healthier family dynamics and societal well-being.

Keywords:

Fatherhood, father absence, South Africa, men, family well-being.

Introduction

This paper examines the issue of father absence in South Africa from the viewpoint of a concerned author. The absence of fathers is a pressing problem in the country, with evidence suggesting that men's difficulty in navigating their identity crisis in the twenty-first century is a primary barrier to embracing fatherhood. Men frequently shy away from addressing this

issue, resulting in adverse impacts on families and communities.¹ Theologian Don Browning of the University of Chicago first introduced the concept of “father absence” in the 1990s,² shedding light on, and providing insights into this social problem. In 2016, at the Fatherhood Forum in Mthatha, Eastern Cape, South Africa, the following statement was made: "South Africa is rapidly becoming a fatherless society, with men behaving like monsters towards women and children". The forum sought to tackle the problem of fatherlessness and the diminishing role of fathers in society.³ It also acknowledged that since South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, the influence of fathers within households has notably waned. This pervasive issue and social malaise have inflicted significant suffering on many families, especially those with young children, ultimately having a devastating impact on the South African society.

Father absence in context: South Africa and beyond

“Father absence” refers to the emotional, financial, and physical absence of a biological father from his child(ren)'s life due to the breakdown of a parental relationship.⁴ According to Salami and Okeke,⁵ this phenomenon represents a societal issue with serious implications for children of all ages and the fundamental fabric of communities within nations. Despite its prevalence, it should not be regarded as a societal norm.⁶ Moreover, Ramatsetse and Ross⁷ highlight various historical, socio-economic, political, and regulatory factors contributing to father absenteeism in South Africa.

Family relationships and overall well-being have suffered detrimental effects due to various policies, including colonialism and apartheid measures such as the creation of homelands and forced settlements, labor migration

¹ F.E. Freeks, 2017, p. 89.

² J. Meyer, 2008, p. 4.

³ L. Feni, 2004, p. 16.

⁴ J. Meyer, 2008.

⁵ I.A. Salami and C.I.O. Okeke, 2018, pp. 1-7.

⁶ K. Geldenhuys, 2023, p. 11.

⁷ T.P. Ramatsetse and E. Ross, 2023, p. 200.

policies, influx control, and pass laws.⁸ Additionally, as noted by Makofane,⁹ father absence extends to scenarios where fathers have minimal regular interaction with their children and lack significant involvement in their upbringing. Consequently, in South African society, many children feel abandoned due to their fathers' absence.¹⁰ Some fathers live separately from their biological children,¹¹ while others do not have a father figure at all.¹² Fatherless children often experience a sense of loss and confusion, and may face bullying or shame due to their father's absence.¹³ When fathers are absent, there are clear indicators of child abuse and neglect within families.¹⁴ Father absence causes harm to many families, particularly children, who often do not know where to seek help.¹⁵ It is evident that father absence plays a significant role in both disrupted and unstable families, as well as in cases of child abuse and neglect.

In the South African landscape, the absence of fathers stands as a severe social issue and a stark reality in society.¹⁶ This phenomenon results in devastating consequences such as fractured families, heightened child aggression, financial hardships, societal challenges, and increased poverty levels. South Africa has undergone rapid transformations, including shifts in family dynamics, with the nation reportedly having the second-highest rate of father absence in Africa.¹⁷ Although father absence is not exclusive to South Africa, it remains one of the nation's most significant challenges.¹⁸ With ongoing changes in family structures contributing to a rise in broken relationships, father absence has become noticeably more prevalent.¹⁹ Father

⁸ Ngcukaitobi, 2021

⁹ M. Makofane, 2015, pp. 22-44.

¹⁰ M.H.M. Mabusela, 2014.

¹¹ L. Richter, J. Chikovore and T. Makusha, 2010, pp. 360-365.

¹² L. Richter and T. Maskusha, 2018.

¹³ L. Richter et al., 2010.

¹⁴ M.P. Londt, M. Kock, and J. John-Langba, 2017, pp. 145-158.

¹⁵ F.E. Freeks, 2021c.

¹⁶ E.M. Mavungu, 2013, pp. 65-78.

¹⁷ Z. Khan, 2018.

¹⁸ F.E. Freeks, 2020, a2607.

¹⁹ W.M. Kesebonye and K.A. P'Olak, 2020, pp. 1-13.

absence poses a significant challenge for many families in the South African society.²⁰ This social issue detrimentally affects family dynamics, especially concerning children's academic attainment. Research indicates that children raised without a father figure often exhibit poorer academic performance or achieve less academically.²¹

Father absence is detrimental and plays a significant role in the issue of dysfunctional families.²² One-third of South Africa's incarcerated men are between the ages of 18 and 25, and many of them have children outside of prison. These statistics were published by the South Africa Institute of Race Relations. Disturbingly, a staggering 63% of youth suicide cases are linked to households where fathers are absent.²³ During the xenophobic attacks in South Africa in 2008, perpetrators were labeled as the "fatherless sons of violence".²⁴ Many individuals, predominantly men, endured brutal beatings, sexual assaults, stabbings, and even murders during these xenophobic attacks, resulting in a significant number of children being left fatherless.²⁵

Furthermore, South Africa contends with one of the highest rates of father absence globally. It is imperative to recognize that children worldwide, not solely in South Africa, endure the consequences of paternal absence. While this study focuses on South Africa, it is essential to highlight the global situation regarding father absence as a social problem and a worldwide phenomenon, as well as the issue of children growing up without fathers. Studies conducted by behavioral scientists on matters related to fatherhood were featured in the *New York Times* magazine. They emphasized that, above nearly all other factors, the presence of a biological father at home could significantly impact a child's happiness and success.²⁶

Dr. David Blankenhorn, the founder of the Institute for American Values, is an esteemed academic and expert in the field of fatherhood in the

²⁰ F.E. Freeks, 2021c.

²¹ J. Radl, L. Salazar and H. Cebolla-Boado, 2017, pp. 217-242.

²² C. Carstens, 2020, pp. 169-173.

²³ T. Frazier, 2015.

²⁴ *Star*, 2008, p. 15.

²⁵ B. Hans, 2008.

²⁶ J.P. Shapiro and J. Schrof, 1995, p. 38.

United States. The institute leads a fatherhood movement, a broad coalition of leaders and organizations dedicated to addressing the issue of father absence in their communities. In his book, *Fatherless America*, Blankenhorn contends that the absence of fathers in the nation stands as the most pressing social concern, carrying profound consequences for children's future prospects.²⁷ This suggests that problems like drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, incest, corruption, and various other social issues pale in comparison to the devastating impact of father absence.²⁸ These patterns are troubling since fathers are actively choosing to reside in separate households, rather than being absent due to illness, death, or conflict.²⁹ Consequently, children lack an understanding of fatherhood and feel profoundly abandoned by their fathers.³⁰

The Euro-American and African perspectives on parenthood exhibit significant divergence and tension. In contrast to Euro-American views, African conceptions, particularly in the context of South Africa, prioritize community involvement in child-rearing. This is encapsulated in the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child". This proverb is closely associated with the principle of "Ubuntu", emphasizing the importance of community in fostering a child's success and well-being, and promoting mutual respect and support among individuals.³¹

Another proverb in Sepedi, "*ngoana ke wa sechaba*", underscores the communal responsibility in raising a child, suggesting that a child belongs to or is nurtured by the community. In this context, the immediate family and the broader society collectively fulfill the role of caregivers. Similarly, the Nguni proverb "*intandane enhle ngumakhotwa ngunina*," highlights the significance of a mother figure in a child's life, suggesting that even an orphan with a mother is considered fortunate compared to one without. This reflects the emphasis on the role of mothers in child-rearing. While these proverbs emphasize the importance of maternal figures, it is worth noting that many

²⁷ D. Blankenhorn, 1997, pp. 9-14.

²⁸ D. Blankenhorn, 1996.

²⁹ W.F. Horn and D. Blankenhorn, 1999, pp. 4-25.

³⁰ Quoted by Blankenhorn but cited in G.E. Lamb, 2015, p. 91.

³¹ K. Tyatya, 2015.

fatherless children still achieve success in life. Nonetheless, the influence of mothers and grandmothers plays a crucial role in shaping children's lives.³²

Due to the support and care provided by other family members, South African mothers who were raised in extended families often exhibit traits of confidence, strength, independence, and resilience.³³ Recognizing that mothers play a pivotal role as primary educators and guardians, ensuring the well-being, growth, and development of their children, underscores the significance of motherhood in every family, community, and society.³⁴

In 2011, the prevalence of father absence rose from 42% to 48%, as reported by Bartlett.³⁵ Consequently, South Africa stands among the nations with the highest rates of father absence globally.³⁶ This underscores a profound fatherhood challenge in the country, with an estimated 2.13 million children growing up without fathers and 9 million experiencing fatherlessness.³⁷ Therefore, it is reasonable to identify father absence as one of the leading factors jeopardizing family stability and overall well-being.³⁸ The increasing prevalence of this phenomenon in South Africa is evident, resulting in challenges such as dysfunctional families, aggressive behavior in children, financial strain, social problems, and poverty.³⁹ Considering that single mothers predominantly head households, this trend serves as a distressing call to action that warrants urgent attention.⁴⁰

Factors contributing to father absence

The "decay of father absence" destroys households and is a major contributing factor to societal ills in South Africa, according to the analysts

³² M.H.M. Mabusela, 2014, pp. 48-49.

³³ S. Magqamfana and S. Bazana, 2020, p. 169.

³⁴ V. Leskošek, 2011, pp. 1-10.

³⁵ Bartlett, 2013, p. 1.

³⁶ L. Richter et al., 2012, p. 2.

³⁷ D. Dube, 2016, p. 2; Frazier, 2015.

³⁸ K. Ratele, T. Shefer and L. Clowes, 2012, pp. 553-563.

³⁹ F.E. Freeks, 2016, p. 2.

⁴⁰ C. Hawkins, 2015.

who have called the country's father absence crisis a "courageous monster".⁴¹ According to Frazier,⁴² the increasing prevalence of absent fathers in South Africa has become a significant concern, with many children living in adverse conditions due to their fathers' absence. Indeed, the absence of fathers is considered one of the primary factors jeopardizing household stability.⁴³ Various contributing factors, including unemployment, divorce, low socio-economic status, cultural beliefs, and others, have been cited as reasons for the absence of father figures.⁴⁴ Also, a plethora of factors, including unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, and so forth, have contributed to the staggering number of fathers who are emotionally, financially, or physically absent from their children's lives.⁴⁵ Because of withdrawal and other forms of abuse, the emotional impact of a father's absence is very painful.⁴⁶

Additional factors contributing to father absence include divorce, fathering outside of marriage, domestic incapacity (being physically present but emotionally absent), social disruption, and death.⁴⁷ The impact of the absent father figure on children's overall development is profoundly distressing.⁴⁸ Research suggests that a child's exposure to father absence correlates with adverse psychological outcomes, including low self-esteem, diminished self-perception, below-average academic performance, and difficulties in forming positive relationships with individuals of the opposite sex.⁴⁹ Furthermore, father absence has been associated with a negative self-image.⁵⁰ Children who are exposed to father absence often experience mood swings and have limited access to health and educational support services.⁵¹

⁴¹ *Cape Argus*, 2008, p. 15; V. John, 2012, p. 24; S. Swartz, A. Bhana, L. Richter and A. Versfeld, 2013.

⁴² Frazier, 2015.

⁴³ M. Bertelsmann, 2016.

⁴⁴ M.M. Eddy, H. Thomson-de Boor, and K. Mphaka, 2013.

⁴⁵ J. Meyer, 2018.

⁴⁶ S.B. Morse, 2016.

⁴⁷ M.H.M. Mabusela, 2014, p. 13.

⁴⁸ E. Pougnet, L.A. Serbin, D.M. Stack, and A.E. Schwartzman, 2011, pp. 173-182.

⁴⁹ P. Smith, G. Khunou, and M. Nathane-Taulela, 2014, pp. 433-436.

⁵⁰ S. Magqamfana and S. Bazana, 2020.

⁵¹ L. Holborn and G. Eddy, 2011.

Furthermore, behavioral problems and instances of child abuse are often associated with fatherless families.⁵² Importantly, the absence of fathers contributes to a detrimental cycle of poverty within many households, adversely affecting numerous children.⁵³

Research on father absence reveals significant challenges for both families and society

Studies indicate that the absence of fathers increases a child's susceptibility to lower educational achievement and antisocial behavior, which can disrupt both work and family life.⁵⁴ Children without fathers may also face various negative outcomes, including substance abuse, low self-esteem, mental health disorders, depression, and involvement in criminal activities.

The issue of absent fathers extends beyond specific communities and is a global concern.⁵⁵ Research conducted across twenty-one countries, including the United States, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, Grenada, Seychelles, and Chattanooga, highlighted a consistent trend. In each of these countries, father absence ranked as either the largest or fourth most significant issue, with violence being the primary concern, followed by crime and drugs, respectively.⁵⁶

Popenoe's⁵⁷ research revealed that father-absent homes were the starting point for 60% of all rapists, 72% of teenage killers, and 70% of men serving prison sentences in the United States. Additionally, Popenoe demonstrated a significant rise in the number of children living apart from their biological fathers, increasing from 17% to 36% between 1960 and 1990. This trend coincided with an escalation in juvenile delinquency, child abuse, teen pregnancy, abortion, poverty, high school dropout rates, and teen suicide.⁵⁸

⁵² P.R. Amato, 2010, pp. 650-666.

⁵³ C.K. Mutegi, 2015.

⁵⁴ T. Frazier, 2015.

⁵⁵ E.F. Freeks, 2016.

⁵⁶ C. Carstens, 2014, pp. 22-24.

⁵⁷ D. Popenoe, 1996.

⁵⁸ D. Popenoe, 1996, pp. 13-14.

Carstens⁵⁹ research presented statistics closely mirroring those of Popenoe's. According to Carstens' findings, households without fathers accounted for a significant portion of various societal issues: 63% of suicides, 70% of juveniles in state-run institutions, 80% of rapists driven by displaced anger, 85% of children exhibiting behavioral problems, 90% of homeless children, and 71% of students who drop out of school. Moreover, compared to children raised in households with both a father and a mother, a striking 46% of all households headed by single mothers had children living below the poverty line due to the repercussions of father absence.⁶⁰

Research confirms that the absence of fathers has detrimental effects on the majority of children in South Africa and globally. Fathers who are absent or uninvolved tend to be neglectful parents, rarely responding to their children's needs or demands. They often only provide for their children's basic necessities such as food and shelter, showing minimal emotional investment. It is crucial to acknowledge that children without a father figure at home lack a positive male role model, which can have lasting consequences. Father absence also renders children more vulnerable to abuse and contributes to the prevalence of child-headed households in the South African context.⁶¹

Furthermore, children deprived of the love and care of both parents become more vulnerable, facing difficulties in fundamental skills such as managing emotions, trusting others, and navigating social interactions. In addition to increasing the risk of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and risky behaviors, father absence heightens the likelihood of children experiencing harm themselves. Those who witness father absence are at greater risk of engaging in unsafe sexual behavior, contracting HIV, abusing drugs and alcohol, committing crimes, and experiencing violence.⁶² Moreover, the absence of a father figure in a child's life can lead to early pregnancy, depression, substance abuse, and premature engagement in sexual activity.

⁵⁹ C. Carstens, 2014, pp. 10-11.

⁶⁰ A. Fins, 2020, p. 1.

⁶¹ F.E. Freeks, 2021b.

⁶² T. Makusha and L. Richter, 2015, pp. 30-33; C. Gould and C.L. Ward, 2015.

These issues are often perceived as devastating by families, leading them to frequently hold God responsible for all of their misfortunes and ills.⁶³

Society grapples with the concerns surrounding fatherless children and the increasing prevalence of absent fathers, with father absence yielding particularly negative consequences for children.⁶⁴ Noteworthy research indicates that 1 in 5 South African children grapple with mental health issues, leading to problems such as aggressive behavior and anxiety disorders.⁶⁵ Another study investigated the impact of a father's absence on children; the results indicated that girls were more negatively affected than boys in various aspects of life.⁶⁶ The girls in this study also expressed feelings of inadequacy, with divorce, the father's incarceration, or death being identified as significant contributing factors.⁶⁷

In another study, Fengu⁶⁸ discovered disastrous outcomes as a result of the content involving 20,000 teachers at 1,380 schools throughout South Africa. The South African Council for Educators (SACE) commissioned this study with assistance from LeadAfrican Consulting (Pty) Ltd. The South African society is characterized by a high number of broken families and a generation of fatherless children. In classrooms, children display a haughty attitude and behave as if they own the space. It is disheartening that the majority of children lack self-control and do not value education. Students are verbally, emotionally, and physically abusing teachers both directly and indirectly, showing a lack of respect towards them. This situation has been exacerbated by Hollywood and, primarily, by the American "culture". Entertainment has the power to influence people's thoughts and emotions, causing shifts in culture. It is not surprising that American education is at a critical turning point, leading some teachers to consider quitting altogether. Understaffing, a long-standing issue in schools, has reached catastrophic proportions. Teachers are exhausted, overworked, and experiencing high levels of

⁶³ D. Popenoe, 1996.

⁶⁴ I.A. Salami and C.I.O. Okeke, 2018.

⁶⁵ T.M. Parchment and L.A. Small, 2022.

⁶⁶ C. Casetter, 2020.

⁶⁷ C. Casetter, 2020.

⁶⁸ M. Fengu, 2020.

stress. Engaging in this behavior greatly impacts teachers' self-esteem and confidence, leaving many educators demoralized and discouraged.

Further research from the study underscores the alarming prevalence of violence against teachers in South African schools, highlighting it as a significant social issue. The survey revealed that 20% of educators in South Africa reported their schools as being violent environments where students carry weapons. Despite the implementation of security checks and measures, students persist in behaving inappropriately and violently. Approximately 17% of teachers noted the occurrence of physical fights involving knives and guns at school, while around 13% of educators observed gang activity on school premises.

Furthermore, the study uncovered that other students often viewed these violent students as heroes, exacerbating the breakdown of behavior, discipline, respect, and obedience within the school system. According to the findings, educators were assuming the roles of social workers, psychologists, counselors, and even parents. The research also revealed a correlation between the prevalence of violence and teacher absenteeism, as well as various health issues such as depression, resignation, early retirement, and a growing disdain for the teaching profession. Father absence and broken families were major contributing factors to the violence. Consequently, school violence is a social evil that is harmful and impacts both the students who are the victims and the people who witness the violence. Fear, anxiety, worry, and uneasiness are then generated, hindering the children's ability to learn and perform well in school.

Moreover, sociological studies have shown that the absence of fathers significantly contributes to children's negative social-emotional and financial outcomes.⁶⁹ Given this trend, it wouldn't be surprising in the contemporary era if South Africa were to be ranked as the country with the highest percentage of father absence.

⁶⁹ S. McLanahan, L. Tach and D. Schneider, 2014, pp. 399-427.

Broken and fractured families within the South African landscape

Families that are affected by a father's absence often experience unhealthy relationships among themselves. Many of these families have gone through divorce and have witnessed instances where family members are in conflict or have become estranged. Broken families can have a negative impact on every aspect of a child's development, which depends on various factors such as the child's age at the time of the parents' divorce, their personality, and their relationships with their family members. Negative effects on development are rare in infants and young children, but teenagers and older children may experience problems with their emotional, social, and academic functioning. According to Mayowa,⁷⁰ broken families and fatherless children are not exclusive to African families, as they are becoming more common worldwide. He also notes that broken families have been labeled as non-African and viewed as unfavorable, exceptional, and forbidden circumstances.⁷¹ A fractured household is classified as one in which a single parent resides with a child or children.⁷²

Saika,⁷³ however, argues that broken families are more common than unusual and distinct occurrences. According to her, a family in crisis can be described as fractured if issues lead to divorce between parents, separation between sons and daughters, and other negative outcomes, as well as harmful elements such as miscommunication, abuse, and rejection. There are several other factors that contribute to broken families, including divorce, separation, death, misunderstandings within the family, unconditional parenting, the influence of parents or friends, problems affecting children from broken homes, emotional difficulties, social and educational challenges, family dynamics, behavioral and learning issues, conflicts between parents and children, and difficulties with adjustment.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ I.O. Mayowa, 2021, pp. 1342-1348.

⁷¹ I.O. Mayowa, 2021.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ R. Saika, 2017, pp. 445-448.

⁷⁴ R. Saika, 2017.

The value of fatherhood in the South African landscape

There has never been a better reason to value fatherhood. Nothing in this world can compare to the impact a father can have on his family. Therefore, the role of fatherhood has evolved over time, leading to significant issues and complications faced by many South African families today.⁷⁵ Factors such as biological fatherhood significantly influence identity development.⁷⁶ I do not address the politics of masculinity in these key points. However, since fatherhood and masculinity are closely connected, it is essential to discuss some fundamental aspects of masculinity.

The role of fatherhood, as a central component of masculinity or what it means to be a man, is constructed.⁷⁷ For example, Hearn⁷⁸ argues that masculinity, which has been associated with male characteristics like virility, power, and manliness since the 17th century, has a well-established definition. This aligns with the point made by Getui and Richard⁷⁹ that masculinity is an embodied, socially constructed way of being male. Additionally, there is a strong connection between this idea and the concepts of manliness and manhood.⁸⁰ Concepts of manhood and masculinity are used to characterize men.⁸¹

Furthermore, there are context-specific variations in the construction of masculinity. In the conventional model, fatherhood is linked to the roles of protector and provider in situations where there is a lack of material resources.⁸² In other scenarios, men's income remains stable and consistent, and the focus is on a father's domestic duties, such as spending time with his children and being a loving, caring parent in his role as a father.⁸³

As a result, the significance of fatherhood has been undervalued in South African society in recent decades.⁸⁴ Ford, Nalbone, Wetcher, and

⁷⁵ J.G. Linn, D.R. Wilson, T.T. Fako, 2015, pp. 12-18.

⁷⁶ L. Richter et al., 2010.

⁷⁷ Z. Khan, 2018, p. 56.

⁷⁸ J. Hearn, 2007, pp. 1-20.

⁷⁹ M. Getui and G.K. Richard, 2020, p. 28.

⁸⁰ J.A. Mangan and J. Walvin, 1987, p. 394.

⁸¹ J. Mathwasa and L. Sibanda, 2020, p. 189.

⁸² J. Meyer, 2018, p. 5.

⁸³ R. Morrell, 2006, p. 22; J. Meyer, 2018, p. 5.

⁸⁴ K. Ratele et al., 2012.

Sutton⁸⁵ observed that fathers are often absent, and families have undergone considerable transformations. Willerton, Schwarz, Wadsworth, and Oglesby,⁸⁶ as well as Freeks,⁸⁷ emphasized that children both need and desire to spend time with their fathers, highlighting the importance of paternal presence over material gifts. Unfortunately, traditional conceptions of family, including God's design and the crucial role of the father, are diminishing.⁸⁸ This decline in fatherhood is evident, with South Africa rapidly transitioning into a society marked by father absence.⁸⁹ Additionally, factors such as denial of fatherhood responsibilities, divorce, dissolution of households, and unreported fatherhood contribute to the widespread and persistent nature of father absence in South Africa.⁹⁰

It is crucial to recognize that fatherhood has evolved over time, presenting numerous challenges for families across various communities. Despite this evolution, fatherhood remains of utmost importance to all races in the South African landscape. However, it is also evident that the issue of fatherhood is a primary contributor to the challenge of single parenting in South African communities. This dilemma warrants urgent attention, particularly as it is becoming increasingly prevalent globally.⁹¹ One potential approach to addressing this issue could involve restoring the importance of fathers and emphasizing their vital role within families.⁹²

The author's contribution

This paper extensively relies on my personal research and studies, encompassing various aspects of fatherhood, father absence, the pivotal role of fathers within families, and overall family well-being. These contributions draw from a diverse array of studies, research papers, publications, books,

⁸⁵ J. Ford et al., 2008, pp. 284-299.

⁸⁶ E. Willerton et al., 2011.

⁸⁷ F.E. Freeks, 2011a,

⁸⁸ F.E. Freeks, 2016, pp. 13-20.

⁸⁹ L. Feni, 2016, p. 2.

⁹⁰ L.M. Albert et al., 2021, pp. 2177-2194.

⁹¹ F.E. Freeks, 2020, p. 1.

⁹² J.M. Del Russo, 2009.

and training materials. Notably, I have conducted research on the adverse effects of father absence on families, particularly children, through a practical theological study.⁹³ Additionally, my work on a Character-Building Programme for Further Education and Training Colleges underscores the significance of parental involvement in children's education and the positive impact of both fatherhood and motherhood on academic performance and community engagement.⁹⁴

Empirical studies further explore the role of fathers, such as "The Role of the Father as Mentor in the Transmission of Values: A Pastoral-Theological Study",⁹⁵ focusing on fathers as mentors and teachers in shaping children's values for societal success. Another study, "Missional Parenting: The Father as Leading and Missional Figure in Families, Society, and Church",⁹⁶ highlights the father's role as a leading figure in promoting missional values within families, society, and the church.

Additionally, "The Fatherhood Training and Equipping Manual for Fathers: Dad Becoming Fully You"⁹⁷ serves as a valuable resource on fatherhood within various contexts, including communities, churches, and society. Furthermore, efforts to train and equip men and fathers in correctional facilities and other incarcerated venues aim to foster positive fatherhood in families and society.

I have also made numerous other contributions to the study of fatherhood and father absence as detrimental social phenomena, as well as the essential role of fathers within families.⁹⁸ Notably, the researcher's monograph, "Missional Fatherhood as Praxis to Christian Families who Grapple with Father Absence: The Bible as Key Answer to this Issue",⁹⁹ has served as a significant influence and contribution to this work.

⁹³ F.E. Freeks, 2004.

⁹⁴ F.E. Freeks, 2007.

⁹⁵ F.E. Freeks, 2011a.

⁹⁶ F.E. Freeks, 2018.

⁹⁷ F.E. Freeks, 2011b.

⁹⁸ F.E. Freeks, 2013.

⁹⁹ F.E. Freeks, 2021c.

Furthermore, the ongoing project titled "A Community Engagement Project on Family Wellbeing: A Practical Theological Assessment",¹⁰⁰ has provided further insights. This project focuses on assessing family well-being, particularly among families significantly impacted by father absence and family dissolution. These contributions enhance the depth and breadth of understanding surrounding the issues addressed in this paper.

Conclusion

The valuable contributions men make to their families are undermined when society loses sight of the importance of fatherhood. If this trend persists, fatherhood may cease to be upheld as an ideal within society. Given that the family serves as a cornerstone of social structure, the absence of fathers significantly undermines the fabric of South African families. Father absence is profoundly destructive, and if society continues to overlook this issue, its impact will only worsen, inflicting even greater harm on children.

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