Access, quality and equity in education for sustainable development in Southern Africa: Child Development

By

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ABSTRACT

Men’s practices in children’s lives
Current practices have shown that most of coupled families are manned by mothers. The majority of fathers are engaged at workplaces. During their free time drinking holes have proved to be men’s entertainment place. The small house issue has also robbed some of the father’s time from their children. Whenever at home fathers appear to dedicate time to media, soccer, politics, and deals or are tired. In this scenario one wonders if men have influence on their children’s upkeep. This paper therefore seeks to establish whether fatherhood is still critical in the development of children. It would be proper to use a descriptive survey in order to establish views of randomly selected men, children and women, on the role being played by fathers in this present scenario. The main question being raised is do men still have time and great influence in their children’s lives, and what values are they inculcating to them?

Key words: Men, Children’s lives Practices and Role

BACKGROUND

Today, there is an increased emphasis on family-centred practice. Family-centred practice does not mean only mother-and-child-centred practice. Rather, all family members and individuals who play a role in the family should be engaged, when appropriate, in order to support meaningful outcomes for the entire family. Children deserve nurturing families and environments in which their physical, emotional, educational, and social needs are met.

In recent years men as fathers have been the subject of a number of research studies and reviews. There are many dimensions of the contributions of men that are yet to be examined. The studies conducted to date have examined the ways in which fathers are directly involved with the family, through caring for and interacting with the child and/or through their relationship with the mother. They also examine the other ways fathers contribute to the family through the provision of material goods, economic support, and shelter. In essence research shows that fathers can positively affect their children’s development through appropriate interactions.

Men affect children in profound and diverse ways. As fathers and family members both their contributions and their failures to contribute have great impact on the health and development of children. In their roles outside the family, as teachers, community leaders, religious leaders, health providers and policymakers; men make decisions that often shape the capability of families to help young children thrive. When these influential men have supportive attitudes toward young children and when they are well-informed about young children's needs, they are more likely to facilitate the establishment of solid programming efforts. When, by contrast, influential men are dismissive of the importance of the early years, or carry misconceptions about what young children need, then programs to help young children are often blocked, unsustainable.

Both children and women are interdependent with the men in their lives. Programming for young children and the family needs to reflect and address this reality if it is to effectively support quality experiences for young children.

Within the last few years there has been an increasing interest in looking at the relationship between fathers and their children. In December 1993, a meeting was held in Mexico.

Researchers and practitioners from Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, and the United States met to discuss the roles and responsibilities of men in relation to their children. In June 1994, UNICEF and the Population Council hosted a workshop for researchers from universities in Brazil, the Caribbean and the US to
discuss the traditional role of the father as it relates to health and nutrition programming, the relation of fathering to Early Childhood Care and Development and to design programs that provide complementary gender equality roles (Engle, 1994). In May 1993, a meeting was held in Italy to promote and encourage increased participation by men in the care and upbringing of children. Research conducted in the North revealed that when fathers are significant in the child's life from birth, the children score higher on intelligence tests than children whose fathers are less involved. Engle and Townsend (1994) observed that children who have good or ongoing relationships with their fathers appear more likely to do better at school and to have fewer behavioural problems. Engle and Breaux (1994) note that one of the most significant impacts of father involvement with the child is on the father himself. The more the father cares for the child, the more he becomes involved with the child, develops care giving skills and gain confidence.

In traditional cultures men's and women's roles were clearly specified. For the most part they were functional, given the geographical and political context within which people lived and the demands on men and women within that setting. But the context is changing rapidly, as are the lives of individuals. All the major religions of the world define the roles for men and women clearly and separately. Yet within each of these religions there are significant differences in interpretation, presenting a continuum in terms of how strictly these definitions are adhered to in modern times. It is important to understand how religion interacts with other variables in a given culture to have an impact on the relationship that fathers are likely to have with their children (Engle, 1994).

For example, in Northern Pakistan there is strict adherence to differentiation of sex roles. In fact, for the most part, women are sequestered in the home and are not seen on the streets. Women are not allowed to interact with males outside of their family. However many would view this as negative in terms of women's rights. Men have to be involved in their children's lives. Male involvement, supported by responses from children and women, has measurable, positive effects on the development of children. Studying the effects of fathers' participation in the daily care and physical maintenance of infants, Pedersen and his colleagues found that the more actively involved a 6-month-old baby had been with his or her father, the higher that baby scored on the Bayley Scales of Infant Development (Pedersen et al., 1980).

The structure of a family, who is present, how the household is organized, and expectations of males and females in that setting all contribute to a definition of how men relate to young children.

In traditional families with an extended family system, in which there are grandmothers, aunts and/or other wives available to help care for young children, the father's role is limited and prescribed. The mother's father and/or brother were expected to be the father during the child's early years. They become the 'social fathers' for the child. One explanation for this may be related to the pattern of men's employment. Men are unlikely to be present during the child's formative years. However, as families become more nuclear in composition, care giving roles traditionally taken on by others may fall on the father (Pedersen et al., 1980).

A study in Brazil (Barros, 1994) looked at the relationship between the number of fathers who lived with their families and the relative poverty of the family. What Barros discovered was that there is a nearly linear relationship between family poverty and fathers living in the house. The poorer the family, the less likely the father is to be living with the mother and children. Ironically, even though women are earning less than men, they contribute a higher percentage of their income to the family than do fathers do.

Literature reveals that beyond the confines of the community there are men who have key roles in the development of national policy. Men are the predominant framers of policy. While their decisions are influenced by their own experiences, the political climate, the extent to which they are beholden to their supporters, and the strategies they think will keep them in power, knowledge also helps (Greenberg, 1995). Engie (1994a) reports about the June 1994 Workshop hosted by UNICEF and the Population Council. It was guided by questions concerning: the family structure, patterns of resource allocation, tasks performed by males and females, the constitutional and legal framework supporting gender equity, definition of masculinity and femininity, role of the father, the barriers to change toward a more gender-balanced family structure, toward a "new" father.

It was established that in sum, men represent approximately half of the population of the world. Men in both their professional and personal capacities are seldom aware of the importance of the early years in terms of children's later development, neither are they aware of their impact on the lives of children, nor of the joy they can receive from being a significant part of a child's life. Improved involvement of men in children's lives will bring much needed resources; both emotional and financial to the support of children's growth and development.

In many traditional cultures men played a significant role in the lives of children, particularly boys, as the children got older. The men were responsible for socialization tasks that would assure continuation of the culture. Boys served as apprentices to men in learning how to herd animals, hunt and/or follow the family craft within the village. Men were also responsible for socializing children into appropriate social roles, teaching them to respect their elders and the social mores of the culture. Thus men played a significant role in assuring that the child became a part of and was able to perpetuate the culture. These patterns continue in some cultures but in most there has been a marked change (Engle, 1994).

With the introduction of modernity, formal schools, contact with the world beyond the village, and the availability of mass media, children's ideas about what adults should do and be now come from a variety of
sources. These sources provide information and knowledge that fathers do not have. Thus the father is no longer seen as the primary source for learning.

Some men carry on the historical role of teacher by becoming teachers within the structure of the formal educational system. However, while we see many men involved in teaching at the higher levels of education, few men are involved in teaching the youngest children. In fact, in the higher grades of the educational system (and at University) the teachers are mostly men. Whereas, the younger the children being taught, the more likely it is that the teachers are women. Historically, in many cultures men have been primary school teachers but in many places, that is changing and teaching at this level is becoming more a woman's province. In some cultures this is appropriate (Greenberg, 1995). In the Northern Areas of Pakistan referred to earlier, where women are not 'visible', girls would not be allowed to go to primary school if the teachers were men. However, in most parts of the world this gender stratification of teaching roles has more to do with the status of young children than with social taboos. The younger the age of the children being taught the less status associated with the job. An examination of some of the issues faced by men who wish to work with young children was undertaken in the UK. The study resulted in a publication, that discussed issues raised by women working in childcare centres that affect men's recruitment and participation as staff members, and recommends a series of policy changes that would allow and encourage men to become more actively involved in caring for young children outside the home. In Zimbabwe echelons of policymakers and the majority of physicians are still predominantly men. However the electronic, print and social media are full of issues concerning misunderstanding of family members, divorce cases, extra marital affairs, “Sugar Dady” stories (GIGI), an increase of brothels, and beer halls, excessive beer drinking, sporting issues, stories of sexual abuse of children, rape, and an increase of maintenance issues. Hence the main questions being raised in this present scenario is; Are men still responsible for their children, if so what roles are they playing in relation to their children’s lives?

Objectives

- To examine men’s ‘contributions towards the family
- To determine the involvement of men in childcare services; i.e. changing the culture of the workplace to support increased participation by men in caring for children
- To establish whether men and women’s roles are more complementary towards child rearing
- To examine time parents spent with their children
- To examine how work related activities affect children’s lives
- To determine men's cultural identity as they relate to children's lives

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey design was adopted in order to come up with an in-depth understandings of feelings and views of mothers, fathers and children to generate data concerning men’s role in the Zimbabwean context with particular focus to Bindura District in Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe. Proportionate systematic random sampling was used to come up with 20 children, 40 men and 60 women.

Research Instruments

There were two distinct paths used to gather data:

1. A survey questionnaire was administered to a total of 50 men and 60 women from the community. A total of 50 questions probed a range of issues related to men's attitudes and behaviours about family life and childrearing.
2. The same issues were also explored in a series of discussion groups with children, men and women in the same or adjoining community as those surveyed. A male-female facilitation team guided these groups through participatory activities designed to evoke the same themes covered in the survey. The resulting discussions were recorded and findings compared to the harder data obtained in the survey.

In general, the methods were complementary and mutually reinforcing. This brief report will draw on findings from both approaches and will look particularly at some of the aspects of the man/woman relations which affect the lives of men and their children.

Findings

Man’s obligation/ contribution to the family

Data obtained was focused on man’s contributions to the family. This meant the researcher had to begin with a man's family of origin, in which obligations and expectations of a son are formed and often remain strong
throughout the male's lifetime. The study had to examine how the common multiple-union pattern of men tends to add on more complex obligations and expectations as the man gets older. In other words, a man's family is defined differently at different points in his life. There are familial responsibilities to parents (especially the mother), to his siblings and their children, to his baby mother(s) (women who bear his children), to his outside children (children he is not living with from other unions), and to children with whom he may now reside with a common-law or married wife.

Traditionally, Zimbabwean culture has been clear that a man's primary obligation to his family(ies), his role as a family man and father, is that of providing for the family. The study confirmed that the primary expectation, by both men and women, was that a good father should maintain the family financially (average 65% of all respondents). The study established that all the 60 (100%) women, 18 (90%) children and only 20 (40%) men thought that it was important for a father to; create a good family life, set an example, spend time and effort, provide discipline, "respect and interact with children positively. Thus there are very high expectations in terms of father playing an active role in raising the children on the part of women and children than on men.

**Characteristics of parents as Caregivers**

In terms of mother’s primary responsibility, in the community sixty percent (65%) of men thought it was the responsibility of women to care for children setting an example. In terms of other characteristics like showing love, showing respect, guide and counsel, economic support, "educate children", "communicate with and discipline children"—more than 80% of the sampled men viewed these as characteristics of good mothers. However all the women and children thought it was the responsibility of both parents to provide care. It would appear men are refraining from the care giving role leaving the sole responsibility to mothers.

On what happens to outside children? 34%—40% of the fathers in the sample had more than two baby mothers; 4%—14% had four or more. While 48%—63% of the fathers in the sample were living with at least one child from extra marital affairs, urban men under 30 years, predictably, were more likely to be in this group. Since large numbers of children do not live with their fathers, future research needs to examine the extent to which these outside children are responsibly step-fathered in subsequent family configurations, or are left feeling essentially fatherless.

On whether there was a re-definition of manhood that includes active fathering, given the Zimbabwean realities of high urban unemployment and generally high under-employment, the majority of respondents thought that there is need to encourage the trends, however tentative, in the direction of defining manhood and fatherhood and motherhood in broader terms that include nurturing, the sharing of domestic tasks and providing financially for the family.

A fairly typical scenario of the limited roles men play in infant and young child care comes from a study of child-rearing practices. The study revealed that 80% of the fathers do not get involved in any childcare until the child is three to four years of age. A few (20%) of the father's said their task is to provide food, clothes and general support during this time. At times the father will carry the child, but he is not involved in feeding, bathing or 'watching' the child. As the child grows older research established that (40%) of the fathers take a dominant role in teaching and disciplining the child. The father makes decisions related to illness, attendance at school, division of work within the household but very little on monitoring their children's school work progress/homework if ever they do its only a signature of acknowledgement.

Twenty percent of the men stated that fathers must not be the primary caregivers to have an impact on the child's development, they should simply need to take part on the child's daily life. Some men argued that it is more accurate to look at women's living arrangements.

For example, when one looks at female-headed households compared with women living without resident partners, the lack of a resident partner is a much more significant variable if we are looking at the potential for fathers to be involved in the lives of their children.

Similar findings emerged in a study from India, titled *The Girl Child and the Family: An Action Research Study*. (Anandalakshmy1994). It was indicated that although the number of Female-headed households is one indicator of whether or not fathers are present in children's lives, Bruce (1994) argues that studies have been conducted which look at the relationship between men's and women's income and how that affects children's growth and development. In essence they suggest that men and women allocate the resources they control differently. Women are more likely than men to use funds available to them to meet the needs of children. The majority of women (90%) suggested that it might be more appropriate to put greater effort into helping men change their priorities in terms of their spending, since women's work load is already considerably greater than men's. Men should be encouraged to give greater priority to the needs of children in the allocation of their income, rather than hitching on cultural perspectives thereby increasing their workload.

In sum, the literature would suggest that it is important in terms of the child's well-being for the father to be involved (in appropriate ways) with the child.
Components of Fathers and Mothers' role

The study showed that there are widespread common beliefs about the components of a father's role and a mother's role, and about the elements of responsibility required to be a good father. But the study also documented the widespread confusion and contradictions men and women experience as they try to live out these expectations in a socio-economic climate which makes fulfilling them very nearly impossible.

The findings from the study underscored the link between economic stability and family stability. For example, in the community sampled where there was the highest levels of post secondary education and less white-collar employment, men were more likely to be in a marriage or common-law union after age 30 and they had somewhat fewer children out side the present family than their peers in the other communities. A man is considered the “head” of the family when he provides economic support and does not “give up his responsibility" in terms of the family. In a typical discussion that took place respondents highlighted that in ancient time, men used to be the sole breadwinners, but not again now. Men nowadays have a different view of things; they either leave the house when responsibility is too great, or even when they stay they just refuse to perform the breadwinning role. So the woman has to do it for the sake of the children.

Time spend with children and the family

It was established that children spent about 11 waking hours a day in their mothers' care, one hour with both parents, and 42 minutes in their fathers' care.

However, studies show that fathers are conspicuously absent in terms of spending time with young children. In a cross-cultural study conducted, examining the lives of 4-16year-old children in Bindura district the researcher found that on average 80% of the children in the district spent 4 -8 hours at school or with maids and 8 hours in their mothers' care, and relatives and only 5% with their father. Research established that 30% of married women spent time with their husbands whilst 50 % of extra marital wives spent time with their prospective husbands. Another way that men can have a positive impact on their children's lives is through the kind of relationship they have with the child's mother and the kind of emotional support they provide. Similar findings were established by Breaux (1994); he concludes that the quality of the marital relationship is significantly associated with the nature of both the father-child and mother-child interaction. The more positive the relationship, the more involved the father is likely to be in childcare and vice versa. Of course causality can go either way. It was also noted that the quality of the father's relationship with his child is much more dependent on his relationship with his spouse or partner (the child's mother) than it is for the mother's relationship with her child. In other words, the father-child relationship is more contextual than the mother-child relationship. Hers tends to be consistent regardless of the strength of the marital or sexual bond. One implication of this research is that when there is disruption in the relationship between partners, men may need support if they are to maintain or strengthen their commitments and ability to relate appropriately to their children. A similar finding came from a study in Jamaica. There they identified two dimensions of the relationship between men's living with their partners and children and their ability to provide income for the family. First, fathers were more likely to stay if they could provide income, and second, women were more willing to allow the man to stay if he could provide (Brown et al., 1993).

A related study in Chile looked at the relative contributions that fathers made to the family based on their relationship with the mother and their ability to provide support. Research established that those fathers who felt they could make a significant contribution to the family in financial terms were more present and confident about their role within the family (Buvinic et al., 1992).

Work Related Activities and their Impact on Children’s Lives

It was established that when men can not find work in their community they are forced to migrate to other places. Sometimes fathers commute to the city while their families remain in the rural area. Fathers are then only available on weekends or during holidays. However, the search for work may involve moving to another area, as for example the men from the town and who thrive to survive as goldpanners (Makorokoza/ Ma Germany) moving from one part of the valley to another area seeking for gold migrate to work in the mines in Mazowe valley and The Great Dyke Belt in Zimbabwe, and some have joined neighbouring countries like Botswana, South Africa, Mozambique Zambia and the Western countries in search of greener pastures.

When the only work that can be found is at a distance, fathers can not be an integral part of their children's lives.

Studies of the work and care giving of families in the Bindura all indicated that the amount of care giving provided by the mother is more or less the same (she does 90% of care giving) regardless of whether or not she is working. The majority of men (90%) believed culturally that it was the responsibility of the mother to look after children and inculcate moral and social values. However, the majority of women tended to disagree and revealed that traditional norms, if inflexibly applied, can pose an impediment on a child’s development.
Whilst following findings were obtained, in Bindura District, similar findings were obtained from Indian girls and households. They went onto state that the role of the father in sharing activities with his children is so minimal that it reflects one of the great tragedies of Zimbabwean family life; the men have abrogated their responsibility of parenting. The tasks of providing for food, education and marriage are in a sense the economic duties of the father, but beyond what is the basic minimum the father steps out of the scene, surrendering his socialization role and losing the opportunity to develop emotional closeness with his children. There are no data to identify minimum amounts of time fathers would need to spend with their children in order to have a positive impact. However, it is clear from the data that despite any rhetoric about the desirability of men taking a more active, engaged role in their young children's lives, this is not yet occurring in a widespread, significant way. While it would be ideal if all fathers could be encouraged to become significantly involved in the lives of their children, the reality is that in many parts of the district, fathers are not even present.

Looking at data on the percentage of households that are female-headed in various parts of the district the numbers are increasing. Extrapolating from the research, one could make a strong argument for increasing the father's role in parenting young children because, in general, when fathers are involved there are positive outcomes for children.

Men as figurehead in the community

 Majority (90%) of the men are of the view that while there has been some cross-cultural research to support a universal argument that fathers need to be more involved in the lives of their children, it is critical to look more fully at what is known about cross-cultural differences, the impact of different religious beliefs, and differences across cultures in maternal behaviour. It was established that there are a variety of cultural dimensions that determine the effectiveness of the roles fathers play in relation to their children.

 Ninety percent of women interviewed expressed the need for men to be provided with a better understanding of child development, so as to provide them with experiences with young children so that they could gain confidence in their skills and abilities to meet the needs of children, determining how the household is run and how children are cared for.

 In most parts of Bindura men revealed that there is a change in the kinds of work that men do and in their ability to provide financially for their families. Moving away from a rural subsistence economy into urban work situations, the changes in the nature of work, the reliance on other people as 'employers', and an international recession, many men are finding themselves unemployed and unable to support a family. However, to a considerable degree in most cultures, men's identity and self-esteem are derived from their ability to provide for their families financially. Thus, when they are unable to do so, it has an impact on their relationship with both the mother and the children and as a consequence men's parenting behaviour changes, even to the extent of being absent.

 Research established that men are of the opinion that the ascription of power and authority is important in terms of a father's relationship with his family. In Zimbabwean culture men are the decision-makers in terms of what happens both within the family and as the family interacts with the world. Historically this power comes from the fact that men have been the major providers for the family. In many cases this authority has been given to them as a result of the dominant religious and cultural beliefs. If men have difficulties fulfilling the bread-winning role and women increase their capacity to support the family financially, men's authority role is undermined. This sometimes leaves them at a loss in terms of how they should now relate to family members. This concurs with Brown's work in Jamaica when she noted that men's "role as economic providers was clear, but if they were not able to fulfil this role, they could find no other place in the family for themselves."

 Seventy percent (70) of men interviewed are of the view that another role predominantly held by men is that of community leader—whether that be the mayor, the town council, the chief. These men dictate policy within the community and their actions directly affect the lives of children. Concluding that they play a distinctive role in their children's lives.

 Eighty percent (80%) of the interviewed women revealed that although men should contribute to the wellbeing of their children through the provision of income to support the activities of the family, however they are minimally contributing financially to the family because of the current practices. Increasingly women are making substantial and sometimes even majority contributions to the family income.

 The majority of women revealed that fathers need to be committed to their children by being fathers who are loving, provide help and are present so as to develop their emotional maturity in their relations with his children and his wives, and become engaged fathers, husbands and friends.

 On the contrary, similar findings were established in Madras, India where women contribute 46% to the family income while men contribute 42%, with 12% coming from joint income. In Nepal women contribute 50% of the family income; in the Philippines women's income exceeds men's by 10% when home production is taken into account; and in Ghana women maintain 33% of the households (Bruce, 1994).
In essence the study indicates that there are psychological, social and economic, rather than biological reasons for the lack of men's involvement in the lives of young children. For example, men teaching young children report that they face prejudice from other teachers and the children's parents.

In fact, in many parts of the world, awareness is needed at a basic level: men (indeed all adults) need to see that what they do and what they provide greatly affects their children. Strategies can be identified at several levels. The fact is that there are changing societal expectations in terms of the ways and extent to which men should be involved in the lives of their children. There are several factors shifting expectations of men. As mentioned above, the changing economic circumstances and moves to greener pastures have changed family structures, putting pressure on parents to rethink their roles and leaving men and women searching for models of how to behave in relation to children.

The research did not negate the voluminous documentation on the Zimbabwean women's role as primary caregiver, nor deny the fact that many women carry out this role with the father being absent from home. However, the study did provide evidence that men should be, and feel responsible with the mother for inculcating moral values and social skills in their children. Although many admit they cannot or do not always fulfill their responsibilities to the extent they feel they should, they redefine their responsibilities to include not only the undisputed role of financial provider but also counselling, communicating with their children and generally being a role model.

Research established that many children are now growing up in family arrangements that deprive them of contact with their biological father. If a mother enters a new relationship there is an implicit understanding and respect for the idea that the new man has rights over the woman (and her children). This might well mean the severing of the father-child bond. In this situation the attitude of many of the sampled fathers seemed to be win some, lose some. While some of the men said "you win some, you lose some", it was clear that many felt they lost out on being able to father their children in all they ways they would like. Sometimes they accept blame for this. Sometimes they blame their dissatisfaction on mothers who no longer want them to relate to their children.

CONCLUSION

Rhetoric in support of fathering, the reality is that most fathers still spend less than an hour a day alone with their young children, which is a small percentage of the time their child receives care.

As noted, there is some evidence to suggest that women are more likely to use resources for children than men. Fathers seldom play a key role in disciplining the child.

In looking at cross-cultural studies in terms of the father's role in the lives of young children, it can be concluded that the more cooperation and communication required of men and women in their daily activities (i.e., if they are both involved in securing food for the family or both undertake similar tasks on behalf of the family) the more they are likely to be jointly involved in childcare.

While the role that men play in relation to their own children is critical in the lives of individual children, the roles men play in the district beyond their family is likely to have an impact on a greater number of children. In today's world men are in key decision-making positions—within religious groups, within the community, within the health and social services that support family life, within educational institutions that socialize children, and within the political parties that rule our nations.

Children are affected as a result of multiple union and end up being the real losers in the man-woman contests that leave so many children without a relationship with one, or sometimes both parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Studies recommend that roles and responsibilities be commanded by family needs rather than by predetermined gender-based expectations or stereotypes.
- There is need for men to focus considerable attention on addressing and raising their awareness of children in their professional capacities.
- There is need to educate men about the needs of children and getting them more involved in the programming process that promote the growth and development of young children.
- There is need to design a program that aims to educate men to recognize their responsibility for the development of their children.
- A parent education program in this part of the country would certainly need to focus on providing the father with appropriate child development information and support him in his role as caregiver by television, radio, and movies.
REFERENCES


NOTE: The following authors were cited in the content but not listed as reference: Pedersen et al., 1980; Greenberg, 1995, Breaux, 1994; Brown et al., 1993