PERCEPTIONS OF THE PHENOMENON 'ABSENT FATHERS' WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MPHANAMA COMMUNITY

by

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DECLARATION

I, Sekgale Israel Lehlokwe, declare that **PERCEPTIONS OF THE PHENOMENON 'ABSENT FATHERS' WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MPHANAMA COMMUNITY** is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

_____   _____

Sekgale Israel Lehlokwe   Date

DEDICATIONS

▪ I would like to dedicate this research to my brave and loving mother Mrs. Sekgale Ngwanamapou Elizabeth who has been always there for me since I started in this study. And my father Mr. Sekgale Mojakgomo Joseph who have always believing in me beyond all thoughts.

▪ I would also want to pay a special thanks to my aunt Mapitsing Makabee Mogoshadi who always believes in me and my dear sisters Glenda and Kgaogelo and my brother Kenneth who have been so supportive to me throughout my study. Indeed, everything is possible with God.

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ABSTRACT

The overall aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of the phenomenon 'Absent Fathers' in Mphanama Community. The objectives of the study were to assess the effects of culture and beliefs on the domination of parenting, to debunk the myth that marital status of parents determines the involvement of fathers in their children's upbringing and to establish who is seen as having the majority power over the child in Northern Sotho culture as compared to other cultures.

This study used qualitative approach because the researcher wanted to explore and understand the phenomenon of Absent Fathers. The researcher focused on feelings, behaviour, descriptions and words from the participants. The other reason for using this approach was to find reality about perceptions of the phenomenon absent fathers and explore their primary interpretation of their situation than that of the researcher. The researcher used exploratory research design. The data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interview was collected from twenty (20) single mothers who are bona fide members of Mphanama and have not just visited the community at the time of the study. The sample was inclusive to single mothers who are bona fide members of Mphanama and have not just visited the community at the time of the study. Their marital statuses were not considered upon selection, so this may be mothers who were never married, married or even divorced women. The participants were from different ages as insight from all age cohorts will be highly valuable. The researcher underpinned the study from the feminist movement is vast in orientation and there is no singular prescription of what the feminist theory constitutes. It is however, stated that within the feminism there is a high degree of consensus that the distinct underlying principle is the awareness of gender and the politics of gender within society. The researcher used thematic data analysis. The researcher followed the steps of thematic data analysis which are transcription of data, checking and editing, Analysing and interpretation, and Generalization.

This study is relevant to Social Work Profession and the Department of Social Development as it will contribute positively in delivering services to the clients served. The issue of absent fathers often leads to family dysfunction and leads to other social problems, this is frequently visible in rural families of low-economic-class where the father is usually seen as the sole provider for the family.

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

According to Kelly (2013) despite the effort to increase and expand the scholarly investigations of fatherhood, the topic still remains complex and elusive. This is partly because fatherhood is not a fixed concept. The ever-changing role of fathers has been a particular challenge for scholars and researchers who attempt to track these shifts and changes whilst trying to create an accurate understanding of fatherhood. While biology defines the role men play in the reproduction of a child, the role of the man as a father changes with cultural, historical and socio-economic conditions. This is also supported by Morman and Floyd (2006) as cited in Kelly (2013) who argues that the way in which men enact the role of fatherhood is significantly influenced by a host of factors. One approach to creating a sense of meaning and understanding of fathers is to assess the social, economic and cultural conditions influencing fatherhood as a shifting construct over time.

According to Richter and Morrell (2006) the experience of South African fathers has been strongly influenced by the history of the country. Dating as far back as the period of colonization up until the Apartheid era, many black fathers were separated from their children due to migrant labour practices. Since the discovery of gold and diamonds during the 1800s and then the Group Areas Act during Apartheid, migrant labour in South Africa became an integral part of many Black South African men's lives, thus influencing their experiences of fatherhood. Men worked in distant places far from home and were often only allowed annual visits to return home to their families, thus the experience of fatherhood was limited and constrained at the time. Many Black families growing up during Apartheid grew up without a father's presence in their lives, as a consequence of migrant labour but also as a consequence of the turbulent political situation for Black South Africans at the time. The Apartheid regime has left a "historical legacy of racial emasculation" and thus it is an important factor when thinking about

fathers and fatherhood today. However, fatherhood patterns are changing since South Africa became a democratic country in 1994. The social and historical climate of South Africa post 1994 has become another factor influencing patterns of fatherhood among Black South African fathers.

The researcher is of the view that there are a number of factors influencing how fatherhood is perceived by different communities in South Africa, culture being one of the most influential element in the picture hence it is held by a large number of people and not just mere individuals. The flaws that come with the result of conforming to such cultural traits does not promote the absence of fathers in their lives in its totality and thus does not leave culture being such a bad thing to conform to. This is supported by Lesejane (2006) who argues that although African culture influences the experience and meaning of fatherhood for Black South African fathers, this does not necessarily imply that culture is a negative influence and perhaps the morals and values of African culture denoting fatherhood should be revisited.

In the study of Kelly (2013) he contend that most men emphasize employment as being central to the understanding and practice of fatherhood. This might be true because most men also value their economic contribution to their children's lives more than the social involvement and other possible means of support. It is also supported by Kelly (2013) that South Africa's increasing rate of unemployment, especially among Black male South Africans, limits the ability for fathers to provide financially for their family and children. According to African tradition "a man is a man because he can provide for his family, however without a job and with high rates of poverty in South Africa, many African men struggle to assert themselves as fathers. According to Rabe (2006) there is a serious need for an alternative understanding of manhood and responsible fatherhood. Although unemployed fathers cannot financially provide for their families they can still assert and embrace their roles as fathers through other avenues. This can also be applicable to make sure that most children see more of their fathers other than the traditional role of financially supporting the child only and seeing as less other means of support.

This research was intended to focus on debunking more on the phenomenon of absent fathers within the context of Mphanama community. This will include a brought inspection on issues of cultural believes around the phenomenon, correlation between marital status and fathering, and also more the South African welfare system's involvement in dealing with the phenomenon. The researcher is of the view that absent fathers implies not being having permanent contact with your father in one's life, as this might be in a form of absent- deceased, absent- never known/no contact, absent-occasional contact, as well absent- regular contact.

The study will further focus on reconnoitering the issues related to this phenomenon of absent fathers as it can be a cause to more of the social problems in families other than just being a mere personal problem to the affected mothers and their children who go through tragedy of growing up without enjoying the benefits of having a father. The envisaged study will be conducted in Limpopo Province, around the Fetakgomo Sub-District, at Mphanama community.

1.2 Operational Definition of Key Terms

- **Perceptions**-

A social work dictionary by Garthwait (2012) defines a perception as a professional view or lens used intentionally to help a social worker examine and focus on a particular realm of social functioning, necessary to complete a thorough assessment. In the context of this study, perceptions refer to the insight and views of the community members of Mphanama on the issues around absent fathers.

- **Absent fatherhood**-

Kelly (2013) expresses that absent fathers, therefore, may fall into different categories, each with different implications for paternal involvement. Paternal absence does not necessarily mean that fathers have no contact with their children. In the context of this research absent fathers are the biological fathers who are not fully present or involved

in the child's life be it because he is deceased, never known/no contact, occasional contact, or even absent-regular contact. Absent fathers in this context mean fathers who are not permanently present in the children's life on daily basis.

- ▪ **Community**-

Weyers, (2011) define community as a social system which originates when a population of individuals (social dimension), localized in a specific geographic area (spatial dimension), establishes and utilizes structures and relationships to deal with impediments (functional dimension) and at the same time develops a sense of communal thinking, identity and activities (cultural-symbolic dimension). For the purpose of this study, these are the people residing at Mphanama area, be single mothers, area social workers, men and the elderly citizens.

1.3 Motivation of the Study

The research problem of this study stems from the practical observation by the researcher during his fourth level of practical placement. The placement was in one of the Department of Social Development offices in the Fetakgomo Sub-District, viz., the Sekhukhune District in Limpopo Province. The researcher observed that there was a challenge of fathers' absenteeism in children's lives. This was noticeable when the grand mothers or other relatives to the child come to the social workers' office to apply for foster care placement after the child's mother's death. The habitual account when enquiries are made on the family regarding the reported child's father is usually "father unknown".

A National Family Policy drafted by Department of Social Development (2006) and circulated for discussion has been criticized, amongst others, for the ways in which it deals with men and fatherhood. Hochfeld (2007) argues that the subject of fathers is not given serious attention in the draft policy beyond noting the general trend of father absence and the threat men pose for women and children as a result of violence. This shows a great deal of a need for more research on the phenomenon of absent fathers.

The researcher is interested in exploring the insights of the phenomenon 'Absent Fathers' within the context of Mphanama community.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The issue of absent fathers is often related to family dysfunction and leads to other social problems. This is frequently visible in rural families of low-economic-class where the father figure is usually seen as the sole provider for the family. This scrutiny is also supported by the study conducted by Kelly (2013) who argues that most men emphasize employment as being central to the understanding and practice of fatherhood. He continues to allude that according to African tradition "a man is a man because he can provide for his family", however without a job and with high rates of poverty in South Africa, many African men struggle to assert themselves as fathers simply because they cannot be able to support their children financially. This shows that there is a need for an alternative understanding of manhood and responsible fatherhood.

Moreover, upon the researcher's observation around the subject of fatherhood in general, he is of the view that the absence of a father in the child's life can have some negative effects on the child's life and the family in question at large. Ramphele (2002) supported this observation that the mistrust between parent and child can further be exacerbated if the unknown parent's identity is revealed by an indirect source. Manyatshe (2012) also concurred with the above research that the non-disclosure can result in negative dynamics within the family.

One other factor that came to the researcher's realization is that children often get curious in knowing who their fathers are, more especially when they reach the adolescent stage where everyone tends to start making sense of their identities. Manyatshe (2012) supports this observation that absent and unknown biological fathers have reported that affected adolescents and youth were apprehensive about asking the mothers and caregivers about their fathers. Kelly (2013) coincided with the researcher in the paper about individuals presenting themselves for therapy due to not knowing

their biological fathers and he argues that the child's expressed interest in their biological parents can be interpreted by both the parents and child as an assault on the familial allegiance, thus children often suppress their desire to ask their caregivers about their true fathers. This shows a great concern from the children in knowing their biological fathers.

The researcher is of the view that the phenomenon of absent fathers still needs to be studies intensely as not much work have been done on the subject thus far. This view is supported by Kelly (2013) that there appears to be a negative perception in the media and research literature about the commitment and role of South African fathers.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The epistemological assumptions of this study are broadly set within the constructionism framework which argues that a critical stance needs to be observed against views about the world that are taken for granted. As an epistemology, constructionism is embodied in many theoretical perspectives and provides the philosophical grounding for the knowledge generated (Crotty, 1998). Gergen (1985) states that constructionism is concerned with socially, culturally, and historically situated description or constructions of the world, which are sustained through social actions and language. At times, these actions are privileged at the expense of excluding others, and constructionism fosters a critical stance against such modes of knowledge generation.

1.5.1 Feminist theory

The feminist movement is vast in orientation and there is no singular prescription of what the feminist theory constitutes. It is however, stated that within the feminism there is a high degree of consensus that the distinct underlying principle is the awareness of gender and the politics of gender within society (Brayton, 1997). The essential aim of feminist theory as described by Flax (1987) is to analyse gender relations, how they are structured and experienced and more importantly how they are viewed. It highlights the constructed nature of gender (Sarantakos, 2004), and that while culturally agreed on biological characteristics might assign males and females to the category of men or

women, it is not synonymous with gender (Burr, 1998). The notion of gender encompasses socially constructed roles, responsibilities, identities and expectations assigned differently to men and women (Johnson, 1988) and gender is seen as a significant feature of social interactions. The notion of gender can be used as an analytic tool to scrutinize phenomena at the societal level. This value is shared by sociologist, Millen (1997), who advocates for all research to take into consideration an unequal society and disproportionate gender relations in order to ensure that androcentric norms are not incorporated into their findings.

It can be said that the gendered role of fathering would affect how fathers relate to their children (Datta, 2007), and to that effect, what and how fathers relate and communicate with their children. A gender analysis would thus seek to see gender hierarchies as entangled in social systems, and that other societal classification systems such as socioeconomic positioning, cultural practices and race are also embedded in societal structures (Lorber, 2000). It is added that the intersectional nature of societal structural arrangements ranks individuals and groups into systems of "power and powerlessness, privilege and disadvantage, normality and otherness."; and these structures are in turn sustained and constructed in everyday interactions and in cultural norms as well as being further legitimized in social institutions and legislation (Lorber, 2000).

By bringing forth a gender structure framework a more realistic description of the lives of women, men and children can be provided by moving beyond stereotypical constructions of people's lives (Gerson, 2004). According to Lay and Daley (2008), by viewing individuals in their social, political, economic, ethnic, and cultural contexts, these factors and how they overlap to produce the potential for disparities that are rooted in gendered relationships can be observed. A gendered framework would acknowledge the link between individuals' private choices and broader institutions and how at times women's choices are constrained by structural domains of which they have limited control over. Even though father absence is experienced in an intimate setting, gender inequalities are embedded in work and family institutions and shape both personal and social problems, thus a gender lens directs attention to the societal

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structural arrangement that organizes women and men's options differently and the unequal ways that perpetuate inequality (Gerson, 2004).

The feminist theory was applied in this research in order to debunk this phenomenon 'absent fathers' without ignoring the fact that when these fathers are absent, there are some people who have to carry the burden, usually the single mothers in most cases or the maternal families if the father is deceased.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

1.6.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of the phenomenon 'Absent Fathers' in Mphanama Community.

1.6.2 Objectives of the study

- To assess the effects of culture and beliefs on the domination of parenting.
- To debunk the myth that marital status of parents determines the involvement of fathers in their children's upbringing.
- To establish who is seen as having the majority power over the child in Northern Sotho culture as compared to other cultures.

1.7 Research Methodology

For the purpose of this research, research methodology includes research design, population, sampling method, data collection method and data analysis.

1.7.1 Research Approach

This study used qualitative approach because the researcher wanted to explore and understand the phenomenon of Absent Fathers. Robert (2011) defines qualitative approach as an approach that provides a detailed narrative descriptions and explanations of phenomena investigated, with lesser emphasis given to numerical quantifications; methods used to collect qualitative data include ethnographic practices such as observing and interviewing. The researcher focused on feelings, behaviour,

descriptions and words from the participants. The other reason for using this approach was to find reality about perceptions of the phenomenon absent fathers and explore their primary interpretation of their situation than that of the researcher. Qualitative approach empirical and systematic rely on careful documentations and analysis grounded in the data. It is descriptive. Qualitative approach allowed the researcher to examine the complex phenomena without relying on structured data collection. Qualitative approach has immediate benefits for participants, it makes stakeholders feel more engaged and appreciated. Its limitations, are time and labour intensive in their implementations and are less useful when the emphasis is on reporting program outcomes with precision and exactitude (Royse, Thyer & Padgett, 2010).

1.7.2 Research Design

The research project may be classified according to its primary objectives. The primary objective of this study was to explore the perceptions of the phenomenon absent fathers. According to Babbie (2011), exploratory studies are most typically done for three purposes: (1) to satisfy the researchers' curiosity and desire for better understanding, (2) to test a feasibility of understanding a more expensive study, and (3) to develop the method to be employed in any subsequent study. So in this study, the researcher wanted to understand better the perceptions of the phenomenon absent fathers in its broad context, be it in relation with elements like culture, marital status and majority power amongst child's parents.

1.7.3 Population

Study population is a group of individuals to which can be legitimately apply conclusion. It is a subset of target population that can be studied (Kazerooni, 2001). The population of this study were twenty (20) single mothers who are bona fide members of Mphanama. The researcher considered to study this population irrespective of age or race. The reason being that the researcher believes that every person's insight in this regard can be of paramount importance despite different ages or even race.

1.7.4 Sampling

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used non-probability sampling particularly purposive sampling. According to Bless, Smith and Sithole (2013) purposive/judgment sampling is based on the judgment of a researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample. A sample is chosen on the basis of what the researcher considers to be typical units that are judged to be the most common in the population under investigation. Purposive sampling is a technique that by definition has characteristics that a researcher is particularly interested in (Royse, Thyer & Padgett, 2010). Purposive sampling, as form of non-probability sampling, enabled the researcher to choose the participants according to the goals of the research (Morgan, 1998). In this study participants were selected based on their knowledge or because they had something unique, in this case being single mothers.

1.7.5 Data collection techniques

The study used primary and secondary data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews and documentation. Interviews provide a rich stream of data that can be used to build up an understanding of why things happen in the way they do (Moore, 2006). Interviews allowed participants to share their own understanding and the researcher used audio recording and field notes in collecting data. Interviews also allowed the researcher to be able to understand participant's emotions, views and beliefs.

The researcher was guided by interview schedule (see Annexure B) when collecting data and used open-ended question. The researcher asked the same questions to different participants. This helped to accommodate every participant since some users are illiterate and could not read the researcher's interview schedule. Questions that were not well understood by respondents were clarified in participants' language.

1.7.6 Data analysis

The researcher used thematic data analysis. According to Mills, Durepo and Wiebe (2010) coding is a basic analytic strategy used in thematic analysis and it is defined as a process of closely inspecting text to look for recurrent themes, topics, or relationships,

and marking passages with a code or label to categorize them for later retrieval and theory-building. There are steps to be followed when analysing data using themes. The following steps were followed as outlined by Manyatshe (2012):

- Transcription of data

The researcher transcribe data from tape onto paper thematically. The manuscripts were edited in order to eliminate typing errors and contradictions. Tape recorders were kept in a safe place and locked. Only the researcher and his supervisor had an access to the tape recorders for verification of data.

- Checking and editing

The researcher scrutinised and edited transcripts. The researcher also related parts of the data in an attempt to prepare them for further analysis.

- Analysing and interpretation

This step entails data reduction and analysis. The researcher developed categories of the data. Codes and categories were used as tools of analysing data.

- Generalization

The researcher identified the similarities and differences and developed the typologies of data.

1.7.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, according to Botma, Greef, Mulaudzi and Wright (2010) has four epistemological standards attached to it, namely truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality.

Epistemological standards	Strategies	Application
Truth Value	Credibility	Credibility refers to internal validity. The researcher must have confidence in the truth of the findings with regard to the participants as well as the context in which the research was undertaken. For purpose of this study the researcher ensured credibility through prolonged engagement, member checking and peer examination (Botma *et al.,* 2010 & Shenton, 2004). One of the strategies which was used was completion of consent forms and which clearly indicated that they participate voluntarily. This ensured that those who participate be free and able to discuss real issues they are face. Once they were able to participate freely and communicating their real experiences the resultant research outcome were believable and credible.
Consistency	Dependability	Dependability refers to the replication of the study done in the same context; making use of the same methods and with the same participants, and in such conditions the findings should stay consistent. To enable dependability, the researcher included the following: o Dependable audit: the researcher provided a detailed account on how data was collected. o Description of the methodology: The researcher included in the research design, that is what was planned and executed during the study. o The researcher ensured that data is correctly

		coded.
		• Peer examination of the study were done (Botma *et al.,* 2010 & Shenton, 2004).
Applicability	Transferability	Transferability is determined by the degree to which findings can be generalized to the larger population. The researcher improved transferability by conducting the study until it reached saturation (Botma *et al.,* 2010 & Shenton, 2004).
Neutrality	Conformability	Conformability entails the research process and results are free from prejudice. The researcher ensured that the study's results were objective and not based upon biases, motives and perspectives of the researcher. Conformability was demonstrated by making field notes available for auditing (Botma *et al.,* 2010 & Shenton, 2004). This ensured that the final outcomes of the study were authentic and validated by other researchers as well.

Table 1: Standards, strategies and applied criteria to ensure trustworthiness

1.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a set of principles often defined as code that act as a guide to conduct. This set of principles provides framework for the acting (Lawton, 1998). According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005), ethical behavior is important in research, as in any other field of human activity. The principles underlying research ethics are universal and concern issues such as honesty and respect for the rights of individuals. Ethical considerations come into play at three stages of a research project, namely:

- When participants are recruited;
- During the intervention and/or he measurement procedure to which they are subjected; and

- In the releasing of the results obtained.

- **Permission to conduct the study**

The researcher received ethical approval from the Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee prior data collection. The participants were made aware that, firstly, the research will not harm them as research subject and, secondly, that they volunteer to partake in this study, based on informed consent.

- **Informed consent**

The researcher distributed the informed consent forms to the participants before collecting data which provided them with information about the purpose of the study, how data will be used, and what participation will require of them, the subjects likely to be covered and how much time is required.

The researcher ensured that the participants understand that participation is voluntary - an issue that may require particular emphasis. This cleared the feelings of obligation or gratitude to participants.

- **Anonymity**

The semi-structured interview schedule (see Annexure B) was used by the researcher and no names or identification were required. As a result, chances were high better that participants had participated in the face-to-face with honesty.

- **Involvement of the researcher**

The researcher guarded against manipulating respondents or treating them as objects or mere numbers rather than individual human beings. The researcher did not use any technique or tactics that are unethical in research to collect data.

- **Confidentiality**

The researcher kept all information collected in the study strictly confidential. Participants were not expected to provide their name, surname and identity number to

ensure confidentiality. If any publication results from this research, participants were notified that they will not be identified either by name, surname or identity and they are allowed to view the outcome results.

- **Harm to the participants**

Monette et al. (1994) indicate that people should never be exposed to situations that might cause serious or lasting harm. Harm to subjects can be physical or emotional, and emotional harm to participants is often more difficult to predict and to determine than physical discomfort (Motepe, 2006). The researcher ensured that the participants were not exposed to any harm. Those who were harmed were referred to social workers and psychologists for professional intervention.

1.9 Significance of the Proposed Research

This study is relevant to Social Work Profession and the Department of Social Development as it will contribute positively in delivering services to the clients served. The issue of absent fathers often leads to family dysfunction and leads to other social problems, this is frequently visible in rural families of low-economic-class where the father is usually seen as the sole provider for the family.

Communities struggle with many social problems and social needs; sometimes it is difficult to know which one of the problems is the most important and which one should be at the top list of priorities (Royse, Thyer & Padgett, 2010). Explorative study help debunk new information that might be contributing to some of the social problems prevailing in a community. The study is important and we find it necessary to explore the perceptions on the phenomenon of absent fathers. It is important to the researcher and the participants, single mothers, area social workers, elderly citizens and men. With positive results of exploration that can be used to develop effective policies and programs seeking guidance as to what type of interventions work best. When improving programs and interventions in a way of making them efficient and effective, all those who are involved or touched by the effects of the phenomenon would be affected. The proposed study is intended to understand better the phenomenon of absent fathers and

thus change or reduce the negative effects that might be prevailing amongst families and the people involved.

1.10 Conclusion

This research is leveling at debunking around the phenomenon of Absent-Fathers as it remains a challenging topic in our communities and little is being done around the issue, thus making it tough for those who find themselves being victims of the concern. This chapter lays out the procedure and methods of how the researcher will go about reaching the set objectives of this research.

CHAPTER 2

FUNDAMENTALS ON THE PHENOMENON - ABSENT FATHERS

2.1 Introduction

This study sought to gather/debunk the perceptions of the phenomenon absent fathers within the context of Mphanama Community. The researcher started by reviewing literature that is relevant to the study. Literature in a research study accomplishes several purposes: it shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported, it relates to a study to the larger, on-going dialogue in the literature about a topic, filling in the gaps and extending prior studies, it provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study, as well as a benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings. In this chapter the researcher is going to review different sources of literature relating to the research topic, problem statement and research objectives of the study being conducted. The literature to be reviewed will be a supporting data to the relevance of the study and will thus give shed light as to what the study is all about and all the issues relating to the topic.

According to Kelly (2013) fathering is an art, a skill and an integral part of life to which investigators of the human condition have long paid scant attention. In the last few decades, increasing interest in the study of fatherhood has produced an array of diverse insights into the meanings and understanding of fatherhood. Current research paints a multidimensional picture of fatherhood and offers a wide variety of different perspectives and approaches to the subject. Fatherhood can be understood as a biological, social and cultural role (Cabrera, Tamis-Lemonda, Bradley, Hofferth & Lamb, 2000).

Despite the effort to increase and expand the scholarly investigations of fatherhood, the topic still remains indefinable and complex. This is partly because fatherhood is not a fixed impression by itself. The ever-changing role of fathers has been a particular

challenge for scholars and researchers who attempt to track these shifts and changes whilst trying to create an accurate understanding of fatherhood. While biology defines the role men play in the reproduction of a child, the role of the man as a father changes with cultural, historical and socio-economic conditions (Ball & Wahedi, 2010).

It is understood that fatherhood is molded by a host of diverging influences, those including history, culture, society, economics, biology, gender, class and race. Fatherhood cannot be studied independently from the influences that shape and give meaning to it. The historical and cultural ideologies that influence the roles of fatherhood undeniably shape the quality of the father-child relationship, the amount of time fathers spend with their children and the activities they share (Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2010). However, Dick (2011) alluded that there is no comprehensive theory that takes into account the complexity and changing nature of fatherhood, noting both internal and external influences that characterize fatherhood.

The complexity of fatherhood has also been studied in the South African context. Perhaps given the diversity of South African culture and society, understanding fatherhood is met with many difficulties. To fully appreciate the specific context in which fatherhood has been experienced in South Africa, one needs to examine the sociological and historical determinants of fatherhood in the country (Richter & Morrell, 2006). Over the past 150 years Black South African families have been shaped and reshaped by colonization, removal and resettlement, racial segregation, oppression and racial emasculation (Townsends, Madvan & Garey, 2006). In the post-apartheid era Black South African fathers remain influenced by contemporary social and cultural factors. Despite the positive changes associated with living in a democratic country, Black South African fathers currently face high levels of unemployment and changing constructs of masculinity whilst negotiating traditional cultural ideals with the pressures placed by society on Western ideals of fatherhood. In the twenty-first century, social changes are forcing adjustments in both popular and scholarly conceptualizations of fathers (Cabrera et al., 2006).

There appears to be a negative perception in the media and research literature about the commitment and role of South African fathers. Most South African men do not seem especially interested in the children of their own. They seldom attend the births of their own, they don't acknowledge that their children are their own, and they frequently fail to participate in their children's lives (Richter & Morrell, 2006). This dominant view runs the risk of ignoring the subtleties of fatherhood that exist in the country today. Understanding the experience and meaning of fatherhood in South Africa may encourage fathers to become more involved in their children's lives and foster a more positive image of fathers (Hinckley, Ferreira & Maree, 2007).

2.2 Who is a Father in South Africa?

Answering the question of who is a father in South Africa still remains a challenging one to attempt. While the designated organisations in South Africa still collects regular household information through nationally representative household and labour force surveys, as well as the Census, it remains a difficult task to establish who is, or has been, a biological father (Posel & Devey, 2006). This is partly because of the uncertainty that surrounds reported paternity – men may not know they have fathered a child or may prefer not to acknowledge paternity due to their different reasons. Counting fathers is important, though in that it acknowledges the crucial role that men can and do play as parents (Morrell, Posel & Devey, 2003). Using the upper and lower limits of several methodologies and inferring fatherhood from information on mothers, marriage, and kin relations between household members, it is estimated that between 45-50 percent of men 15 to 54 years of age have fathered a child in South Africa (Posel & Devey, 2006). Nonetheless the fact is, we simply do not know which or how many men are fathers.

Contributing biologically to the conception of a child, however, does not necessarily make a man into father. In South Africa there exists a very strong conception of a 'social father', an ascribed, as opposed to an attained status. A saying from one local language, Sepedi, stresses that '*ngwana ga se wa šete, ke wa kgoro*', plainly meaning that a sperm does not beget a child a man becomes a father, and is treated with the

respect attached to the role, when he takes responsibility for his family and becomes a role model of appropriate behavior for young men in the society (Lesejane, 2006). Acknowledged biological fatherhood, at least as a manifestation of lineage, is a very important element of identity development. Children take their clan name from their father and, in times past, children, like the famed Zulu King Shaka (1787-1828) were humiliated for being fatherless. Today, being considered fatherless generates in children a sense of loss and a great deal of confusion (Ramphele, 2002). The pain for fathers can also be intense. In his novel (Johnny, 2011) Jonny Steinberg's protagonist, Sizwe Magadla, mourns the fact that he hasn't paid "*lobola*", bride-price, and thus the two children he has with his lover are not his own. He feels castrated, not in the sense that he cannot father children, but in the sense that he cannot father children he can claim as his own – a man without descendants and thus without permanence.

Migrant labour and the resulting residential separation of partners, delayed marriage, and the growing delinking of child-bearing from marriage, all mean that many men today are both social and biological fathers. A man may be supporting his sister's children who live in the same household as he does because that is what is required of him as her older brother; he may also pay maintenance for a child of a former partner with whom he has regular contact, but he may not have acknowledged a child of another partner who he no longer sees. Another man may have little contact with his own children in a former household because he has moved in with a woman who has children from her previous relationship and he has become their primary source of support (Mkhize, 2004).

The multiple and shifting constellations of partnerships and parenthood in the late 20th and early 21[st]centuries have resulted in men and women the world over being caught between traditional and contemporary gender roles within families and in relation to children. South African fathers are not very different from men elsewhere around the world. "Among all the changes going on in the world", says Anthony Giddens, "none are more important than those happening in our personal lives in sexuality, relationships, marriage and the family. There is a global revolution going on in how we think of

ourselves and how we form ties and connections with others. It is a revolution advancing unevenly in different regions and cultures, with many resistances" (Anthony, 2003). That is how a father is perceived in South African eye, not only biological traits determined a father but rather there are a lot of spheres associated with the element of being a father.

2.3 Influences on Fatherhood

The way in which men enact the role of fatherhood is significantly influenced by a host of factors varying from each case. One approach to creating a sense of meaning and understanding of fathers is to assess the social, economic and cultural conditions influencing fatherhood as a shifting construct over time (Morman & Floyd, 2006). The historical, cultural, socio-economic and individual influences affecting fatherhood will be looked in to within the South African context as they will be of paramount importance when exploring the phenomenon absent fathers.

- Historical influences

The experience of South African fathers has been strongly influenced by the history of the country. Dating as far back as the period of colonization up until the Apartheid era, many black fathers were separated from their children due to migrant labour practices. Since the discovery of gold and diamonds during the 1800s and then the Group Areas Act during Apartheid, migrant labour in South Africa became an integral part of many Black South African men's lives, thus influencing their experiences of fatherhood. Men worked in distant places far from home and were often only allowed annual visits to return home to their families, thus the experience of fatherhood was limited and constrained at the time (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

Richter and Morrell (2006) continued to allude that many Black families growing up during Apartheid grew up without a father's presence in their lives, as a consequence of migrant labour but also as a consequence of the turbulent political situation for Black South Africans at the time. The Apartheid regime has left a "historical legacy of racial emasculation" and thus it is an important factor when thinking about fathers and

fatherhood today (Richter & Morrell, 2006). However, fatherhood patterns are changing since South Africa became a democratic country in 1994. The social and historical climate of South Africa post 1994 has become another factor influencing patterns of fatherhood among Black South African fathers.

- Cultural influences

When attempting to understand the status of fatherhood in South Africa the underpinnings of African culture could offer further explanation. However African culture is not one-dimensional and many researchers problematize culture by cautioning against the construction of an encompassing African culture. Lesejane (2006) argues that, while African culture is not homogeneous, there are enough commonalities to enable generalisation within this broad value system.

Notions of fatherhood in African cultures are significantly linked to the philosophical foundation of *ubuntu* which encourages the collective social responsibility of the community (Mkhize, 2006). African cultures thus see fathering as the responsibility of the community as a whole and not the sole responsibility of the biological father. Several theories claim that African fathers epitomise the portrayal of a strict patriarchal head of the family. Rather than taking on an active role in parenting which is left to the mother and other female relatives, African fathers usually take on a more symbolic role (Mkhize, 2006; Morrell, 2006).

In a study conducted by Freeman (2008) a notion is made that the paradox of patriarchy is that while a father may be head of the family, simultaneously he is constrained from being a central character within it. It has been hypothesized that the patriarchal role of the father encouraged by some African cultures may contribute to the relative absence of fathers in child care (Nsamenang, 2010). Spjeldnaes, Moland, Harris and Sam (2011) interviewed South African teenage boys from low socio-economic backgrounds about their understanding of fatherhood. Many felt ill-prepared for fatherhood as they lacked paternal role models of their own. They described their fathers as unapproachable and

irresponsible, and longed for emotional closeness to their fathers (Spjeldnaes et al., 2011).

Patriarchy in African fatherhood can, however, easily be 'blamed' for the production of the distant and irresponsible Black father in current research and popular media. "The current problem is that African patriarchy has become distorted and a new patriarchy without obligations or reciprocity has emerged" (Lesejane, 2006). The traditional patriarchal father figure in African cultures, according to Lesejane (2006), is not just the head of the household but also carries many responsibilities that exhibit good fathering. These responsibilities include enforcing moral authority and guidance for the family and children; becoming a leader and being responsible for the affairs of the family; being the primary provider of the family's material needs such as food and shelter; being a protector of one's family and children against any perceived threats; and becoming a good role model especially for their sons so they in turn can embody the values of good fatherhood (Lesejane, 2006). However due to several historical and social factors, traditions of 'African' fatherhood have become distorted. Although African culture influences the experience and meaning of fatherhood for Black South African fathers, this does not necessarily imply that culture is a negative influence and perhaps the morals and values of African culture denoting fatherhood should be revisited (Lesejane, 2006).

Like culture, understanding the function of religion in the formation of fatherhood ideals and practices is useful for increasing the understanding of paternal interest and behaviour among religious communities (Furrow, 1998). Certain religious groups assert an interest in family values which influence fathers with those religious beliefs. There appears to be little to no research on how religion has influenced fatherhood despite the importance of religion in the lives of many Black South African fathers.

- Economic influences
According to Shows and Gerstel (2009), most men emphasize employment as being central to the understanding and practice of fatherhood. South Africa's increasing rate of

unemployment, especially among Black male South Africans, limits the ability for fathers to provide financially for their family and children (Mkhize, 2006). According to African tradition "a man is a man because he can provide for his family" (Mkhize, 2006), however without a job and with high rates of poverty in South Africa, many African men struggle to assert themselves as fathers. There is a need for an alternative understanding of manhood and responsible fatherhood. Although unemployed fathers cannot financially provide for their families they can still assert and embrace their roles as fathers through other avenues (Rabe, 2006).

Understanding fatherhood may vary when considering the socio-economic status of fathers in South Africa. Working-class fathers living in townships or remote rural areas may differ in their experience and conception of fatherhood compared to middle-class and upper-class fathers. However, an interesting finding among South African men was that most fathers, whether rural, transitional or urban, all stressed their breadwinner responsibilities above their other responsibilities (Edwards et al., 2001).

- Social influences

The ways in which fathers practice fatherhood entail enactments of masculinity and gender relations. The role of gender offers a framework in which fatherhood in South African can be studied (Eerola & Huttunen, 2011). One study reported that fathers are more likely to increase their involvement with their children if they have a greater proportion of male children in the family (Morman & Floyd, 2006). Difficulties and tensions emerge when fathers attempt to find ways of practicing 'new' fatherhood whilst confronting gender issues (Henwood & Procter, 2003). Current gender issues include the increased levels of employment of women in the workforce. Increased levels of employment in women have challenged the traditional model of hegemonic masculinity and the old assumptions about fatherhood. When mothers are employed, fathers are more likely to be involved in the care of their children and the household (Show & Gerstel, 2009).

Although several masculinities exist in the South African context, the notion of hegemonic masculinity "emphasizes competition, wealth, aggressiveness and heterosexuality" (cited in Kahn, 2009). Hegemonic masculinity can be considered a version of masculinity whereby male dominance is supported and perpetuated within a particular society. Hegemonic masculinity encourages certain forms of expression of gender and masculinity which are viewed as superior to others. The exploration of how dominant masculinities are reproduced in fathers is imperative in understanding how they negotiate fatherhood. Challenges to the traditional construct of hegemonic masculinity require new negotiations of gender relations in parental care and perceptions of fatherhood (Shows & Gerstel, 2009). Morrell (2006) stated that classic constructs of masculinity; work, sport and body are being replaced with child-centred rhythms and new measures of accomplishment. By restoring the value of fatherhood in constructs of fatherhood, men are able to adopt new fathering identities that foster positive father-child relations (Morrell, 2006).

Another staid social factor influencing fatherhood in South African communities is the HIV/AIDS epidemic. One of the contributing factors to the absence of fathers is death (Posel & Devey, 2006). Many South African households are headed by single mothers raising children whose fathers are deceased. In light of the current HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa where most infections are concentrated in the sexually active population the majority of people infected are parents (Desmond & Desmond, 2006). The spread of HIV/AIDS contributes to fatherless households, however what is most prevalent in South Africa is the number of HIV positive women in the country (Wiener, Vasquez & Battles 2001). Instead of focusing on paternal absence due to HIV/AIDS an important issue to discuss is the investigation of paternal experience and involvement with children living with HIV/AIDS. The debilitating presence of HIV/AIDS in the South African family indicates how important it is to challenge the traditional roles fathers adopt whilst operating in new challenging environments (Roy & Dyson, 2010). Authors have explored the critical role that fathers play and the potential they have to reduce the burden of HIV/AIDS on the younger generation (Desmond & Desmond, 2006; Palitza, 2008; Wiener et al., 2001).

2.4 Different Types of Fathers' Absence

When debating the consequences of present versus absent fathers, it is important to acknowledge that 'absence' is not a simple variable representing a unified group of people. Swartz and Bhana (2009) have identified four different categories of absent fatherhood. These include:

- Absent- deceased
- Absent- never known/no contact
- Absent- occasional contact
- Absent- regular contact

Absent fathers, therefore, may fall into different categories, each with different implications for paternal involvement. Paternal absence does not necessarily mean that fathers have no contact with their children (Phares, 1996). Under the category of people who do not know their fathers, there are a variety of expressions. Mapping out the existing understandings of the meaning of the terms 'unknown', 'absent' and 'undisclosed' father might be of paramount importance when debunking on the perceptions of the phenomenon 'absent fathers'. Atobrah (2004) suggests that 'unknown fathers' would be those whom the children had no knowledge.

A lack of recollection of the father may be due to the young age of the child when the father left or died, or having had little or no interaction with him. A father can be defined as unknown when the mother (or guardian) of a child does not know or has doubts about the identity or the name of the child's father. Again, this is also true when the mother is unwilling to divulge his name for official registration purposes, or the mother does not have enough information about him (Kelly, 2012; Manyatshe, 2012; Meerum Terwogt, Meerum Terwogt-Reijnders and Van Hekken 2002). The term 'unknown father' should not necessarily be understood to mean a complete lack of information on the identity of one's father because sometimes children have some insight but maybe not enough to say they fully know their father (Clowes et al. 2013; Nduna and Jewkes 2011; Phaswana, 2003). Thus reference to unknown fathers should clarify whether the term

refers to unknown to the child, the mother, or the father, and if 'not knowing' means not knowing his name, having never met him or lacking an emotional bond.

Fathers can be *absent* in the lives of children fully, partially, economically or emotionally (Datta 2007; Khunou 2008; Kruger 2012; Langa 2010; Madhavan, Townsend and Garey 2008; Makiwane et al. 2012; Manyatshe 2012; Townsend, Madhavan and Garey 2005). In answering the question, who are absent fathers, Jaffee and colleagues refer to 'paternal non-involvement' and 'single mothers' as situations that spell out absent fathers (Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Taylor and Dickson 2001). The degree and nature of non-involvement are not spelt out. Single motherhood or solo mothering does not always imply father absence as the father may be present in some way in the child's life (Rhein et al. 1997). On the other hand, Mancini (2010) states that absent fathers usually do not reside with their children or are away for long periods of time. This includes fathers who are divorced, separated, incarcerated, employed in the military, travel regularly for business and live away from their children for extended periods of time (Clowes et al. 2013). However, this explanation is somewhat narrow in that it does not include fathers who have died, those who had never lived with their children or those who have never been married to the mother. These scenarios should be included because they are experienced as fully absent (Langa 2010). Fathers who are incarcerated might be absent for that time while they are in jail but the child might still visit the father, and when they are released they might resume a presence in their child's life (Clowes et al. 2013). Therefore, separation due to incarceration can be termed as a temporary absence.

Non-resident fathers who continue to have contact with the child are to be considered absent, at least partially. On the other hand, fathers who are physically present and who provide financially can also be emotionally absent in their children's lives when found to be lacking a filial connection or attachment with their children (Clowes et al. 2013). Absent fathers may or may not be known to the child (Nduna & Jewkes 2011).

An *undisclosed father* is one where the mother does not tell the child who the father is or provides incorrect information. This conception is limited since it is unclear how it will account for a child who has found out the identity of his or her father without the mother's knowledge (Nduna & Jewkes 2011). Until recently, March 2013, the South African abridged birth certificate document identified only the mother's name on it (Department of Home Affairs 2013). This means children born before the new unabridged birth certificate rely on their parents to communicate their father's identity to them (Langa 2010; Phaswana 2003). From another perspective, the unwillingness to disclose a father's identity might be due to incest, being impregnated by a married man, denied pregnancy, or the mother (or her family) does not have or wish to have contact or a relationship with the father (Manyatshe 2012; Meerum Terwogt et al. 2002; Nduna; Nduna & Jewkes 2011; 2012; Polela 2011). For the term 'undisclosed father' to be precisely defined some questions on disclosure should be considered so as to clearly categorise non-disclosure. How should the context of disclosure be organised? Who should take the responsibility to disclose? What amount of information should be disclosed for the child to say they know their father? The different definitions presented above highlight the complexity of the terms of absent, unknown and undisclosed fathers, and thus challenge social scientists to unpack and clearly define these terms when conducting their studies.

2.5 Single Parenting

Raising children as a single parent is full of challenges; it is like having two jobs at once. Single parenting requires a sympathetic mother plus a strict and providing father at the same time. It is no wonder that being a single parent can be very stressful. It requires managements of behavioral, emotional and spiritual aspects of the parent (Department of Social Development, 2012).

Sadly, many South African children grow up without fathers or mothers. In some cases, fathers/mothers have had to leave the family home to find across country's borders. In others, the fathers/mothers have fallen victims of AIDS, leaving widows and orphans in their wake. Some women have single-parenthood forced on them by war. Increased

numbers of divorced parents in SA have also created more single-parent families (Department of Social Development, 2012).

As divorces increase, so do the chances for South African children to be exploited. Extreme poverty forces single parents to abandon their children, increasing the number of orphans and children living in the streets. Another reason sighted for single parents abandoning their children is the fact that foster parents receive more financial support that do single parents. A single parent in extreme poverty may hope that the child will get better care from foster parents.

Unfortunately, it is the very children most in need of care and parenting that are most at risk for exploitation. Child pornography is a major industry in SA, and sexual trafficking of children is increasing. Children are prostituted to provide basic food stuffs for their starving families. Labour exploitation is also common, with children under the age of 15 being forced to work long hours for little to no pay (Department of Social Development, 2012).

Single parenting is not only about divorce. Some parents have never been married; others have survived the death of their loved one. These parents are impacted by the same issues faced by divorced parents: isolation, lack of support, financial struggles and emotional overwhelm. When an adult is constantly stressed, the child absorbs and mirrors these negative feelings (Department of Social Development, 2012).

2.5.1 Parenting by single mothers

Women in their various roles play a critical part in the well-being of children. Women single parents are shouldering conditions of grinding poverty at a very early age with a few support systems especially because South African communities consider care-giving and child-rearing the responsibility of the mother solely. Single parents or widowed heads-of-households in South Africa are even taking the responsibility for the care of family members and children affected by HIV/AIDS (Department of Social Development, 2012).

In some parts of South Africa, many women who are single parents run households because their husbands have gone away to work in town of countries or provinces across the border. Many of the husbands also have died of AIDS related diseases.

2.5.2 Challenges

The rise in number of single parents has been note across all sectors of societies all over the world. Single parenthood usually results from separation or divorce, death and pregnancy out of wedlock. The widespread problems with AIDS and the increasing rate of teenage pregnancy also add to the mix. The more traditional South African communities still believe that mothers should be responsible for rearing the children and giving care within the home. And they have the added burden of caring for family and children affected by HIV/AIDS (Department of Social Development, 2012).

The Department of Social Development (2012) alluded that South African children are greatly affected by divorce. Not only is the marriage dissolved, but the child is separated from one or both parents. Absent fathers is a serious problem for South African children and their mothers. The reduced ability to earn a meagre income is magnified by the lack of a male role model in the home, which has serious consequences for the future South African generations. Single parenting related stress for women often pertains to how they could manage their households while they work to earn a living for 8 to 9 hours during the day.

South African women face the grim life. They are frequent victims of rape and teenage pregnancies are common. Single mothers, no matter what the reason for their situation, face social stigma and extreme poverty. Sexual exploitation of women is a serious and growing problem as well. Due to their need to earn a living most single mothers are mostly employed and thus spend less time with their children at home (Department of Social Development, 2012).

2.6 The Role of Social Institutions and Disclosure of the Rightful Biological Father

Quantitative studies on paternal involvement have reported the mother's role as imperative in facilitating the father-child relationship (Carlson & McLanahan, 2009; Madhavan, Gross, Norris, Richter, & Hosegood, 2012). Kiernan (2006) has suggested that unmarried men who remain on good-natured terms with the mothers of their children or are named on the birth certificates, are likely to remain involved in the child's life, and presumably be disclosed to the child. The quantitative nature of these studies often neglected the contextual factors affecting the mother (Sano, Richards, & Zvonkovic, 2008). Traditional maternal gate-keeping theories are further limited as they tend to focus on divorced couples and couples who were previously in long-term relationships rather than those who were never married and only got involved with each other for a limited amount of time (Alvare, 2011). These studies often did not take into account that liberal approaches to partnering do not secure that all conceptions will happen in such normatively defined circumstances, and that there could also be other contributing factors besides the mother's attitudes and beliefs about father involvement.

Various studies in South Africa reported that men deserting their children or denying paternity have become a common occurrence (Datta, 2007; Denis & Ntsimane, 2006; Mbatha, 2012; Mkhwanazi, 2009; Richter & Morrell, 2006; Nduna & Jewkes, 2012). This may prove to be a complexity for the unwed women in South Africa, as for the father to be documented on official birth records, he must acknowledge paternity. With no alternative recourses or initiatives to establish paternity, when paternity is disputed the onus is "solely" on the mother to ensure that the father is documented (Department of Home Affairs, 2010) or carry the responsibility to take measures to prove that he is the father.

In civil and customary unions, the marital assumptions secure that the woman's current spouse is documented as the father (Clark & van Heerden, 1992; South African Law Commission, 2001) even though the documented man may not be the actual biological

father (Kelly, 2012). This can be interpreted as an idealization of the heterosexual marriage and protection of children born in matrimonial contexts (Luxton, 2002) and a disregard towards children conceived in other family structures (Makiwane et al., 2012; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). It is acknowledged that the establishment of a genetic relationship does not necessarily equate that a man will take on his fatherly role (Datta, 2007; Richter, Chikovore, & Makusha, 2010), and correspondingly a man can take on the paternal role to children who are not biologically his own (Langa, 2010; Morrell, 2006). However, initiatives to establish paternity could diminish the space between biological and legal ties for children (Besson, 2007), and the change in legislation may shift accepted norms and lessen the social distance between fathers and their children.

Structural interruptions such as the State's non-intervention on facilitating the establishment of paternity at birth for children born outside of marriage can also be seen as propagating the acceptance of a culture of "fatherless" children in South Africa (Nduna & Jewkes, 2012). In her analysis of the child's right to know their heritage, Besson (2007) inferred that non-state intervention can be interpreted as an infringement on the child's right to, at a later stage, have access to their heritage through birth records. The author argued that as the State has the resources to register a child's identity, they would similarly have resources to institute permissible sanctions against those who breached that obligation (Besson, 2007).

Shefer (2004) has highlighted in his research the role of cultural constructions in contributing to the reproduction of uneven gender practices. The customary practices of establishing paternity through the man's family paying financial dues to the unwed mother's family leaves minimal option for the women when men do not adhere to this symbolic act (Kaufman et al., 2000; Madhavan et al., 2008; Richter et al., 2010). Munalula (2009) asserts that such cultural arrangements transfer control of the women's fertility over to the men and weakens the women's prestige. The esteem which these cultural acts signify in some circles have been reported as resulting in mothers and guardians unable to disclose to the child who their biological father is (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006), and also at times this caused estrangement between the paternal and

maternal family consequently alienating the children from their fathers (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). It is hard to discern how much of a factor this is toward paternal non-disclosure, as selective acculturation among African people means that some may still subscribe to the customary practices of recognising paternity through, *inhlawulo*, and others have been reported as shifted towards a combination of traditional African and Western norms (Burman, 2003).

2.7 Government Policy, Men and Fatherhood

Especially since democratization in 1994, the South African government try in vein and provides for the support of families, including fathers, in a number of ways, some of which are outlined below but many forms of support for children through fathers depend on recognition of a child by their father, which is needed for a child to be given their father's name. The child's father must register his child's birth in order for the child to receive a birth certificate; without this, a child is registered with their mother's name only (Giese & Smith, 2007). Once a father recognizes his children, the state requires that he supports them, whether or not he is married to the mother, or lives with his children.

2.7.1 Economic support

In South Africa, like in many other countries, tax exemptions are allowed for children, and child support is tax deductible. There is a trend, for example, in the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom – and South Africa - to expand tax credits to benefit families with children, especially working families (Kamerman & Gatenio, 2002). However, in South Africa, the rate of unemployment is high and the informal economy so large, that tax benefits operate mainly for those men with better-than-average salaries, who generally live at home with their children anyway.

South Africa has an extensive social security system to protect vulnerable individuals from destitution and to support families to care for children. An old-age pension facility forms a critical source of support for poor children, and most of the money is spent food, clothing and school fees (Case et al, 2005). In addition, poor children qualify for a monthly Child Support Grant, given to the child's caregiver, including the father.

Currently, round about 11 million South African children benefit from this support. However, for a variety of reasons, including lack of knowledge and accessibility, very few fathers take up the grant, even when they are the primary caregiver of an eligible child (Case et al, 2005). Another reason for fathers not to opt for taking the grant, more especially African men, is the culture that every man should never fail to support his family or children and should make it by all means necessary. That leads to them in most cases denying help to do what they label as their sole duty.

2.7.2 Social support

Under Apartheid, customary marriage was not legally recognized. This caused hardship for children who were considered illegitimate, and for wives who were not accorded the same status as in civil marriages on matters of intestate succession and maintenance (Kaganas & Murray, 1991). A maintenance order could not be made against a person who was not present. Men could thus, and did, evade maintenance orders, leaving women to support children alone (Bonthuys, 2008). The 1998 Act recognized customary marriages and, by implication, polygamy, and obliges the family head to meet the daily needs of his wife (wives) and children (Herbst & du Plessis, 2008). A Constitutional provision protecting a child's best interests now enables an order to ensure the effective enforcement of maintenance. The requirement for fathers to support children, however, exists alongside their right to see their children. As Khunou (2006) points out, custody arrangements favour mothers, and children may suffer when parents get embroiled in protracted conflict over paternal maintenance and access to his children.

In 1996, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) demanded five days paid paternity leave and 20 days paid compassionate and family responsibility leave, noting that men have a responsibility and right to play a role in child rearing, including being supportive to their partner when a child is born. South African legislation now provides for three-days' paternity leave, but government recognizes the need to extend paternity leave so men can share responsibilities, and allow men more time to bond with their new born babies.

A National Family Policy drafted by Department of Social Development in 2006 and circulated for discussion has been criticized, amongst others, for the ways in which it deals with men and fatherhood. Hochfeld (2007) argues that the subject of fathers is not given enough nor serious attention in the draft policy beyond noting the general trend of father absence and the threat men pose for women and children as a result of violence. While it is true that a large number of fathers are absent, tend to take little direct responsibility for domestic and childcare family chores, and are responsible for substantial violence and harm in families, their position in families is still significant. The South African policy contrasts with that in, for example, Britain, which portrays men as resources for their children (Featherstone, 2003).

2.8 Civil Society Programmes available to Increase Men's Involvement in the Lives of Children

Civil society organisations in South Africa working to promote constructive male involvement and responsible fatherhood are active and increasingly successful at enlisting men and creating awareness (Peacock & Botha, 2006). Some, such as *Fathers Speak Out* and *Men as Partners*, have as their primary focus reaching men and fathers. *Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training* (ADAPT) seeks to address the role that men can and should play in bringing about a non-violent society. ADAPT also provides counseling on what men can and should be to their children (Peacock & Botha, 2006). The Men as Partners (MAP) network attempts to reduce the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS by encouraging men to resist violence against women and children and to become more involved in HIV/AIDS-related prevention, care and support.

The Human Sciences Research Council launched The Fatherhood Project in 2003 aiming to influence social expectations and perceptions about men and their care for children, create a sense of shared responsibility for children's development among men and women, engender broad-based and long-term commitment to men's involvement with children and to rally peer and professional support to enable men to be more

involved in children's lives. It opened the project with a photographic exhibition that travelled the country, accompanied by debates and participatory events. The project has evolved into a fully-fledged research programme, leading to the publication of the first book on fathers in South Africa (Richter & Morrell, 2006), with continuing studies of father's support for children and the benefits of fatherhood for men. Even if not all mentioned in this research, there are a lot more programmes that are in action trying to get men realize their role and importance of being involved in their children's lives.

2.9 NGO Programmes Fostering Fatherhood

Richter, Chris, Hosegood, Madhavan, Makiwane, Makusha, Morrell and Swartz (2012), in their paper they alluded that while space precludes a comprehensive review of programmes working to foster fathers' engagement with their children, three NGOs focused on fatherhood or men more broadly, provide some examples of what is possible. One is based in the UK, the other in South Africa, and the last is an Africa-wide initiative based in Zimbabwe.

2.9.1 The Fatherhood Institute

The Fatherhood Institute is a UK-based organization that aims to improve children's chances of interacting with, and getting to know their fathers and the father figures in their lives. They do so by providing father-inclusive training that targets staff in children's centres, managers, schools, nurseries and crèches and providing information on different ways to engage fathers and encourage father-involvement. The Institute also disseminates the results of intervention research and acts as a consultancy for public and private sector agencies. Examples of changes in law and policy for which they advocate are parental leave that encourages sharing of parental roles among mothers and fathers, and equal parental engagement in schools. Programmes include 'Early Years', engaging men in the education and care of children; a mentoring programme for health workers to deliver to expectant fathers called 'Hit The Ground Crawling'; and 'Staying Connected', a workplace resource which aims to help fathers develop better relationships with their partners, take care of their own mental wellbeing and stay connected to their children. Finally, the Institute runs a campaign entitled 'Dads

Included' which aims to transform children's health care services to be able to foster father involvement, and 'The Dads Test' - an online assessment tool that helps workers in family services identify ways in which they can make their services more inclusive for fathers (Richter et al, 2012).

2.9.2 Sonke Gender Justice

In the context of low-income families in South Africa, Sonke Gender Justice run a project called "My Dad Can" - part of their One Man Can campaign – that focuses on the engagement of fathers in the lives of their children and families. This project aims to celebrate fathers 'who care' by profiling them in local media.

Positive local role models are identified and their stories circulated as examples of involved fathers, and to change children's ideas of fathers, not only as 'strong' people in their lives but also as 'supportive' and 'caring' figures. Sonke Gender Justice also runs *MenEngage South Africa*, part of *Men Engage Africa*, which tries to strengthen advocacy and policy agenda for engaging men and boys to promote gender equality, prevent and address gender gender-based violence, promote reproductive health and rights, and gender equality (Richter et al, 2012).

2.9.3 African Fathers Initiative

African Fathers is a continent-wide initiative for the generation, collection, and dissemination of knowledge and skills about fatherhood in Africa. African Fathers in conjunction with Sonke Gender Justice, Instituto Promundo in Brazil, the South African National Department of Social Development and MenEngage launched a project known as Men Care, which aims to engage men to improve maternal health and birthing outcomes of children as a way of involving men in parenting roles and the developmental outcomes of their children. They do this by running programmes that encourage father and child interactions and getting fathers involved through educational activities, encouraging shared work and campaigning for fathers' involvement (Richter et al, 2012).

2.10 Co-Residence between Children and their Fathers

Using data from several national household surveys, Posel and Devey (2006) estimated that 55% of rural Black African children (age 15 years and younger) in 2002 did not live with their fathers. The Africa Centre Demographic Information System (ACDIS) of demographic and health data in 11,000 households in northern KwaZulu-Natal provides detailed longitudinal data about the social and residential arrangements of biological fathers and children, came up with similar findings (Hosegood et al., 2007). In 2005, 51% of the 22,732 resident children with living biological parents (non-orphans) lived in a household where their biological father was not considered to be a member (Hill et al., 2008). Of the 49% of children whose fathers was considered to be a member of the household, 44% of these children were not co-resident with their fathers because the father was living primarily somewhere else (i.e. he was a non-resident household member). Among children whose mothers had died (maternal orphans), the proportion of children whose fathers do not belong to the same household is significantly higher than among non-orphans - 68% compared to 49% among non-orphans.

Using more recent data from the South African General Household Survey (2010), 31% of children aged 0-9 years do not reside with either of their biological parents even though only 19% of children not residing with either of their parents are double orphans. It has also been found that many children move between households and often live separately from their parents. Nationally, only one third of children live with both their biological parents, while 40% live with their biological mother but not their father and 3% of children live with their biological father but not their mother. These results are similar at national and provincial levels (Hall & Wright, 2010). Even though a large proportion of children are not living with one of their parents, one of their biological parents is often alive.

Most sources of nationally representative or large provincial household surveys are cross-sectional, providing little or no insights into any changes in the arrangements between children and their fathers over time (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012). Not only can fathers initially present become less socially and residentially connected to their

children over time but young children - not only fathers - are very mobile in South Africa (Ford & Hosegood, 2005; Hosegood & Madhavan, 2010; Madhavan, 2010). The migration of a child may in some cases facilitate the child joining their father elsewhere and becoming more residentially connected to their fathers (Madhavan & Roy, 2009; Madhavan & Townsend, 2007).

2.11 Conclusion

The phenomenon of Absent-Fathers remains a challenging one to deal with in our communities. The understanding and tactics around fatherhood are deeply rooted in culture and in most of our rural black communities, culture is the dominant authority that is actually passed from one generation to another without it being written. Even in the mist of modernization in most communities, culture becomes part of the elements that are not being left behind when moving in to the new world. It continues to affect households and some of the customs are found to be unjust when referring to the English laws that govern the country. A lot still need to be done so that a better understanding g of fatherhood can be established and the trend of absent-fathers can be reduced.

CHAPTER 3

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK AROUND THE ISSUE OF ABSENT-FATHERS

3.1 Introduction

Despite the increased recognition of the beneficial role that fathers can play in the lives of their children by allowing not only married fathers, but also some unmarried fathers, automatic parental responsibilities and rights, the new Children's Act has retained the *status quo* to the extent that it still does not confer automatic, inherent parental rights on biological fathers on the same basis as mothers. This chapter aims to ascertain whether the continued differential treatment, regarding the initial allocation of parental responsibilities and rights, can be justified in view of international trends emphasizing the importance of the role of both parents in the upbringing of their children (Children's Act 38, 2005). United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter referred to as the UNCRC) obliges state parties to respect the child's right to contact with *both* parents while Article 18(1) of the UNCRC compels state parties to apply their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that *both* parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing of the child (Louw, 2010).

The maintenance act implies that the non-residential parent has the responsibility to pay maintenance (Maintenance Act no 99, 1998). It does not say anything about access to the child. In most cases the non-residential parents are fathers. Most fathers find themselves in awkward positions wherein the law enforces the payment of maintenance but disregard or pay less attention to the prevailing struggle for them to have access to their children. It has been proven in many accounts that monetary support only is not enough to nourish the development of children, but other means of support are also vital for the good development of the child. Those might be the emotional support, social support and the friendly bond between fathers and their children.

The Children's Act no 38 (2005) express of the rights and responsibilities of the parents. All fathers have equal rights and responsibilities, regardless of being married, divorced, and separated or never living together. In section 35 of the Children's Act, a parent who refuses the other parent access or moves away without sending the new address to the other parent, is guilty of parental alienation and can be put in jail for up to a year (Children's Act no 38, 2005). Most of the fathers who are absent because of the maternal families alienating them, they have less knowledge on this law, thus they remain powerless and never attempt to fight the injustice.

The best interest of the child is always of paramount importance. It also refers to situations in which children need to be protected, for instance, when being abused. The focus on father involvement has the best interest of the child at heart. There seems to be a strong cultural practices which hinder father involvement and for which needs to be tackled. In most rural South African communities, culture appears to disregard constitutional regulations of the country.

3.2 Legal Aspects of Fatherhood in South Africa

In one of their research Richter and Morrel (2006) argued that in South Africa, the legal aspects of fatherhood fall in the domain of family law. Family law is divided into two main sections – the law of husband and wife, and the law of parent and child. Apart from the legal aspects of fatherhood, the concept also has certain philosophical aspects. These include care, support, guidance, love and affection. Fathers are seen as being an integral part of a family that consists of a mother, a father and children. However, in a world ravaged by poverty and HIV/AIDS, this idealised nuclear-type family is constantly being eroded, and children often find themselves either orphaned or being raised in a single-parent family. Where children are raised by a single mother, however, there are certain legal constraints still placed on the absent father – whether such absence is caused by death or divorce or abandonment – namely, inheritance and maintenance (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

3.2.1 Parliament enacting new law in relation to fathers of extra-marital children

In 1997 the Natural Fathers of Children Born Out of Wedlock Act was passed. In terms of this legislation, fathers of extra-marital children are granted guardianship, custody and access rights to such children. However, these are not automatic rights and, in order to assert these rights, the father must apply to court. The order can only be granted if it is in the best interests of the child, and after the application has been investigated by the Family Advocate (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

In the case of Ivan v/s the state, the court confirmed that, in applying the Act, the best interests of the child had to be the focus of the inquiry. In addition, the court accepted that it was generally to the advantage of a child to have communication with both parents, unless there were particular factors that demanded that the welfare of the child be protected by depriving him or her of the opportunity of maintaining contact with one parent (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

A highly publicised case that brought the issue of fathers of children born out of wedlock to the fore was that of Lawrie Fraser. Fraser, an unmarried father, tried to adopt his biological child and was denied this opportunity through the provisions of the Child Care Act. Other parties who had applied for adoption, adopted his child.

Fraser first applied to the High Court to overturn the adoption order. The High Court did so and referred the matter back to the Children's Court. However, instead of going back to the Children's Court, Fraser brought another application claiming that the provisions of the Child Care Act were unconstitutional as they discriminated against fathers of extra-marital children.

In deciding the matter, the Constitutional Court stated that consent to adoption of such children is not necessarily required of all fathers – various factors should be considered, including the duration of the relationship between the parents of the extra-marital child, the age of the child, the bond between the child and the father, and the best interests of

the child. The Court declared section 18(2) of the Child Care Act unconstitutional and gave Parliament an opportunity to correct the section within two years of the order.

It has been argued that the Constitutional Court took the approach that an emotional and material involvement between the father and child would result in the father obtaining rights towards his child, rather than using the biological bond as the reason for this (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

Amendments to the Child Care Act have been effected, but, at the time of writing, a Children's Bill was before Parliament and some of the provisions contained in the Bill will affect the present law relating to fathers of children born out of wedlock. The Children's Bill represents a complete overhaul of welfare legislation aimed at children and aims to address the current fragmentation of child-welfare law in South Africa (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

However, while it was initially intended to comprise a holistic and comprehensive approach to children and basically result in the codification of most laws pertaining to children, it has been changed substantially since the first draft was released by the South African Law Reform Commission. It has also undergone severe excisions by the various state departments mandated to examine the draft (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

Clause 21 of Children's Bill 70 of 2003 deals with the parental rights of unmarried fathers. The issue of granting automatic parental responsibilities and rights to unmarried fathers has proven to be controversial, and this clause purports to address the controversy and provide a solution that suits both the father's rights and takes the child's best interests into account (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

The section provides that an unmarried father acquires parental rights and responsibilities in certain circumstances, for example, by living with the mother in a long-term relationship or where he has contributed, or attempted in good faith to contribute, to expenses related to the maintenance of a child for a reasonable period of

time. The wording of the section is very broad and open to interpretation and so the practical application of this section is a matter that will need to be tested (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

3.3 Discrimination against Fathers

3.3.1 Discrimination based on sex, gender and marital or equivalent status

Section 28(1)(b) of the Constitution of South Africa only creates rights for children, not their parents. However, in so far as the biological father is given the right to acquire parental responsibilities and rights in terms of Sections 20 and 21 of the Children's Act, he may claim an entitlement to the same rights as the biological mother, based on the equality provisions contained in Section 9 of the Constitution. The biological father's right to claim the same rights as the mother will nevertheless fail if the unequal treatment of fathers can be justified (Louw, 2010).

The Children's Act as amended, discriminates in the first instance between biological fathers and biological mothers in so far as all mothers, regardless of their marital status or commitment to their child, automatically acquire parental responsibilities and rights based exclusively on their biological relationship to their child. If fathers are denied automatic parental responsibilities and rights because only females are capable of bearing children, the discrimination seems to have less to do with the law's discrimination on ground of sex than nature's discrimination against men. The discrimination against fathers has rather been found to lie in the prejudicial treatment of fathers arising out of their parenting roles, and is thus based on gender (Currie & De Waal, 2005).

Assigning automatic parental responsibilities and rights to all mothers and not all fathers at birth is deemed discriminatory because it perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces the message that the law (and society at large) still sends, namely that child care is a mother's duty and that fathers should not concern themselves with child care because it simply is not their job and/or because they are incapable of, or unsuited to it (Louw, 2010).

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The discrimination based on sex and gender has often been said to overlap with discrimination based on marital status. The court in *B v/s S* held that in so far as the assignment of access (now contact) depends only on the best interests of the child and not the respective position of the parents. Fathers of extra-marital children are in the same position as married fathers and are consequently not discriminated against. As pointed out by Pantazis, this proposition is unacceptable, since access is presumed not to be in the best interests of the child in the case of extra-marital children, while in the case of a legitimate child, the assumption is that it is in the best interests of the child. In *Fraser*, the court recognised that the existence of marriage might have little to do with whether a father involved himself with his children. While most constitutional commentators agree that the unequal allocation of parental responsibilities and rights to mothers and fathers may amount to unfair discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender and marital status, the *Children's Act* no longer denies fathers equal parenting rights based merely on these grounds. A biological father who lived with the mother in a permanent life-partnership at the time of the child's birth will now also acquire parental responsibilities and rights automatically in the same way that a father who is or was married to the mother will acquire. The intention was clearly to equate the commitment of permanent life-partners with that of spouses for purposes of the allocation of parental responsibilities and rights – hence the alternative ground "equivalent status" added to discrimination based on marital status. A biological father can now, furthermore, also automatically become the legal parent of the child if he can show that he is sufficiently committed to his child by not only having identified himself as the father of the child, but also by having contributed to the child's upbringing and maintenance (Louw, 2010).

The question of whether the law is fair in so far as it requires fathers to "qualify" to acquire parental responsibilities and rights whereas it does not do so in the case of mothers is, it is submitted, now even more complex and nuanced than before. While the constitutional attack on the commitment requirement could obviously also be based on unfair discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender and marital status, since mothers do not have to show a similar commitment to be recognised as the legal parent of the child,

a "lack of commitment" could arguably constitute an independent ground on which to attack the constitutionality of the father's legal recognition as a parent. If such a ground is recognised, it would have to be treated as an unspecified ground and would not benefit from the presumption of unfairness (Louw, 2010).

3.4 Parental Responsibilities and Rights of Fathers

The parental responsibilities and father's child custody rights of a divorced biological father and of an estranged unmarried father are exactly the same. They both have rights of contact (access), care (custody) and guardianship and the best interests of the child becomes important on how these rights will be exercised. It is important to remember that contact to a child is not dependent on the payment of maintenance as Sections 20, 21 of the Children's Act alludes (Erna, 2016). According to Section 31 of the Children's Act (2005) any decisions with potentially huge impact on the child can only be made by a parent if the child's voice is heard and considered and if the co-parent's views and wishes are considered (Erna, 2016).

3.5 Parental Alienation and Consequences

According to section 35 of the Children's Act, if one parent refuses contact to another parent against the terms of the court order or does not inform the other parent of a change of address, that parent is guilty of an offence and liable to jail sentence of up to one year (Erna, 2016). In most cases in communities, fathers are the victims of the alienation and due to lack of knowledge they never involve the law. Maternal families in most cases have an attitude that the child being born is theirs until the father marries their daughter or pay damages as such to prove his commitment.

3.6 Conclusion

Drawing inferences from the legislation that is currently available in South Africa, one can say that there is a lot that still needs to be done for justice to prevail for fathers. Fathers' absence doesn't only cause damage to the physical being of the child, perhaps support of physical needs, but also causes damage to the holistic being of the child, be

it emotional, psychological and at some points spiritual. The legislations need to be strengthened so that the issue of absent fathers can come to a minimal as such serving in the best interest of the children as being of paramount importance in any case.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is aimed at presenting, analyzing and interpreting the empirical findings. The researcher used non probability sampling particularly purposive sampling. According to Bless, Smith and Sithole (2013) purposive sampling is based on the judgement of a researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample. A sample was chosen on the basis of what the researcher considered to be typical units that the single mothers should be residing at Mphanama. The sample consisted of single mothers who are bona fide members of Mphanama and have not just visited the community at the time of the study, their marital statuses were not considered upon selection, so this may be mothers who were never married, married or even divorced women. The participants were from different ages as insight from all age cohorts will be highly valuable.

The single mothers were permanent residents of Mphanama. These single mothers were not just visitors at Mphanama at the time of the study. The data to be presented was collected from twenty (20) single mothers who are bona fide members of Mphanama and have not just visited the community at the time of the study. The researcher used semi-structured face-to-face interview. The face-to-face interview allowed the researcher to get in-depth data from the participants regarding their perceptions on the phenomenon absent-fathers at large, their experiences of being single mothers with absent fathers in their children's' lives and how it affect their day-to-day lives. The responses of the participants, based on the semi-structured interview schedule, were recorded on the laptop exactly the way they have been presented by the participants.

The researcher used thematic data analysis. According to Mills, Durepo and Wiebe (2010) coding is a basic analytic strategy used in thematic analysis and it is defined as a process of closely inspecting text to look for recurrent themes, topics, or relationships, and marking passages with a code or label to categorize them for later retrieval and theory-building. There are steps to be followed when analysing data using themes. The researcher followed the steps of thematic data analysis as outlined by Sarantakos (2002) which are transcription of data, checking and editing, Analysing and interpretation, and Generalization.

4.2 Experience of Raising Children without a Father Figure

Raising children as a single parent, specifically as a single mother, is noted to be full of challenges; it is like having two jobs at once. Single parenting requires a sympathetic mother plus a strict and providing father at the same time. It is no wonder that being a single parent can be very stressful. It requires managements of behavioral, emotional and spiritual aspects of the parent. The absence of a father in a child's life put a lot of strain on the mother and all the responsibility of providing to the child's needs on her shoulders. Almost all the participants expressed:

> *"It is very hard and difficult to raise children without their father in the picture. This becomes a strenuous as the children look up to you as a mother to provide all that they want and if you cannot meet the children's needs it becomes a challenge."*

In support of the above another participant echoed that:
> *"It is really not a good thing to raise children without their father as I did not make the children alone. Parenting should be a two people task so that it doesn't have to feel like a burden. It becomes hard at times that you think of their father who never took responsibility."*

Sadly, many South African children grow up without fathers. In some cases, mothers have had to leave the family home to find across country's borders. This is way too

much baggage for mothers as they find themselves having to go through all the struggle of raising the children alone and ensure their survival. This trend of absent fathers, have always been a challenging issue as the participants alluded. This phenomenon of absent fathers causes a lot of stress to mothers and it ends up affecting them physically, economically, emotionally, psychologically and socially as some end up losing hope in life.

4.3 Understanding of Fatherhood

Paquette (2010) and Tamis-Lemonda (2004) believe that fatherhood is not simply a social invention but rather a biological necessity of child development. Understanding the experience and meaning of fatherhood in South Africa may encourage fathers to become more involved in their children's lives and foster a more positive image of fathers (Hinckley, Ferreira & Maree, 2007). When asked to delineate who is defined as a father, the participants alluded different views but it can be told that their responses fell out of what the society have made a norm. One participant stresses that:

> *"A father is the one who brought the child on earth by blood, but it has to be noted that it is not enough to be called a father only by being a biological father as such. A father is someone who takes responsibility of his children's upbringing and support them, make sure they eat, dress and are in good health."*

One other participant supported the above by saying that:
> *"You can be a biological father by blood to your children, yes that cannot be changed, but if you don't play your part by helping the mother to see to it that the children eat and dress, then you are as good as absent. A father is someone who takes responsibility of his children."*

This shows that fatherhood is defined inversely by different people depending on their personal views, mostly coming from their life experiences. Most of the women need not only fathers to be there but to actually help in meeting the needs of the children, mostly

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the physiological needs of the children. Fathers who cannot provide for their children economically might experience a challenge of being recognized as fathers. This again stems from the unemployment rate in the country and thus leads to most men not recognizing themselves as fathers if they fail to provide for their families.

The above arguments can be supported by Shows and Gerstel (2009), most men emphasize employment as being central to the understanding and practice of fatherhood. South Africa's increasing rate of unemployment, especially among Black male South Africans, limits the ability for fathers to provide financially for their family and children (Mkhize, 2006). According to African tradition "a man is a man because he can provide for his family" (Mkhize, 2006), however without a job and with high rates of poverty in South Africa, many African men struggle to assert themselves as fathers.

4.3 Being a Single Mother

The rise in number of single parents has been noted across all sectors of societies all over the world. Single parenthood usually results from separation or divorce, death and pregnancy out of wedlock. The widespread problems with AIDS and the increasing rate of teenage pregnancy also add to the mix. The more traditional South African communities still believe that mothers should be responsible for rearing the children and giving care within the home.

To strengthen the above point of view, one participant said that:

> "If the father of your child does not want you anymore there is nothing you can do. There are a lot of mothers who raise their children without their fathers and the children just grow to be responsible men and women, you can't force a man to love his children if he does not want to. You just have to find means to raise your children and leave him alone."

It shows clearly that most women have made peace in their minds that they are the ones that have to struggle for their children to survive and men can only make a choice whether they want to be part of their children's lives or not. Fathers are not given

responsibility in any way and maybe that is why they don't even feel guilt for not contributing to their children's upbringing.

Being a single mother comes with negative impacts in most accounts. It is no wonder that being a single parent can be very stressful. It requires managements of behavioral, emotional and spiritual aspects of the parent. Some participants mentioned that:

> *"Being a single parent is heavy itself because all the challenges that you face as a mother you have to find a way of dealing with them even if you are puzzled yourself. There are some cases issues that you can tell that if there was a father figure he was going to handle them better than you do as a woman."*

One other participant concurred with the above and said that:

> *"Sometimes as a single mother I face challenges that I feel like if the father of my children was around he was going to deal better with them. More especially when male children reach around the age of 16 years, they just need a father to talk to them and guide the on life in general. It burdens me as a single mother."*

Single parenting is not only about divorce but some parents have never been married; others have survived the death of their loved one. These parents are impacted by the same issues faced by divorced parents: isolation, lack of support, financial struggles and emotional overwhelm. When an adult is constantly stressed, the child absorbs and mirrors these negative feelings. The issue of being a single mother does not only affect the mothers themselves, but can also have such negative impacts on children too.

One participant highlighted that:

> *"Sometimes at home when we face some hardships, poverty in most cases, my children like to say that if their father was around they wouldn't be struggling. That pains me because I feel like I am not doing enough for my*

children and that is why they can feel the gap of their father's absence. But I am not working so there is nothing much I can do but do my best."

As divorces increase, so do the chances for South African children to be exploited. Extreme poverty forces single parents to abandon their children, increasing the number of orphans and children living in the streets. Another reason sighted for single parents abandoning their children is the fact that foster parents receive more financial support that do single parents. A single parent in extreme poverty may hope that the child will get better care from foster parents.

The case of absent fathers is far deeper that attended to, it bears negative outcomes to most families and thus affects the children's development directly so and also affects how they interact with the society out of their families. Single mothers may try and come up with strategies to deal with challenges is their household and if those strategies fail to work, they might relapse and perceive themselves as being incapable parents.

4.4 Roles of a Father in a Child's Life/in a Household

There are different roles that fathers play in their children's lives and in the family at large. Other than just being a biological father, the essence of fatherhood comes with certain responsibilities that may vary from culture to culture or from household to household, but some are uniform. The participants acknowledged that fathers have great responsibilities and roles that they need to play in a child's life or at home.

4.4.1 Provision of physical needs

Out of all the responsibilities that have been noted, the most frequent one that the participants mentioned is the provision of physical needs in a family. That may mean that if a man is unemployed and is unable to meet the physical needs of his children and wife, he might feel less of a father. Being a father is attached to being a bread winner in most rural families where women don't usually work. It has been made a norm that men should leave their families and go for work to provide for their families,

that's how men get recognised as responsible fathers. Without a job, fathers often struggle to be respected in families and being happy with their children.

One participant asserted that:

> *"A father is very important in a household. His roles are many, but just to mention a few, a father have a role of being the head of the family, taking decisions at home, guiding the children and his wife but most importantly provide foods, clothes and shelter for his children."*

Another participant alleged that:

> *"A father's role is to ensure that the family have food and are safe. Even if a woman can work, but a father is known to be the provider in his family, a woman's salary can just help but a man is the provider."*

This is buttressed by Shows and Gerstel (2009), that most men emphasize employment as being central to the understanding and practice of fatherhood. South Africa's increasing rate of unemployment, especially among Black male South Africans, limits the ability for fathers to provide financially for their family and children (Mkhize, 2006). According to African tradition "a man is a man because he can provide for his family" (Mkhize, 2006), however without a job and with high rates of poverty in South Africa, many African men struggle to assert themselves as fathers.

4.4.2 Being the head of the family

The traditional patriarchal father figure in African cultures, according to Lesejane (2006), is not just the head of the household but also carries many responsibilities that exhibit good fathering. These responsibilities include enforcing moral authority and guidance for the family and children; becoming a leader and being responsible for the affairs of the family; being the primary provider of the family's material needs such as food and shelter; being a protector of one's family and children against any perceived threats; and becoming a good role model especially for their sons so they in turn can embody the values of good fatherhood (Lesejane, 2006).

The participants have highlighted that despite the provision of material needs, a father still remains a fundamental head of the family, signifying being the leader of the family. They mentioned one role of being the decision maker in the family and directing how the family should be run, setting rules for the children and his wife on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable to do in the family.

One participant alluded:

> "A father is someone who make decisions in the family and set out rules in the family. As a wife I should listen to what he says and implement without hesitation because he is the one who knows what is good for the family. He should be there to guide the behaviour of the children and teach them goo practices in life."

Another participant coincided with the above and held that:

> "A father's role in the family is to lead the wife and children forth. He is the head that makes decisions and give direction to the family. By norm, a wife cannot make any decision in a household without involving a father because it will seem disrespectful if she does so."

That proves that fathers are having a responsibility of leading families and entrusted with the power to take fruitful decisions in the family. When a father is absent, that's where the mother feels the obligation of executing the roles that are supposed to be performed by the father and at times it becomes overwhelming for mothers to do so.

4.4.3 Role modelling and behaviour guiding

Most of the participants indicated that as single mothers, it is often hard to lead the family and at the same time be role models to the children in the family, here they referred mostly to male children. The participants alluded that when a male child reaches teenage stage, there is a strong need of a father's role where the father needs to be there to guide the young man into what does being a man mean. They also

highlighted challenges with managing the behaviour of children alone as single mothers, they said that is usually the role of a father to maintain order and harmony in the family.

Some of the participants emphasised:

> *"It is a father's role to maintain order in the family and guide the behaviour of children in the right direction. Dealing with teenage boys' behaviour is purely a father's role. Making sure that the boy understands the concept of being responsible man."*

4.5 Effects of Absent Fathers in Child's Life

Acknowledged biological fatherhood, at least as a manifestation of lineage, is a very important element of identity development. Children take their clan name from their father and, in times past, children, like the famed Zulu King Shaka (1787-1828) were humiliated for being fatherless. Today, being considered fatherless generates in children a sense of loss and a great deal of confusion (Ramphele, 2002).

It can be noted that the issue of absent-fathers causes more harm than good. The participants have stated that there are a lot of negative effects that are being brought by fathers' absenteeism. This ranges from emotional riot in children, economic struggle and the social encounters cause d by absent fathers. A discussion of the three noted effects will be discussed consecutively below.

4.5.1 Emotional effects

Children whose father is absent often experience emotional challenges. This may be because of the curiosity by the children about who exactly their biological father is and how he might be behaving. Sometimes when looking at families around themselves, children often envy the benefits that the fathers give to their children and that cause emotional glitches to the children. This effect of emotional agony is mostly felt by boy children as they should be seeing their fathers as their role models and wanting to be

like them as any other children would wish to, but when the father is absent it then emotionally break the child.

One participant alluded that:

> *"Whenever my children talk nor ask about their father, you could tell that the issue really not sitting well with them. The other day my child even said that if his father was around he wouldn't be having any worries knowing that his father is there to give him all that he can as from him, be it clothes, cell phones, etc..."*

4.5.2 Economic effects

Most of the participants were unemployed, thus the absence of the children's fathers often left a gap in the economic needs of the children. Single mothers struggle to put food on the table on their own and at times as they are having no one to help them, they are not able to meet all the family needs. That means the children have to suffer at times. In most rural areas like Mphanama, having a father in the family means less poverty, so if there is no father that might mean a serious struggle. As a matter of a norm in the society, mothers are expected to remain at home and look after the children while fathers may even go far to look for employment to feed their families.

Most participants have mentioned this effect to be more prevalent in their area. Some of the participants' comments were:

> *"When there is a father in the family, as a mother I can worry about other things except the monetary standing of the family. Fathers are known to feed their families and always have means of making money so that the children can grow. So in the absence of a father as single mothers we really get stressed and the children too notice that if there was a father in the family things were going to be much better."*

Another participant also said that:

> *"Honestly speaking, having no father in the family brings nothing but a struggle. Poverty play with us as single mithers because we are unemployed and yet we have children that are supposed to eat every day, bath, wear and live normal lives like others. But with no employment and no help from the children's father it's really a struggle and only God just keep us going."*

Single mothers find themselves in situations that stress them out because the children want things that the mother cannot afford. Raising a child is very expensive and without being employed it can even be more difficult.

4.5.3 Social effects

On the other side of the coin, if there are foreseen benefits to having paternal care then there may be disadvantages in not having paternal care. Almost any kind of social pathology has been linked to children with absent fathers including drug and alcohol abuse, criminal involvement, teen pregnancy and suicide (Baskerville, 2002). Cabrera et al. (2000) have established five debilitating consequences of paternal absence. These include the absence of co-parenting for the child; economic loss which frequently accompanies single motherhood; the social isolation or disapproval often experienced by single or divorced mothers and their children; psychological distress in the children of absent fathers; and conflict which may arise between the present mother and absent father. Advocates of the claim that paternal absence causes a host of social, emotional and behavioural problems often "conflate and misconstrue research" (Flood, 2003).

Most participants indicated that this issue of absent fathers is a serious challenge and its often visible amongst the children on how they interact with the society different from those children that come from families with both parents. The participants have said that being a single mother with a lot of things to deal with in a household, you end

up lacking to be there socially for your children and that is visible when they start to behave in a deviant way from other children.

One participant said:

> *"The effects of this issue where visible on my children because the other one once told me that if their fathers were with them he was going to be happy and ask him al that he would like to have. I can tell as a mother that my son was talking with a painful heart."*

The other one alleged that:

> *"I think this issue have affected my child a lot because every time he would ask about his fathers and I can tell that the face doesn't have a spark when he talks about the issue."*

One could express that socially the issue of absent fathers affects the children negatively and some end up engaging in unacceptable behaviour as their way of dealing with their stress. Some children without fathers opt to drink alcohol and smoke knowing their single mothers have less power to discipline them. Like the participants have highlighted, it could be better if the father was present and they could hold hands together in raising the children and making sure that their lives are socially healthy.

4.6 Disclosing the Biological Father to the Children

On this issue, the participants have raised their feelings about disclosing the biological father to the children. Most of them seemed not to have a problem disclosing the biological father to the children if they are not yet married, but they seemed to have a problem disclosing the biological father of the children if they happen to get married by another man. One participant said:

> *I think it's good for the children to know their biological father, even if he does not want to take care of them. It becomes simpler when I am still single as their mother, but it becomes a challenging issue if I am married to*

another man because my children have to know him as their father and give
him a full respect as their father."

Yet another participant said almost the same thing that:
> *"It is not good to keep the truth from the children about their father. It is*
> *better you tell them clearly who is their biological father and why is he not*
> *with them. The truth is the one that can fix the whole situation of the children*
> *questioning about their father. It is only fair that you tell them when their*
> *ages are around adolescence because children usually get curious around*
> *that age."*

The issue of marriage still come in on the issue of disclosure. Most participants alluded that it is not good if you are married to someone else who is not the biological father of your children, who is taking care of them and stays with them, yet you tell the children about their biological father who is not eve in the picture. It only causes confusions to the children and complications at home. If not treated with caution, this issue often threatens peace in most families as some children starts to disregard the man who married their mother and disrespect him with an excuse that he is not their father so he cannot tell them what to do and not what to do.

The issue of disclosure of the biological father to the children cannot be treated in isolation as it is, because it is affected by most issues including culture and beliefs too. Some beliefs will pressurise the mother to tell the children about their biological father because it is believed that if they are connected with their paternal family that's where they will get their blessings and things will go well in their lives.

4.7 Culture and absent fathers

4.7.1 Definition of a father in Northern-Sotho culture

Contributing biologically to the conception of a child, however, does not necessarily make a man into father. In South Africa there exists a very strong conception of a 'social father', an ascribed, as opposed to an attained status. A saying from one local

language, Sepedi, stresses that '*ngwana ga se wa šete, ke wa kgoro*', plainly meaning that a sperm does not beget a child a man becomes a father, and is treated with the respect attached to the role, when he takes responsibility for his family and becomes a role model of appropriate behaviour for young men in the society (Lesejane, 2006).

The way the participants defined the concept of a father was more than just being a biological father. They dwelled much on the social context of a father and the roles that the father is expected to perform according to *Sepedi* culture. Thy defined a father as a man who married the mother of the children and take care of the children. One of the respondents said:

> *"Being called a father doesn't come automatically by giving birth to a child, in our culture, it takes one who have committed to marry the mother of the children and have followed the right procedures to send his parents to knock at the woman's family and vow to take responsibilities. Even if one has to marry a woman with two children from another man, by mere fact that he is getting married to the women then automatically he is the father of the children. The biological father who did not marry the woman practically loses his fatherhood right over the children. The children go with their mother where she gets married and it will be disrespectful for the biological father to go and claim the children who are married at the other clan."*

The above respondent merely denotes that the concept of fatherhood does not rely on biology but rather marriage as valued in Northern-Sotho culture. There are certain customs that are usually performed by men to be granted a tittle of a father. Even if a man might not have yet fully married women, but he has at least send delegates from his family and clan to go a represent him where he has impregnated a woman or have a baby, then it is only then when the two families formally know each other that he can exercise his fatherhood roles liberally. Failure to conform to the mentioned standards might result in one not being recognised as a father as such. To substantiate this, one other respondent maintained that:

> *"Even if you can have several children with a woman but not marry in our culture you will never be regarded as a father. Yes, the children might know you when you visit them but in actual fact you will never earn the respect you deserve from the community of being called a father. The saying that 'ngwana ke wa kgomo' is true."*

One other aspect that remains notable and frequent from the respondents' replies remain the issue of the provision of the material needs by a man to be labelled as a real father. From the majority of the respondents, for a man to be recognised he needs to be willing and able to maintain his children. That is possible when one is able to provide the material needs to his children. One respondent alluded:

> *"A real father always finds a way to feed his children. A father can sacrifice so much to put food on the table to see to it that his children do not go to bed with empty stomach."*

This also puts pressure and discourage men who are unemployed and cannot provide the material needs for their families to regard themselves as fathers. It is clean that if one cannot maintain his children with money, food and other material needs, then the likelihood is that that particular father might distance himself from being there for his children socially and in other ways.

The definition of a father in Northern-Sotho culture again doesn't leave out the sense of a father to be there for his wife and children. Some respondents have mentioned that a father is someone who is supportive towards his wife and can be there as a leader of the family and actually make sure that the family is safe and in good health. Fathers are defined by their behaviour and their willingness to take responsibility in defending the family and ensuring that no harm come near them.

4.7.2 Power imbalances in parents' domination in parenting

There seems to prevail some kind of an imbalance in parents' domination over the children in Northern-Sotho culture. Mothers feel to be having more domination and power over the child immediately from birth. That escalate to a point where even after the mother's passing away, maternal families still remain with more responsibilities and domination over the children despite the fact that their biological fathers is still alive or not. One participant indicated that:

> "A child belongs to a woman. It has always been like that and it will not easily change. That's why when a child cries, he will never call up his father's name for help but will definitely call up a mother's name."

Another respondent coincided with the above and said that:

> "A child belongs to a woman and we have more power over the child as woman. A father yes is important in the child's life but will never overpower a woman. That is why if a woman can pass away first before a man, it is difficult for the father to remain and take care of the children on his own but we see a lot of mothers doing that after the fathers passing away or if he does not want to be part of the child's life."

From the way the respondents reacted to the question, it could be said that woman have made in their minds that they are tight by giving birth to be there with their children but them man can make a choice not to be involved in upbringing their biological children. This trend of power imbalances is rooted in some men's minds that they don't feel a sense of responsibility over their children and some deliberately stay away to run from the responsibility of maintaining their children financially. Most women who are also unemployed often find themselves having to raise children alone in absentia of fathers, that some of them they know very well and their whereabouts but they just don't show interest in raising their children.

4.7.3 Qualities of an ideal father in Northern-Sotho culture

During the interviews with the single mothers, they have mentioned some qualities of an ideal father in Northern-Sotho culture. The common qualities that they have mentioned are that a father needs to be someone who have love for his children and wife spontaneously. The respondents said that a father should be able to stand along with his wife and children in all circumstances and hold the task of raising the children together with his wife and not run away from responsibilities. They mentioned that a father should someone who is not a stranger to his children but can actually sit them down and talk with them issues that needs to be talked and also give them guidance on life generally. One respondent alluded:

> *"A father should be a friend to his family and be a partner to his wife and help her raise the children. Not only provide food but also be there for them to provide the emotional support, social support and spiritual support at all costs possible. The children will also feel his presence and appreciate having him knowing that apart from their mother, there is actually another parent that they can depend on."*

A father is expected to be someone who carries the responsibility of his family and ensure the children's wellbeing and actually be supportive towards the mother of his children in raising them with good morals. The issue at some point concaved with modelling to male children that fathers should teach their male children on what does being a man mean in their culture. That is part of the socialisation that strengthen the importance of a father in children's lives.

4.8 Marriage and Absent-Fathers

4.8.1 Effects of marital status on involvement of fathers in their children's upbringing

In his novel (Johnny, 2011) Jonny Steinberg's protagonist, Sizwe Magadla, mourns the fact that he hasn't paid "*lobola*", bride-price, and thus the two children he has with his

lover are not his own. He feels castrated, not in the sense that he cannot father children, but in the sense that he cannot father children he can claim as his own – a man without descendants and thus without permanence.

This have been witnessed in most accounts across many African cultures. A marriage is used as a tool to determine who is a father and who is not. This also affects men as it's not everyone who afford to marry, but it happens that one has a child or even more than one child out of wedlock. In that case, according to Northern-Sotho culture, a man has to pay damages to the family that he has a child in and see to it that he marries within a reasonable time to gain full access and control over his children. A marriage signifies acceptance of responsibilities over your children other than your wife. No matter how old one may be on age, you will always be seen a boy if you have not married. Some families even deny a man access to even have contact with his children if he hasn't paid the damages as a sign that he will marry their daughter. A participant held that:

> *"A marriage is very important in our culture because it serves as a sign that a man is really serious about his children. If you have not married and has children with a woman, and another man happen to marry the woman, the children will no longer be yours but the man who married the mother will take full responsibility of the children too."*

There is a Northern-Sotho saying that *'kgomo e gapwa le namane'*, simply meaning that if a man marries a woman who have children, the children become part of the package. So marital status of parents has a very serious impact on the involvement of fathers in their children's upbringing. Men who have not married find it hard at times to be part of their children's live. Some even try to contribute to their children's upbringing by means of money and buying their children clothes, sadly some families reject the contributions as the maternal families claim that they will take carer of their grandchild.

It becomes better in some rare instances where fathers get the privilege of being allowed to support their children even if their mother got married by another man. The cultural rituals at times also serve to connect the children with their biological fathers. For people who believe in ancestral beliefs, they believe that for the children to have a better life and future, they need to have a connection with their paternal families and also get connected with the ancestors from the paternal family's side.

So, the issue of marital status has a very huge effect on the involvement of fathers in their children's upbringing. The effects are often clearly visible on young people who are still under their parents' care and depend financially from them. In many accounts, the maternal families want to dominate and have more powers over the child of their daughter and give less consideration about the father's involvement simply because the young man have not married their daughter. That is also witnessed by excluding the father's details on the details on the birth certificate of the child in many accounts and it be reported as father unknown whereas in actual fact the father is well known.

4.8.2 The power of marriage in fathers' involvement according to Northern-Sotho culture

Marriage is regarded as a sign of commitment according to Northern-Sotho culture. It carries a lot of weight regarding the issue of fathers' involvement in the child's life. In actual circumstance, a marriage is not only about the couple but the families and clans where the couple come from. If a man has not married or paid '*lobola'* to the family that he has a child in, then chances are that he might not be recognised as a father to his children but rather the maternal grandfather play a father role on the children. It has been observed in many accounts where children know and call their maternal grandfather as their father. It is only when their biological father pays damages, *lobola* or marry their mother where he can get full recognition as a father. The respondent also highlighted a marriage as a very significant step into allowing a father to fully exercise his fatherhood rights.

4.3 Conclusion

The phenomenon of absent-fathers still remains a challenging issue in many communities. Fathers don't have it easy as there are a lot of other issues having a very strong influence on the phenomenon. There are distinct ways of defining fatherhood and that determine whether the father will be involved or absent. The critical aspects that hinder this significant role ranges from culture, beliefs, marital status and the personal intentions of the children's parents, specifically the children's biological fathers in this most cases. Other issues that influence the issue of fatherhood are social influences, economic influences and even historical influences of how fatherhood have been conceptualised all along. The concept of fatherhood has to be redefined in order to try and change society's perspectives on fatherhood and the importance of fatherhood be given enough consideration. The government can strategize on ways to encourage fathers to develop more interest in becoming involved in the upbringing of their children and actually realise the negative impacts that come with their absence and also the benefits of being tangled in their children's lives.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the major findings drawn from the study on Perceptions of the Phenomenon 'Absent Fathers' Within the Context of Mphanama Community, conclusion and recommendations. Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006) argue that, after interpreting the findings it is useful too summary the aims of the research compare them with the findings and draw conclusion on how much and in which manner the goal has been achieved. This chapter will further present the re-statement of the problem aim of the study and objectives of the study.

5.2 Restatement of the Research Problem

The issue of absent fathers is often related to family dysfunction and leads to other social problems. This is frequently visible in rural families of low-economic-class where the father figure is usually seen as the sole provider for the family. This scrutiny is also supported by the study conducted by Kelly (2013) who argues that most men emphasize employment as being central to the understanding and practice of fatherhood. He continues to allude that according to African tradition "a man is a man because he can provide for his family", however without a job and with high rates of poverty in South Africa, many African men struggle to assert themselves as fathers simply because they cannot be able to support their children financially. This shows that there is a need for an alternative understanding of manhood and responsible fatherhood.

Moreover, upon the researcher's observation around the subject of fatherhood in general, he is of the view that the absence of a father in the child's life can have some negative effects on the child's life and the family in question at large. Ramphele (2002)

supported this observation that the mistrust between parent and child can further be exacerbated if the unknown parent's identity is revealed by an indirect source. Manyatshe (2012) also concurred with the above research that the non-disclosure can result in negative dynamics within the family.

One other factor that came to the researcher's realization is that children often get curious in knowing who their fathers are, more especially when they reach the adolescent stage where everyone tends to start making sense of their identities. Manyatshe (2012) supports this observation that absent and unknown biological fathers have reported that affected adolescents and youth were apprehensive about asking the mothers and caregivers about their fathers. Kelly (2013) coincided with the researcher in the paper about individuals presenting themselves for therapy due to not knowing their biological fathers and he argues that the child's expressed interest in their biological parents can be interpreted by both the parents and child as an assault on the familial allegiance, thus children often suppress their desire to ask their caregivers about their true fathers. This shows a great concern from the children in knowing their biological fathers.

The researcher is of the view that the phenomenon of absent fathers still needs to be studies intensely as not much work have been done on the subject thus far. This view is supported by Kelly (2013) that there appears to be a negative perception in the media and research literature about the commitment and role of South African fathers.

5.3 Re-statement of the Aim and Objectives of the Study

5.3.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of the phenomenon 'Absent Fathers' in Mphanama Community. This aim was achieved.

5.3.2 The objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were:

▪ To assess the effects of culture and believes on the domination of parenting.

This objective was achieved. Culture and believes have found to be having a very notable impact on the domination of parenting. There are certain standards that fathers need to meet so that they can be recognised as fathers. There are definite norms that are commonly held by the society that play a very huge role on the domination of parenting. The effects of culture go deeper than just a personal choice of who is dominant between a mother and a father. This cultural practices that affects the domination of parenting are passed through from one generation to another. Even in the mist of modernisation, those cultural customs still prevail and continue to affect the domination of parenting. It has been noted that in Northern-Sotho culture, mothers dominate the children by default from birth. Instead its fathers who have to always prove themselves to be worth fathers and having to meet certain criterions in order to get acknowledgement as fathers. This cultural and believes effects often favours mothers other than fathers and forms part of the reasons why some of the fathers end up being absent form their children's upbringing. This calls for serious need to revisit and relook some cultural and believe practices so that they can be adjusted to be fair and just to people being implicated, specifically fathers.

This is supported by Paquette (2010) and Tamis-Lemonda (2004) that fatherhood is not simply a social invention but rather a biological necessity of child development. Understanding the experience and meaning of fatherhood in South Africa may encourage fathers to become more involved in their children's lives and foster a more positive image of fathers (Hinckley, Ferreira & Maree, 2007).

▪ To debunk the myth that marital status of parents determines the involvement of fathers in their children's upbringing.

This objective was achieved. Most specifically in Northern-Sotho culture, a marriage is found to be often used as a tool to detect who is appropriate to be a father and who is

not. There is found to be some kind of a symbolic meaning of a marriage other than just being a matrimonial union of two people. A marriage is seen as assign of commitment of a man to take care of his children and be part of their upbringing. Without being married, men are less seen as fathers and are not given full acknowledgement as ideal fathers. Although there are in some accounts, fathers that are not married but are fully involved in their children's upbringing, there are few of those accounts. In most cases unmarried fathers are given less acknowledgement, mistreated by the maternal families when they have to see their children and in some extreme cases some fathers are denied access to even have contact with their children.

This is supported by a novel (Johnny, 2011) Jonny Steinberg's protagonist, Sizwe Magadla, mourns the fact that he hasn't paid "*lobola*", bride-price, and thus the two children he has with his lover are not his own. He feels castrated, not in the sense that he cannot father children, but in the sense that he cannot father children he can claim as his own – a man without descendants and thus without permanence.

- To establish who is seen as having the majority power over the child in Northern Sotho culture as compared to other cultures.

This objective was achieved. To answer the question of power, there are some aspects and conditions revolving around the issue. The ultimate power though seems to be given to mothers. By giving birth to the children, mothers by default gain majority powers over the child. Fathers only get a portion of power to their children after they have met certain standards as alluded throughout the study. A man needs to complete certain tasks to prove himself to be worth a father and failure by which he might not be recognised as a father. The aspect of a marriage or paying *'lobola'* seems to be regular in all debates. In the Northern-Sotho culture, a man gains power and control over the children after paying the bride price to the woman's family.

5.4 Summary of the Major Findings

The following are the findings of this study:

- The absenteeism of fathers in the children's upbringing have undesirable effects towards the children and their mothers and in most cases women find themselves burdened by the responsibility of raising the children alone without fathers' help even if some fathers are still alive;

- Single motherhood come with stress of playing a role of a mother and trying to fill the gap of a father at the same time and it often comes with emotional strain, stress and the confusion. Economic struggle is also found to be prevailing in families with absent fathers hence most single mothers are unemployed and are still having the responsibility of providing for their children alone;

- The way in which fatherhood is being conceptualised and understood play a very huge role in determining whether fathers will get involved in their children's lives. Hinckley, Ferreira and Maree (2007) emphasized that understanding the experience and meaning of fatherhood in South Africa may encourage fathers to become more involved in their children's lives and foster a more positive image of fathers;

- Culture and beliefs have found to be playing a very significant role in influencing the fathers' involvement in the upbringing of their own children. There are standards and criterions that fathers need to meet in order to be recognised as fathers and have the freedom to be part of their children's day-to-day life;

- Fatherhood in Northern-Sotho-culture is defined by being able to fulfil certain responsibilities and taking care of the family, mostly being able to provide the material needs to your children. Unemployed fathers often feel discouraged to make efforts in being part of their children's lives because they are given less consideration on most cases. This is buttressed by Shows and Gerstel (2009), that most men emphasize employment as being central to the understanding and

practice of fatherhood. South Africa's increasing rate of unemployment, especially among Black male South Africans, limits the ability for fathers to provide financially for their family and children (Mkhize, 2006). According to African tradition "a man is a man because he can provide for his family" (Mkhize, 2006), however without a job and with high rates of poverty in South Africa, many African men struggle to assert themselves as fathers;

- The essence of fatherhood is very broad and people hold different perceptions around it. That itself affects the involvement of fathers in the children's lives. The issue of fatherhood is also found to be influenced by social circumstances. The traditional patriarchal father figure in African cultures, according to Lesejane (2006), is not just the head of the household but also carries many responsibilities that exhibit good fathering;

- The absenteeism of fathers in the children's upbringing affects the children negatively as they envy their peers around them when they talk about their fathers. This also cause emotional and psychological strain to children as they have unanswered questions about their fathers at times. Ramphele (2002) stressed that today, being considered fatherless generates in children a sense of loss and a great deal of confusion. Acknowledged biological fatherhood, at least as a manifestation of lineage, is a very important element of identity development. Children take their clan name from their father and, in times past, children, like the famed Zulu King Shaka (1787-1828) were humiliated for being fatherless;

- Marriage is mostly used as a factor to determine whether one is fit to be a father in Northern-Sotho culture. Unmarried fathers find it hard to be involved in their children's lives and in some points find themselves being denied access to their children because they haven't married; and

- Mothers get the ultimate power and domination over the children from birth. Fathers' involvement is the one that have to be questioned as the power imbalances do prevail between the parents.

5.5 Conclusions

Based on the above findings, the study can conclude that:
- The absenteeism of fathers creates negative effects towards children;
- Being a single mother and having to run the household in the absence of a man comes with emotional stress distortion, stress and economic strain;
- Fatherhood is being conceptualised separately from being a biological father of the child but the responsibilities that one has to carry;
- Culture and beliefs have a very huge effect on the domination of parenting;
- A marriage is used as a tool to determine who is a father in Northern-Sotho culture;
- Mothers are having domination power over fathers according to Northern-Sotho culture; and
- The issue of absent fathers affects negatively the children.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends that:
- People should redefine the concept of fatherhood separate from provision of material needs and look at other benefits of father's involvement holistically in the child's life other than material needs;
- The government come up with ways and strategies to encourage fathers in becoming more involved in their children's upbringing;
- The government develop policies that will minimise the absence of fathers and ensure that fathers take their responsibilities in their children's upbringing without being hindered by culture; and

- Culture should have limitations and be modified in order to suit the needs of the children as they are the central concern in the whole phenomenon of absent fathers.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATION IN STUDY INFORMED CONSENT

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PHENOMENON 'ABSENT FATHERS' WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MPHANAMA COMMUNITY.

University of Limpopo

Sekgale Israel Lehlokwe

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(Email address: lehlokwe@gmail.com)

INFORMED CONSENT

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Dear participant

My name is Sekgale Israel Lehlokwe. I am currently enrolled with the University of Limpopo to study Masters in Social Work in the Department of Social Work. You are invited to participate in the face to face interview that will assist in collecting information for the research from you.

PURPOSE

It is to explore the perceptions of the phenomenon 'Absent Fathers' in Mphanama Community.

PROCEDURE

As a participant you will be enrolled in the study and you are requested to participate in the face to face interview which will take not more than 45 minutes of your time. You are free to ask where you do not understand for clarity.

RISK

The face to face interview is not intended to harm you any how whether physically or psychologically. Any feeling of discomfort you are welcomed to ask the researcher with no force.

COSTS AND FINANCIAL RISKS

There are no financial costs directly or indirectly associated with participation in this study.

BENEFITS

There is no guarantee that you will benefit directly from the study.

COMPENSATION

You will not receive any compensation for participation in this study.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to participate.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made by the researcher to keep all information gathered in this study strictly confidential, except as may be required by court order or by law. You are not expected to provide your name, surname, persal number, and identity number to ensure confidentiality. If any publication results from this research you will be identified either by name, surname or identity.

DISCLAIMER/WITHDRAWAL

You agree that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and that you may withdraw at any time without prejudicing your standing within The University of Limpopo Social Worker Department.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

If you have any questions pertaining to your participation in this study, you may contact the principal investigator **SEKGALE ISRAEL LEHLOKWE** by telephoning **079 258 5487**.

CONCLUSION

By signing below, you are indicating that you have read and understood the consent form and that you agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____

Participant's signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's signature   Date

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SINGLE MOTHERS

Title of the study: **Perceptions of the phenomenon 'Absent Fathers' within the context of Mphanama community**

1. **What is your experience in the context of absent fathers**?

   ▪ What does being a single mother feels like?
   ▪ What circumstances led to you being a single mother?
   ▪ What is a father's role, according to you, in a home?
   ▪ What are fathers supposed to be like?
   ▪ How does not having a father in the home influence your interaction with your children?
     E.g. divorce, death, never married, etc…
   ▪ Has your child/ren ever enquired about the whereabouts of father?
     ➢ How does he/she seem to feel about this?
     ➢ As a single mother how do you deal with this (the child enquiring)?
     ➢ How do you think the not knowing their father affects your child/ren?
     ➢ Do you plan on telling your child/ren who their father is?
     Probing: when?
   ▪ Whether the biological father knows of the child/ren's existence.
     ➢ Does the father of your child/ren know the whereabouts of his child/ren?
     ➢ If given a choice, would you want your child/ren to know who their biological father is?
   ▪ Has the biological father ever tried to be involved in the child's life?
     Please enlighten what transpired?

2. **Effects of culture and believes on the domination of parenting.**

   ▪ Who do you think possess more power over the child in your own believe and culture?

- Do you think culture have any effect on the absence of fathers in their children's lives?
  - Probing: if so, how?
- In your culture who is regarded as a father?
- In your culture what qualities should a real father should possess?
- Does your culture say anything about when is a father allowed to be in his child's life?
- Are there any cultural practices impeding the father's involvement in his child's life at any stage?

3. **Marital status of parents in relation to the involvement of fathers in their children's upbringing.**

- What is your marital status with your child/ren's father?
- Did that determine the father's involvement in the child's upbringing?
- Do you think marital status should be used as a tool to determine who can be a father?
  Support your answer: Why/ why not?
- Do you think unmarried fathers should be given the same chance of being fully involved in their children's upbringing?
  Please support your answer.
- What important elements does a marriage have in relation to the father's involvement in his child's life?
- Can you give any recommendations on how this issue of absent fathers can best be dealt with and increase the presence of fathers in their children's upbringing?

!! THANKS FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!