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The Need for Fathers as Role Models to Aid Family and Social Cohesion in Resource-Constrained Contexts

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The impact of parents on their children, especially in the developmental years, cannot be overemphasized. The influence of both parents on the individual lives of their children differs and may have long-lasting effects on their adulthood. The dimensions of love, encouragement, and discipline that both parents display toward their children are diverse and, as such, both parents have something crucial to offer. Rohner and Veneziano (2001) suggested that both parents have a powerful effect on the health, social, and cognitive functioning of the child. The differing parenting styles play a divergent, yet significant and complementary role in a child's development. In this regard, Salami and Okeke (2018) argue that if one of the parenting styles is redundant or missing, it will certainly affect the entire developmental process. The absence of fathers in the lives of children is an increasing trend in recent years. It is therefore not news that the influence of fathers on their families, especially in their children's lives, has been waning over the years (East et al., 2006).

A role is considered "A role is a socially acceptable model of behavior; it is a set of rights and responsibilities which are related to certain positions within the group. A role is a dynamic aspect of a status. When a person executes his rights and obligations arising from his position, he or she accomplishes their role. Every role is assigned in the context of other roles, without them it is inconceivable"(Gežová, 2015, p. 46 in Hargašová 1991, p. 97). The State of the World's Fathers report (2017) indicates that a father's involvement in the lives of his children is as important as a mother's (Heilman et al., 2017). Research has further shown that mothers and fathers can differ in their parenting styles (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). Thus, a mother's role, as well as a father's role, is specific within the context of the family, as both provide different positions, responsibilities, characteristics, obligations, and structures to a child's development and environment (Gežová, 2015). As such, a father's role within the family environment provides a significantly different parenting approach compared to the role of a mother within the family (Gežová 2015). Additional research reveals that paternal involvement from the early childhood development stage toward later life offers positive psychosocial and behavioral development, which is different from maternal involvement (Vaughn et al., 2017; Yogman & Garfield, 2016). Growing evidence highlights the positive influence that fathers have on the development of their children and the well-being of their families. The role of fathers has been found to have a significant impact on the fostering of a child's social-emotional, cognitive, language, and motor development (Lamb, 2004). Empirical studies on the father's role in the family and parent-child relationship found that fathers

strengthen the child's early childhood development, make an essential contribution to a child's academic achievements, and decrease participation in adolescent-risk behaviors (Gray & Anderson, 2012; Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Richter et al., 2010).

Globally, there are general ideas and cultural expectations on the role of fathers; however, there is still a sparsity of literature on absent fathers, child outcomes (Featherstone, 2001; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001), and their impact on family and social cohesion. In South Africa in particular, attention has been placed on fathers' absenteeism and their involvement in a child's social and educational development (Salami & Okeke, 2018), but research focusing on fathers is only now beginning to emerge. As such, this paper seeks to explore the need for a father as a role model to aid family and social cohesion in resource-constrained contexts so that families and societies thrive and become more cohesive, which will ultimately spill over into society.

The Need for Fathers – What A Father Is, and What His Contribution to the Family Is.

Studies on fathers' involvement contend that historical, cultural, and family ideologies formulate the role of fathers. These essentially include the time fathers spend and activities carried out with their children. In addition, the role of fathers toward their children is further supported by the quality of the interaction between the father and the child (Palkovitz, 2002).

A father is broadly viewed as "the male or males identified as most involved in caregiving and committed to the well-being of the child, regardless of living situation, marital status, or biological relation" (Yogman & Garfield, 2016, p. 2). This includes biological as well as adoptive and step-marriage relations. In addition, the roles of fathers are complex due to the changing environment of family structures and social norms. In historic times, fathers were viewed as powerful patriarchs and breadwinners within the family environment (Knibiehler, 1995). From the 20th century onward, fathers have been more involved in their parental role (Griswold, 1993).

However, in early theoretical and empirical literature that explores childhood social interactions and focuses on the parent-child relationship, significant attention was given to the mother and child. Both the psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1983) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973) emphasize the bond between mother and child. Subsequent work on child

development research further stressed through the child's development that the child is exposed to social support systems and that these support systems largely contribute to the child's development. Within systems theory, further emphasis is placed on the relationships in the wider social systems surrounding the child. Similarly, (Magnusson, 1998, p. 38) argues, "The development processes of an individual cannot be understood by studying single variables in isolation from other simultaneously operating variables". Conversely, further arguments relating to parenting styles proffer that mothers and fathers have different parenting styles because of gender.

Family Cohesion in Resource-Constrained Contexts

Family cohesion implies that family members have each other's genuine interests at heart; they are attached, experience emotional and affective relationships with each other, and exhibit friendly and shared associations, companionship, and fellowship (Neto et al., 2021). Furthermore, family cohesion has been positively associated with better educational, emotional, and physical well-being among children and adolescents (Tolan et al., 1997).

In an interesting study in which the relationship between family cohesion and healthy eating behaviors in adolescent girls was examined, the authors found that girls who reported greater family cohesion in their families had more days of eating breakfast. The girls also consumed less soda and showed a relatively positive attitude towards the consumption of fruits, vegetables, and milk (Franko et al., 2008). A possible explanation for these findings is that cohesive families may value the need to be together and share important meals. It could also be the influence of the parents and desire to please and obey their parents when they conveyed the importance of health messages about eating breakfast and the negative effects of soda intake.

In a mixed-methods study conducted by Leidy et al. (2010), in which the authors examined the association between positive parenting, family cohesion, and child social competence amongst Latino families (282 parents and 282 children [ages 9 –12]) who migrated to the United States, family cohesion predicted improvements in the problem-solving skills and social self-efficacy of a child. Although social and economic stressors affect children and families from many cultural and ethnic groups, in the United States ethnic minority children are particularly affected (Guerra & Smith, 2006). Proctor and Dalaker (2002) stated that 28% of Latinos in the United States under

the age of 18 experience grave economic difficulties.

Additionally, immigrant Latinos and their children are often exposed to an array of harsh and adverse conditions. These include parents having to work multiple jobs, limited community resources, living in unsafe neighborhoods, experiencing prejudice, language barriers, and possibly overcrowded living conditions (Hernandez, 2004; Shields & Behrman, 2004). These socio-economic challenges may have a major impact on the cohesion of families, especially amongst these minority groups.

Social Cohesion and Resource-Constrained Contents

Empirical studies have shown that social cohesion enhances the health and well-being of individuals in a community and is a crucial need for human survival (Fonseca et al., 2019; Friedkin, 2004; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997; Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). It has, however, been a challenge to get a consensual definition or theoretical conceptualization for the construct (Fonseca et al., 2019; Friedkin, 2004; Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). Social cohesion fosters living together in unity, accommodates one another's differences, enhances inclusion, reduces disparities within the income of individuals in the community, nurtures trust, and promotes shared values and norms (Fonseca et al., 2019; OECD, 2011; Ohmer, 2016).

The disparity between income earned and the standard of living that exists between the classes of people in a community could give a clear indication of the social cohesion that exists in that society. Social cohesion is further hampered when there is increasing economic and social inequality and exclusion amongst a group of people (Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997; Khambule & Siswana, 2017). Furthermore, high unemployment rates give rise to inequality and subsequently poverty. Leholá (2014) identified the lack of proper education and unemployment as crucial drivers of poverty in South African society.

A socially cohesive society should be aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment by enhancing cooperation within groups, fostering unity, creating a sense of belonging, envisioning a common good, generating a communal drive for promotion, and moving forward. In a survey administered to 483 random caregivers with children under the age of 10, McLeigh et al. (2018) indicated that social cohesion did not mediate the relationship between neighborhood poverty and parental neglect, but social cohesion mediated the relationship between the economic resources of its members and abusive behavior.

Absent Fathers – Implications and Impact

The Department of Social Development (DSD) (2013) reported that in South Africa, absent, living fathers are an increasing phenomenon that is affecting the family environment as well as the family structure. The family structure within South Africa includes a three-generation household, absent-spouse, single parent, and child-headed household (South Africa, DSD 2013). Factors that affect absent fathers within households and family structures include historical, social, economic, and cultural settings (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Hall and Posel (2012) and Visser and Moleko (2012) emphasized that labor migration from rural to urban areas, for example, migration due to employment opportunities, as well as low rates of marriage between partners, largely contributes to changes within the family structure. In addition, unemployment and poverty have contributed to the changing family structure of absentee fathers and female-headed households (Rabe & Naidoo, 2015). Furthermore, deaths among parents have also been a cause of child-headed households, with an increase in orphans in South Africa due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and other factors contributing to absent fathers, not to mention crime and violence (South Africa DSD 2013; Holborn & Eddy 2011). These underlying social and economic factors negatively influence family environments as well as child development. Moreover, poverty has been shown to increase the stress levels of single parents, as well as the time and activities spent with their children and family (Stack & Meredith, 2018). Consequently, studies reported that single parenting has a higher risk for poor behavioral and educational outcomes for adolescents due to financial constraints experienced by single parents (Fomby & Cherlin, 2007).

A study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) investigated the effect that fathers have on their children's development. The results showed that fathers' involvement largely contributes to cognitive development, intellectual functioning, and school achievement. Holborn and Eddy (2011, p. 4) further posit that a father's influence on his children is directed towards "children's educational level or length of time spent in school, educational achievement, self-confidence, especially amongst girls, as well as adjustment and behavior control among boys". Conversely, the lack of present fathers increases the risk of children facing emotional disturbance and depression, which influences the involvement of risky behaviors in adolescence (Holborn & Eddy 2011).

These factors further argue the significance of fathers' involvement within the family environment and successful child development (van den Berg & Makusha, 2018). In addition, the State of the World's Fathers report further highlights that greater involvement by fathers in daily care work is needed, as it can encourage gender equality across mothers' and fathers' roles (Heilman et al. 2017). Shared caregiving can play a vital role in social cohesion. The State of the World's Fathers report 2017, therefore, suggests that father-inclusive parent training can positively influence family cohesion and well-being, as it can improve child development outcomes, decrease child violence, and reduce parental conflict.

The report: State of the World's Fathers, 2017 further stipulates that there are various father-centered, parent-training programs, for example, Program P focuses on providing and training men in strategies of active fatherhood relating across the child's early childhood developmental stages. Program P further utilizes factors such as maternal health, caregiving, and gender equality. A randomized controlled trial of this program in Rwanda found that there was a decrease in physical or sexual intimate partner violence and physical punishment of children, as well as an increase in partner support and child care (Heilman et al., 2017, p. 48). These factors can further improve cohesive aspects within the family and social environment.

Another father-inclusive parent training program that has been found to aid in social cohesion aspects was the Real Fathers Initiative which endeavors to reduce physical violence against women and children through challenging gender norms and communication to encourage conflict resolution strategies. The findings of this program found that for men who participated in the program compared to men who did not, there were vital reductions in physical violence after the completion of the intervention. However, although these programs have had a positive impact on fathers, they have been limited (Heilman et al., 2017, p. 49). Thus, having a broader focus on the contributions of fathers across a variety of aspects can provide a better understanding of family health, well-being, and social cohesion.

Data and Methods

A purposive sampling qualitative approach was used to obtain most of the data for this study. This sampling method was utilized to obtain in-depth information from the respondents in which they could verbalize their experiences in their own words. This approach has produced clearer and

much more robust responses from respondents (Bryman, 2016; Hossain, 2011).

Primary data was collected from interviews with parents and other relevant stakeholders. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social workers, and hotel staff in the communities assisted in recruiting the participants. Other participants were sourced by going door to door and asking members of the community to participate in the study. The snowball method of data collection was also utilized. Twenty-five people (25) were interviewed from four different communities, namely: Lambert's Bay (Table 2), Caledon and Grabouw (Table 3), and Philippolis (Table 4). The participants were all 18 years and older. Interviews were conducted in English, Afrikaans, and IsiXhosa depending on the preference of the interviewee. The interviews were conducted in person during April, May, and September of 2019.

Open-ended questions were used to procure information from the participants. The interviews included questions on parenting skills, family values, relationships amongst family members, trust, resolving conflicts, race, communication, equality in the neighborhood, and social cohesion. Interviews were audio-recorded after obtaining permission from the participants. These were then transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The emerging themes were used to explain the data. A few quantitative questionnaires were administered in Caledon and Grabouw to add to the richness of the data.

Lambert's Bay, also known as the "Diamond of the West Coast," is a small fishing town situated in the Cederberg Municipality in the Western Cape province of South Africa (*Lamberts Bay Tours, 2017; Cederberg Municipality, 2021*). The communities of Caledon and Grabouw are located near each other in the Theewaterskloof Local Municipality in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Grabouw, a commercial town in the Overberg region, is noted as the largest single-export fruit-producing area in Southern Africa (*Municipalities of South Africa, Theewaterskloof Local Municipality, 2012 - 2022*), whilst Caledon is a town located next to mineral-rich hot springs, which is a predominantly agricultural region where barley, wheat, wool, and stock farming are cultivated (*Municipalities of South Africa, 2012 - 2022*). Philippolis, on the other hand, is a town in the Kopanong Local Municipality, in the Free State province of South Africa that is regarded as one of the first colonial settlements in the Free State (*Info SA 2021. Philippolis; Municipalities of South Africa, 2012 - 2022*).

Table 1: Demographics of the participants

	Lambert's Bay	Philippolis	Caledon & Grabouw
Occupation	Parents: employed or unemployed Stakeholders: Police officer, Principal, Health Care Worker, Pastor, Social Worker, Attorney		
Gender	3 Males, 5 Females	4 Males, 7 Females	2 Males, 4 Females
Race	7 Coloured, 1 White	5 Coloured, 3 Black, 3 White	4 Coloured, 2 Black
Home Language	Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Shona, Zulu		
Age	\bar{x} = 40	\bar{x} = 45	\bar{x} = 28
Education Level	Gr 7, 9 and 12	Gr 7, 11 and 12	Gr 7, and 12
Marital Status	Single, Married, Widowed		
#No of Children	between 1 to 3	between 1 to 3	0 to 2

Table 1 summarizes the participant's demographics across each community.

The occupation of participants included both parents and stakeholders with diverse backgrounds. Gender, race, and home language were representative of the diversity of sex and culture. The average age in the areas varied between the late 20s and mid-40s. Marital status included parents who were single, married, or widowed. Participants had from one to three children.

Table 2: Lambert's Bay

<i>PARTICIPANT</i>	<i>GENDER</i>	<i>RACE</i>	<i>AGE</i>	<i>EDUCATION LEVEL</i>	<i>HOME LANGUAGE</i>	<i>EMPLOYMENT</i>	<i>CHILDREN</i>
1	Male	South African	48	Gr12 (M+3)	Afrikaans	Rural Impact NGO	Undisclosed
2	Female	Colored	47	Gr 7	Afrikaans	Domestic Worker	2
3	Female	Colored	21	Gr 12	Afrikaans	Unemployed	1
4	Female	Colored	39	Gr 9	Afrikaans	Unemployed	3
5	Female	White	61	Gr 12	Afrikaans	Social Worker	Undisclosed
6	Female	Colored	24	Gr 12	English	Pastor	Undisclosed
7	Male	Colored	42	Gr 12	Afrikaans	Municipality worker	3
8	Male	Colored	42	Gr 12	Afrikaans	Police officer	2

Table 3: Caledon and Grabouw

<i>PARTICIPANT</i>	<i>GENDER</i>	<i>RACE</i>	<i>LANGUAGE</i>	<i>AGE</i>	<i>EDUCATION LEVEL</i>	<i>OCCUPATION</i>	<i>MARITAL STATUS</i>	<i># OF CHILDREN</i>	<i>AREA</i>
<i>P1 STAKEHOLDER</i>	Female	Black/African	Shona	33	Bachelors	Social Worker	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Caledon
<i>P2 STAKEHOLDER</i>	Female	Colored	English	24	Honors	Social Worker	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Caledon
<i>P3 PARENT</i>	Female	Colored	Afrikaans	27	Grade 7	Unemployed	Unmarried	1	Grabouw
<i>P4 STUDENT</i>	Male	Colored	Afrikaans	19	Grade 12	Student	Unmarried	0	Grabouw
<i>P5 STAKEHOLDER</i>	Male	Colored	Afrikaans	33	Diploma	IT Day Hospital	Married	1	Grabouw
<i>P6 PARENT</i>	Female	Black	Sotho	32	?	Unemployed	Unmarried	2	Grabouw

Table 4: Philippolis

<i>PARTICIPANT</i>	<i>GENDER</i>	<i>RACE</i>	<i>LANGUAGE</i>	<i>AGE</i>	<i>EDUCATION LEVEL</i>	<i>OCCUPATION</i>	<i>MARITAL STATUS</i>	<i># OF CHILDREN</i>
<i>STAKEHOLDER P1</i>	Male	Black	Zulu, Sesotho and English	35	Matric	Policeman	Single	0
<i>PARENT P2</i>	Female	White	English and Afrikaans	48	Matric	Attorney	Widowed then Remarried	2
<i>STAKEHOLDER P3</i>	Female	White	English, German and Afrikaans	52	Matric	Part-time secretary at Dr	Married	0
<i>PARENT P4</i>	Female	Black	isiXhosa	35	Grade 11	Unemployed	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
<i>GRANDMOTHER P5</i>	Female	Colored	isiXhosa and Afrikaans	67	Unknown	Unemployed	Widowed	2 (2 deceased)
<i>PARENT P6</i>	Female	Colored	Afrikaans	39	Grade 7	Unemployed	Undisclosed	2
<i>STAKEHOLDER P7</i>	Female	White	Afrikaans	48	PhD Theology	Pastor	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
<i>PARENT P8</i>	Female	Colored	Afrikaans	64	No school	Unemployed	Undisclosed	3
<i>STAKEHOLDER P9</i>	Male	African	Sesotho	27	Matric	Volunteer Community Health Worker	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
<i>STAKEHOLDER P10</i>	Male	Colored	Afrikaans	51	Higher Education Diploma	School Principal	Married	Undisclosed
<i>PARENT P11</i>	Male	Colored	Afrikaans	29	Grade 12	Unemployed	Undisclosed	1

Results

Four sub-themes were identified under the theme of the 'need for fathers as role models to aid social cohesion, namely: 1) The absence of fathers in the community as protectors and guardians of the youth; 2) Unemployment limiting financial provision; 3) Need for fathers' financial provision for material needs for their children; and 4) Rolemodelling/motivation by fathers. Below is the presentation and interpretation of each sub-theme supported by verbatim quotes.

Sub-theme 1: Absence of fathers in the community

The challenge of absent fathers was a common theme in most families. They asserted that some children grow up ignorant of their paternity, which leads to broken families. One explanation is that some fathers are married to other women; as a result, they are unable to completely fulfill their parental responsibilities to their other children for fear of straining their relationships in their current marriages. One of the stakeholders who is a pastor narrates his views below:

“With the fathers that are very much involved, I think about Bergmanshoogte. The family, hits in terms of the black community, are very much involved. Also, the children know when the family speaks, you listen, in terms of designated family stems. Well, there is a lot of families with absent fathers. The reason is that they come in at holiday times, but they work in different spaces, so they leave the children either with the girlfriend or the mother or they be leaving it with the grannies, so a lot of absent fathers. I also had a lot of incidents where children would ask their mothers who the father is. And that's also sensitive because sometimes fathers are married. Sometimes the fathers are from the white community. So nowadays we find, especially at a high school where they ask the children who the father is, they will name some of the fathers. I'm the child of this and this so. They know who the father is. I sometimes, if I see the families having difficulty in the colored community and I know if it is a farmer because they have to name the fathers when they're baptized, then I will speak up and drive past the farm and say your family in the township is having difficulty, sort it out, please. In a sense, some of the fathers are involved but from the sideline. You can think for yourself when you have two families growing how difficult it is.

... Yeah, but also in the present, you know, sometimes I think the fathers' wives don't know about the second family. Would they know or they don't want to know?" (Stakeholder – pastor – P7).

From the above excerpt, it is evident that having children out of wedlock or divorce can negatively affect how fathers play their roles. Some fathers are not awarded the opportunity to bond or be involved because their current family setup does not allow it. They get sidelined by the mothers of their children due to unresolved personal issues. Furthermore, some fathers do not disclose the children they had out of wedlock, and it makes it even harder to support them financially with the fear of being questioned by their current wives.

The results also indicate that the absence of fathers in their children's lives has led to moral decay in communities, as children no longer have respect in the community. Some of it is related to these fathers publicly drinking, thereby not instilling good social values in their children. This stakeholder expounds on that:

"The majority is not 100% involve[d] with their kids; unfortunately, this makes the point where boys are not 100% controlled from [the] mom's side, because they see their dads are somewhere in the shebeen so then they don't have any respect anymore" (Stakeholder – secretary – P3).

Absenteeism is also caused by imprisonment. One of the participants mentioned that the father of her child was incarcerated and had not seen his child in a long time. This is echoed below:

"[How often does the father see the child?] The father? The father was then in jail when ... during the time I was pregnant. Till how many years ... He's seen his child very little" (Parent – P3).

As indicated above, children who have incarcerated parents are also denied the opportunity of knowing their fathers. This may harm the children's behavior, as they are at risk of ending up in the same situation because of the lack of parental supervision and guidance. Also, they may emulate the destructive behaviors they observe in their communities and find it a challenge to show respect to others as they lack guidance. Some fathers reportedly work away from home on farms and can only be with their families

on weekends. One stakeholder, who is a policeman, had this to say:

“They do try to get along with the fathers. But mostly it’s men that’s working and the jobs here for most people that are from this small community they work for the farms. So, during the week they will be at the farms, and then on weekends they come home, and so it’s manageable, I think it’s okay ... I won’t say they do, because they don’t, because they are not there. Some are not here, some have passed on, but they try. They do try. As the fathers be part of their children’s lives” (Stakeholder – policeman – P1).

The statement above explains that even though some fathers want to be a part of their children’s lives, their circumstances, such as working far from home, do not allow them sufficient time to groom their children or to notice any changes in their behavior. Such situations deprive children of the opportunity to be raised by both parents who play different roles in their lives. On the other hand, the fathers have no choice but to go and fend for their families.

One stakeholder, who is a social worker, asserts that it is mostly the mothers who play a parental role to their children when they separate from their fathers. Fathers are portrayed as irresponsible, as they leave the parental roles up to the mothers. One stakeholder articulated this as follows:

“the father is not ... does not participate in the upbringing of the child. It’s just the woman at her house, or at her mother’s house just getting kids whilst the father is not involved in the upbringing of the child. Yeah. Most they do not work. [Do they stay with their parents?] Yes. Most of them do stay with their parents. I have not dealt with the white community that much. As far as I’m concerned, there is this issue of cohabiting. They just live with their boyfriends without marriage ... [Do they get married?] Not often. You get people who have been staying together for 22 years, yet they are not married, they are just cohabiting. I think maybe it has to do with the formality of the whole thing. They don’t want to be tied to the other person. They don’t want that” (Stakeholder – social worker – P1).

This study highlights that most members of the community are from broken homes or cohabiting relationships. Either they are avoiding commitment, or

they would prefer to have children with different partners. Marriage is not a priority to them. Therefore, due to this absenteeism of fathers and broken homes, the young community members lack guidance on principles and good social values.

“I would say they are adhering to their role as a father with the families I’ve seen, but also other families that I have also seen there is a lot of absent fathers. I would say from what I seen again it’s overall [race groups]” (Stakeholder – social worker – P2).

Though most of the data highlights that there are a lot of absent fathers in the community, there are some cases of present and responsible fathers. These fathers are concerned about their children’s welfare, and they partake in all activities that involve their children’s welfare.

Sub-theme 2: Unemployment limiting financial provision

The second sub-theme that emerged from the data was unemployment and financial challenges resulting in family separation. Sometimes it can be attributed to the father having to leave for work and stay in a different place. These fathers are dedicated to working for their families, while others spend their time searching for a job with no success.

“I [as a father] want to own my own house and [to] earn an income. I just want to secure a future for my child ... [Do you think other fathers want the same?] I think so. We fathers, we don’t say it, but we still have it in our hearts – we want to work for our children, we want to work for our parents ... [Are fathers not there for their children?] Yes, some of them are there. Some of them don’t care so the sons won’t go back there if they don’t care” (Parent – unemployed – P11).

“... their [her children’s] biological father died about two years ago and he didn’t make provisions in his estate” (Parent – attorney – P2).

The need for fathers to provide for their families is important. However, the results also show that some fathers leave nothing for their children after death. This might be due to unemployment which leads to chronic poverty.

Sub-theme 3: Need for fathers’ financial provision

The third sub-theme that emerged from the data is that there is a need for financial provision by the fathers. One of the stakeholders, who is a school principal, asserts that some parents are not willing to take jobs that are away from home; hence, they loiter around with nothing to offer their children. The stakeholder further remarked that these parents should at least try to be active in their children's schoolwork. This was expressed as follows:

“Fathers is a total, total absence. Absence figure in the lives of that children ... [why?] [Sighs] ... That one. Maybe it's a sense of guilt that they can't provide because of the unemployment rate, they are sitting around, not willing to come out of Philppolis and work away from home. So, they are just loitering around in the township. So guilt is one of those things; they can't provide in material things; money wise; and just support their kids in their schoolwork, coming to school, have a conversation here at school, come and enquire about the performance about the kids and things like that. So, they are totally, totally uninvolved” (Stakeholder – principal – P10).

From the explanation above, it has been observed that poverty might lead fathers to shun responsibilities that do not necessarily need finances to support their children. As a result, this may lead to children performing poorly at school or in life. This further supports the notion that most of these poor communities do not show growth, because there is no support from fathers who are supposed to be pillars for their children and positively guide them throughout their lives.

The study also revealed that some fathers do not support their children financially because they rely on government grants.

“Some fathers they are not doing it [supporting] because they know there is a grant” (Stakeholder – health worker – P9).

Even though there is an employment challenge, fathers need to find other means of providing for their families. However, some fathers now neglect their duty to provide for their children because of the monthly grant, which is probably not enough. Another stakeholder supports this by saying:

“It's mostly mothers and their children. The fathers are not present. Maybe it is this thing of a man just giving a woman a child and then he leaves, so that this woman can be on grant. I

have seen from my experience; they just get kids so that they can be on a grant. So, they don't really get married per se, they just get boyfriends" (Stakeholder – social worker – P1).

These results reveal that some women have children so that they can receive some form of cushioning from the government. As a result, the fathers do not bother taking on any financial role. This also influences the extended family, as they will have an extra burden of taking care of more children from one source of income or none at all. This further creates a community that is impoverished and has nothing much to offer future generations.

Sub-theme 4: Role modelling/motivation

The results of this study gave rise to a fourth sub-theme which revealed that there is a need for motivation from fathers in these communities. The principal asserts that it is mostly the mothers who are proactive in motivating their children at school and not so much the fathers. The excerpt below aptly captures the principal's sentiments in this regard:

"When you call the parent or the parents to come [to school], there is a ... I don't always want to say there is a problem, but even when the child has done good, to bring in the parent just to praise them or tell about the good performance of the learner or good conduct and it is always the mother that is coming to the school" (Stakeholder – principal – P10).

Both parents need to show interest in their children's activities. They act as role models, thereby setting good standards in their families and communities. The information above highlights the importance of motivating children especially when it comes from both parents. If a learner conducts themselves badly or well, the praise from their parents would motivate them to do better and be exemplary to other children in the community.

The data also reveals that generational poverty will lead to inherited debts where older children have to take care of their siblings when they start working. The stakeholder who is a pastor explains it below:

"So one of the farmers sons went off to university, three of them eventually ended up lawyers and running law firms currently. One actually went off to study agriculture. So he will be coming back but coming back doesn't mean I will inherit the farm

coming back means I'm going to work for the next 30 years to pay out my few brothers. Who also have claim on the farm, it's actually only if you look at the economics of farmers, it is only when you turn around about 50 that you have paid out all the siblings then you make money for yourself. So it is a difficult process. So, all the farmers would have two or three children the boys will come back" (Stakeholder – pastor – P7).

From the above views, poverty can be inherited and will affect future generations to come. Therefore, parents need to create wealth for their children to break the cycle of poverty in their families and the community at large.

Discussion

Evidence from this study points out that there is a need for fathers to play a role in their children's lives to groom them to be better members of the community. Unemployment was found to be one of the challenges that hinder a father's financial provision for his children. Some fathers, due to unemployment, do not stay with their children because they have no means to care for them. Similar findings were found in a study by Makhanya and Matthias (2018) where they discovered that all the participants who were not staying with their children were unemployed. However, in another study done in a low-income area of South Africa by Madhavan et al. (2014), the findings showed that regardless of pervasive unemployment, a significant proportion of children received either continuous or interrupted support, even though there were variations across age groups. This illustrates that fathers can still provide for their children even if they are not formally employed. Lack of jobs in the local market forces fathers to leave their families in pursuit of better life opportunities (Wilson, 2006), and as a result, children are deprived of the chance to be nurtured by both parents. The absence of fathers owing to unemployment further impedes direct communication with their children, which in turn disrupts family structures that have been established.

The study shows that some fathers leave their homes in search of employment while others return on weekends to check on their families; however, not all have the privilege of making weekly visits. This distance might result in families drifting apart, and fathers might lose touch with their children's day-to-day activities. Another factor related to distance discovered in one study is that fathers could not afford to visit their children

because the mothers moved to distant locations after separation, making it harder for them to visit their families (Makhanya & Matthias 2018). This inhibits the communication and access of fathers to their children.

South Africa still faces the challenge of absent fathers in a child's life, and this is often related to family dysfunction and leads to other social problems (Koketso et al., 2019). While a father's presence in a child's life may not be a guarantee for positive outcomes, studies have revealed that there is an association between a father's absence and negative outcomes for children and women. In the current study, most fathers are shown to be completely absent from their children's lives. A father's absence creates a gap in meeting a child's basic needs and leaves a burden on the carer who might not have any other source of assistance. One study by Tau (2020) revealed that a father's absenteeism in a child's life leads to stress, feelings of rejection, and worthlessness, which are a result of thinking that they are not "good enough." As such, these children grow up with fears of rejection and confusion that disable them from being better members of society. Such feelings might also lead to poor school performance, anger, violence, bullying, promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, suicidal thoughts, and winding up in prison, amongst many other factors (All Answers Ltd, 2018; Koketso et al., 2019; Madhavan et al., 2014; McLanahan et al., 2013).

The motivation of children by their fathers has been shown to have a great impact on a child's performance at school. Studies point to the essence of parental or caregiver involvement in the children's success at school, and these include partaking in school tasks, helping with homework, reading stories, and attending school events (Lynch, 2019). The results of this study show that most fathers are not involved in their children's education, and it is the mothers who normally attend school-related activities and events. Ntekane (2018) avows that children who have parents involved in their education have better grades, good social skills, and demonstrate improved behavior. Education is an important institution that plays a part in social cohesion through the provision of knowledge and skills, which in turn facilitates social participation Kantzara (2016), thereby functioning as a fundamental stage of community development.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Fathers play a fundamental role in social cohesion by guiding and instilling values in their children, which make them better members of society. The current study revealed that due to unemployment and, consequently,

poverty, fathers are unable to uphold their parental duties, which affects the process of social cohesion. This study also concludes that a father's absenteeism due to various factors harms the child, family, and community. It further affects behavioral outcomes, as there will be a lack of moral guidance in children, and as such, many of these children from resource-constrained settings end up in prison or using illegal drugs. This leads to community decay, as there is less development and more crime and other undesirable outcomes. Most of these effects are psychological with long-term outcomes, which will affect children as individuals and as members of the community.

This study, therefore, recommends that:

- There should be support groups in these communities for fathers to explore the significance of fatherhood, and to also understand what their roles are as fathers, issues of masculinity, and even the utilization of contraceptives.
- There should be increased access to counselling services where fathers bring their families to talk about their way of life and how it can be improved.
- The government should create awareness of parental rights, which include issues of custody, financial support, visitation rights, and parental agreements. The available services should not be used to discriminate against any party but should address and represent all parties in a way that will favor the wellness of the children.
- The narratives around the importance of fathers in families must change. Fliers and brochures should be circulated in schools, clinics, hospitals, police stations, restaurants, community halls, and other public places to change the mindset of community members on the vital need for fathers' involvement in their children's lives. The general negative trend of fatherhood in families should be frowned upon by society.

To conclude, it is noted that there is a need for fathers to play a role in social cohesion, as they are an important aspect of their children's development and future outcomes.

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