Fatherhood Among Marginalised Work-Seeking Men in South Africa

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1 Introduction

> *I love my children. I'm just saying I can uhm. . .the problem is there is just one thing I am thinking about, you see, in my thoughts, I am thinking I should just pay 'ilobolo' for the children. I should take them to my family home, uhm. . .I should pay damages for all three of them.* -John

Twenty-four year-old John, a father of three, had difficulties getting involved in his children's lives. He said that he would love to spend time with them, but because he was unable to "pay *ilobolo,*" he did not have access to them. *Ilobolo* is a Nguni word referring to bride-wealth (sometimes erroneously referred to as bride-price or dowry). In mentioning *ilobolo* John is gesturing to *amasiko* (plural; singular *usiko*) which are cultural rituals and practices performed in many Nguni ethnic communities in South Africa. John is pointing out the fact that his inability to offer *ilobolo* "for the children" to the children's mothers' families – the children had different mothers – so that he can be close to them (and not because he wants to marry the mother) is the reason behind the difficulties he was facing with gaining access to his children. Though he refers to *ilobolo*, unmarried men like John are expected to pay *inhlawulo* (what he also refers to as 'damages') in order to be acknowledged as fathers and gain access to their children.

Similar to many unemployed or precariously employed men, John could not afford to offer *ilobolo* or *inhlawulo* because he "worked" as a day labourer, and, if he

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did get a job for the day, he was poorly paid. Stable, gainful employment is an essential concern to consider in examining the involvement or lack of involvement of some men in their children's lives.

In this chapter we focus on the stories of men like John, who, due to precarious employment, are inconsistently present or absent in their children's lives. The relationship between unemployment and fathering is particularly important in South Africa which is characterized by high levels of unemployment (Statistics South Africa 2019) and low levels of paternal involvement (Ratele and Nduna 2018). While there are many studies examining precarious work across the world and in different contexts (Devault et al. 2008), these studies often cite unemployment as one of the factors that impact on fatherhood without investigating in detail the ways in which fathers' relationships and engagement with their children is complexly impacted. Furthermore, these studies often draw on forms of precarious work that involve a formal employment contract. The aim of the present study is to explore a different kind of employment precarity, that of day labour workers who engage in seasonal work with no employment contract. According to Blaauw et al. (2006), who conducted a survey on 'day labour' work, there were nearly 1000 day labour sites (roadside hangouts where men go daily to wait for any type of work) in South Africa, with about 45,000 men occupying these sites. These are men (and increasingly women) who wait on the side of the road for any work ranging from construction to domestic work. Given the significance of paid work and the impact of this type of precarious work on constructions of fatherhood and masculinities (see Malinga 2016), examining the views and practices of this particular group of men offers us an in-depth and contextual understanding of the conditions under which some men are expected to father. Additionally, a unique contribution of the chapter is the mediation of the relationship between precarious employment and fathering by cultural practices.

In the next section we sketch the context of our studies on fathers and fatherhood in South Africa, providing a synopsis of work on fathers and fatherhood in the country. We highlight the emergence of the new fatherhood discourse but also the persistence of the traditional fatherhood discourse. And then we turn to the changes in the cultural constructions as well as the socio-political and economic contexts of fatherhood as some of the factors that shape such discourses.

2 Context

2.1 Emergence of the New Fatherhood Discourse, and Persistence of the Traditional Fatherhood Discourse

A set of dynamic relational practices tied to context, fatherhood is a historically and culturally contextual practice. What it means to be a father and the activities associated with it change over time and across places. Fatherhood is shaped by the

economic, cultural, political contexts within which men become fathers (Hauari and Hollingworth 2009). At the same time, we also observe that within the same historical-political era, for example South Africa during the apartheid, or the same cultural milieu, for example among the Nguni, meanings attributed to and practices of fatherhood can vary and even clash.

Different forms of fathering are encouraged in different cultures and times. For example, while many scholars cite the emergence of the "new father" who is reportedly more actively involved in the parenting process (Lamb 2000), this form of fathering may be less visible in some contexts. Remarking the persistence of the "traditional breadwinner" discourse, Enderstein and Boonzaier (2015) contend that changes in discourses of fatherhood reflect an *integration* of parenting roles among men (caregiving and financial provision) and not necessarily a shift from provision to caregiving. Evidence from other South African studies show that even though fathers have become more involved, or in some cases desire to do so, their roles remain centred on providing for their children and families' financial needs (Enderstein and Boonzaier 2015; Hunter 2006). Moreover, evidence from South Africa (Hunter 2006) and Germany (Tölke and Diewald 2003) suggest that men's ability to provide for their children and families remains a critical signifier of both culturally exalted masculinity and fatherhood. In South Africa, the relationship between the ability to economically provide for one's children and conceptions of masculinity and fatherhood is complicated by high levels of unemployment.

While the discourse of an *emergent* nurturing father suggests that this kind of fatherhood is uncommon, some authors have pointed out that the active involvement and participation of fathers in children's lives has been part of the way of life for many African societies. Ahadi and Mandy (2007) present an extensive list of responsibilities traditionally assumed by African fathers, including, providing love to their children, building self-esteem, practising non-violence, and taking equal share of housework. Similarly, Lesejane (2006:176) outlines the responsibilities that the position of father carried historically among Africans, extending from father as moral authority, leader, provider, and protector to role model. Mkhize (2006) writes about collective fathering and the importance of kin and community in parenting among African people. What is of especial interest in the work of the latter two authors is in highlighting that the traditional responsibility of the father in some African communities extended beyond one's own children and the children of the extended family members (such as brothers, sisters, and cousins), to other children in the broader community. Among many Black South African communities, men's ability to fulfil these roles is determined by their ability to fulfil certain cultural practices that determine and legitimise their access to their children. We discuss these practices and their implications in the following section.

2.2 Cultural Practices and Constructions of Fatherhood

Whilst South African research and government reports have shown the decreasing rates of marriage, in particular among Black South Africans (Posel et al. 2011), scholars who work on masculinities and fatherhood have remarked the weight of marriage and building a home for one's family in constructions of culturally recognized fatherhood and masculinity (Hunter 2006; Lesejane 2006). Historically – and to a lesser but still significant extent, contemporaneously – marriage did not merely bring two people together but functioned to legitimize a man's position within a cultural world. Marriage earned a man a particular kind of value – cultural credit. But in the enduring contemporary economic climate that characterises South Africa, a situation that has followed a long period of an entrenched, brutalizing system of economic migration tied to colonialism and apartheid economies, marriage has become out of reach for many men. The customary practice of *ilobolo* is one of the reasons for the unaffordability of marriage and, hence, the decline in marriage rates.

Built into a custom like *ilobolo* are important processes that are designed to prepare both women and men for parenting and marriage. These cultural practices have, however, become commercialised and less accessible to men who lack stable employment and live in poverty. There are also implications for unemployed men who are not able to fulfil the costs associated with these rituals. For example, in some ethnic groups in South Africa, when the father does not marry the mother (for reasons such as economic constraint) and fails to offer *inhlawulo* to her family, he loses his right to the child (Lesch and Kelapile 2016). *Inhlawulo* is the offering, usually financial, made by the male's family to a female's family when there is an unplanned pregnancy or where there is no intention of getting married (Lesch and Kelapile 2016). While such rights and access can be negotiated and challenged through the courts, many men who do not pay these "damages" often cannot afford them, but likewise cannot afford the legal process that would help them reclaim their legal rights of access to their children. In such cases it is not only the fathers who are affected, but children too. For example, when a man pays *inhlawulo* to the woman's family and is then recognised as the child's father with access to the child, he also extends his own social and kin networks to the child (Madhavan 2010). Such an extension of networks can be beneficial – immediately, and more so later – for children's cultural existence, broadening their access to cultural capital. For unemployed men who desire to be recognised as fathers to their children, their non-recognition means not only their own exclusion from certain rights and decision-making powers, but also cultural isolation from their children – a phenomenon experienced disproportionately by Black men in South Africa whose lives remain affected by the country's violent and oppressive history.

It is critical for us as critical cultural subjects and fatherhood scholars, to observe that beside finances, culture (and religion) are two key facts to understanding men's actions in those contexts in which culture (or religion) is a salient element of social and personal life. At the same time, to avoid stereotyping African communities, it is

necessary to recognize that *amasiko* and rituals and customs such as *ilobolo* and *inhlawulo* are neither universal across Nguni communities nor are they performed by all Africans.

2.3 Socio-Political and Employment Contexts and Fatherhood

While collective fathering remains a part of life in some communities in South Africa (Mkhize 2006), the practice has declined in many other parts. This decline is partly attributable to the fact that Black men and women are experiencing a transitional period of cultural renegotiation, remain economically marginalised, and are disproportionately represented among the unemployed in the country. This decline suggest that fatherhood continues to be shaped by the country's economic and political past of colonialism and apartheid and its continuing legacy. Whilst Black people are in the majority in South Africa, the history of white racism continues to have effect on Black cultures. Therefore, the decline in cultural practices such as collective fathering is in part due to the enduring impact of colonial and apartheid injustices on the lives of many Black South Africans alongside contemporary racialised economic inequalities.

It is important to note that while South Africa has been liberated from a white racist rule, the effects of colonisation and apartheid continue to haunt many Black families. These effects are evidenced in the numbers of children who are growing up without their biological fathers or any father figure at all (Ratele and Nduna 2018), and most critically, the high unemployment rates among particularly the Black population (Statistics South Africa 2019). According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey published at the end of the second quarter of 2019, 29% of the working age population in South Africa was found to be unemployed. Of these, the previously disadvantaged groups had the highest levels of unemployment: the unemployment amongst Black was 32.7%; Coloured 22.5%; Indian 11.2%; and amongst Whites 7.4% (Statistics South Africa 2019). While unemployment remains higher for women than it is for men (Statistics South Africa 2019), Black men find it harder to find stable jobs in South Africa. In addition to the unemployment rates, there has also been a decrease in the formal sector employment, while the informal sector continues to grow (Statistics South Africa 2019). What this data suggests is that in the absence of formal and stable jobs, and as a result of the desperation that comes with being unemployed, people are more likely to move towards the informal sector as well as informal employment.

3 Methodology

This chapter is based on data collected as part of an ethnographic research study conducted in 2014 with men who spend their days on the side of a road looking for work. The ethnographic study focused on constructions of masculinities and fatherhood among these unemployed/precariously employed men. Data gathering for the study included semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Interviews were conducted with 54 men over a period of 17 weeks in Cape Town, South Africa. We draw from 46 participants who identified as fathers, of whom 15 shared residence with their children. The participants were all indigenous African men who were either born in Cape Town (15) or had migrated from various parts of South Africa (22) or neighbouring countries (8 from Zimbabwe and 1 from Lesotho) to Cape Town in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The majority of the men went to Cape Town in search for work. One went to complete his high school education (but, due to financial constraints, he never did and ended up seeking work on the side of the road). And one was moved from the Eastern Cape Province through the prison system and was later released around Cape Town where he had no family and had to live on the streets.

Participants were recruited using both purposive and snowball sampling methods that allowed the researcher to approach men who were fathers (self-defined) and were seeking work on the side of the road; as well as to be referred to participants by other men who had already participated. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide and took place on quieter parts of the sidewalk further away from where other men gathered. Interviews lasted between 10 and 90 min.

The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim and analysed using grounded theory method of constant comparison which involves a detailed coding process (Charmaz 2006). The first step of analysis was initial coding which allows for line-by-line coding. The second step was focused coding which involved an in-depth exploration of the codes from step 1. Following these first two steps, the data was compared for similarities, differences, and contradictions – a process that was constantly repeated. The codes were then thematically grouped together, resulting in the main themes relating to the meanings and practices of fatherhood discussed below. In line with maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, in reporting and discussing the findings, the participants' real names are replaced with pseudonyms.

Drawing on the ethnographic study, in this chapter we examine the impact of precarious work on constructions and practices of fatherhood. More specifically, we highlight the ways in which precarious "day-labour" work shapes the way men think about fatherhood and its associated practices. Following Hobson and Morgan (2002), we distinguish between the terms father, fatherhood, and fathering. We take father to refer to the adult male who contributes to the conception of the child (biological) and/or to the (emotional and economic) upkeep of the child (social). Fatherhood refers to the meanings attached to fathers including their rights and responsibilities. And fathering refers to the actual 'doing' of fatherhood. In this

paper, we dwell on the meanings and practices that men associate with their role as fathers, focusing on the experiences of economically marginalised African men.

In the following sections, we now turn to report and discuss selected findings from the ethnographic study, focusing on two thematic threads. First, we highlight economic provision as a key aspect of fatherhood among men juxtaposing this with some men's recognition that love and presence are necessary in fatherhood. Then we turn to cultural practices as possible impediments to the involvement of men with their biological children.

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 To Provide, to Love, and Be There

Participants in this study were asked what fatherhood meant to them and it was not unexpected that all of them made reference to the responsibilities they thought fathers ought to fulfil. The least surprising in this regard, despite the much touted discourse of the emerging new father, was the view that fathers' main responsibility is to provide for their children's material needs for food, clothing, shelter, and school requirements.

It is clear, on the basis of this finding, that economic provision remains an important aspect of fatherhood among men in men's eyes. This finding is another confirmation of the work of many scholars (e.g., Enderstein and Boonzaier 2015; Hunter 2006). The importance of financial provision is, according to Robert Morrell (2006), more emphasised among men who struggle to fulfil this ideal as a result of poverty and unemployment. This makes obvious sense: men who struggle to fulfil what has been, and may still be, the elementary requirements of manhood and fatherhood, that being to provide for one's children, will perceive the inability to economically provide for one's children as failure. The present study thus confirms that, even though constructions and practices of fatherhood may continue to evolve over time and across cultures, the expectation placed upon men to provide for their children and families' financial needs remains intact.

Many earlier reports and studies on fatherhood maintained a pathologizing view on poor and Black fatherhood (and motherhood, and broadly the Black family), uncritically arguing that these fathers often abandon their children and families. In the context of the U.S., the 1965 Moynihan Report on "The Negro Family" is a notorious exemplar of such a view (e.g., see Blount and Cunningham 2014; Collins 1989; Hunter and Davis 1994). The findings from the present study illustrate that many of the men acknowledged the importance of physical presence, support, and love for their children. However, and as a result of unemployment and labour migration, it was difficult for them to fulfil even the nurturing aspect of their role as fathers. In an attempt to move away from pathologizing constructions of Black fatherhood, we highlight the importance that men placed on nurturing their children and being there for them in many different ways.

As noted earlier, colonialism and apartheid greatly affected the ability of fathers to not only provide for their children and families, but also to be physically present and participate in their children's lives. Of all the men studied, 31 (67%) did not live with their children, mirroring the national picture (Ratele and Nduna 2018). We found that financial provision, the significance of showing one's children love, and being present were important to all men, whether they shared residence with their children or not. Due to poverty, even those men who shared residence with their children spent very little time with them, as they spent most of their time out seeking work. For some, it was the shame and humiliation associated with a lack of financial stability that forced them to spend time outside of their homes. Despite the physical distance, the importance of love was highlighted several times. For example, Sicelo (a Zimbabwean father of one who did not share residence with his child) noted that "the first responsibility of a father is to love the children, be there for the children." Several other participants shared the same sentiments as shown below by Jason, a 37 year-old father of 3 who was one of the 15 who shared residence with their children:

> *Loving them is the most important thing. Because if you don't wanna give them love, they gonna feel that there's no love. That's why most of the kids turn out…changing their lives to drugs, doing this, doing that, getting into gangs and all that. It is very important for a father to love his kids.* -Jason

Jason highlights 'father love' as an important factor in children's emotional and psychological development. He underlines that it is not only physical presence that matters, but also – "the most important thing" – the love children can experience from their fathers. Furthermore, Jason argues that children who do not receive such love may in fact experience negative social, behavioural, and psychological outcomes.

Themba is another example of a poor man who highlighted the love of the father. But, in addition to loving one's children, Themba argues that it is important that fathers fight for and defend their families:

> *I think maybe as a father it is love, love…just love…like love you see, and also defending your family. To them even if you have nothing, you say 'hey, hey, hey, that's my family!' I have to fight for them, to defend whatsoever. It gives you something to…even if you are going through rough patches in life where you have nothing like money you understand, not much, they look at you and say 'eish that guy you understand has…has love for us and he* [inaudible segment: 0:19:27.9] *he knows how to defend his family you understand', yeah I think that the one thing that is important to me is love, being able to protect them as a father.* -Themba

In the extract above, Themba argues that it is important for men to love and defend their families so that even when they are going through financial difficulties and are unable to provide their families can still appreciate them.

Jacob – a father of two who did not live with his children – spoke about his desire to live with and be present for his children.

> *…And I want them to stay with, with me, I want to stay with my children. I want them to feel that their father is here even when I have even when I don't have.* -Jacob

Similar to Themba above, Jacob wants to be there for his children so that even when he is not able to provide for them they can still appreciate his presence. And yet, because they have to seek work on the side of the road, Themba and Jacob are not always able to provide for their families. Even when they do get jobs, the wages do not cover their own living expenses, and they are therefore not always able to send any remittances back home to their families. In the absence of the highly emphasised role of men as economic providers, they want to be present for their children in other ways – such as living with them, protecting them, and showing them love. These are important statements that challenge the arguments that seek to brand poor and unemployed men as "bad fathers."

While it was clear that participants thought it was important for them to share residence with their children, they were also not prepared to just go home (Zimbabwe in Jacob's case, and the Eastern Cape in Themba's case) and stay at home caring for their children while they do not have the means to provide for them. As noted above, financial provision remains a dominant feature of "responsible" masculinity and fatherhood across many cultures. As such, men do not want to risk facing the humiliation that is associated with not meeting the requirements of "successful" masculinity and fatherhood.

The dilemma of love and money was captured by Spikiri. A 27-year old father of one, Spikiri saw financial provision – eating – as the "first" responsibility of a father. For him, it is most important for a father to feed his children, then love can follow.

> *You must first make sure that children eat, [my] sister. You must make sure that you provide them with clothes to wear and [only] then you have to make sure that they get a father's love at all times.* -Spikiri

Roy (2004) reports similar findings which showed that even while nurturing is considered important, financial provision was still the primary role men thought they ought to fulfil. It is clear from the findings of this study that men's views differ on the order of importance of the roles they are expected to play in their children's lives. These differences are shaped by their material conditions and the support they have in providing for their children. The focus on and prioritisation of economic fatherhood, particularly in the context of poverty, is likely the reason studies on fatherhood often do not reveal much about how men "do" fatherhood outside of the economic provider model. What this suggest it that we need more studies that tell us how these men express love and other positive parenting practices, particularly in context of deprivation. As East et al. (2006) argue, existing literature does not articulate the importance of "father love" very well (see also the chapter by Macht in this volume).

In this section we have sought to illustrate that while financial provision remains an important role for fathers, love and physical presence are also valued by men as important in their parenting roles. These findings also show that these men desire to fulfil the nurturing father ideal, however, they are challenged by their socio-economic circumstances. This data suggests then that though desired by most fathers, the nurturing father ideal is not always accessible to all.

4.2 *Amasiko as Impediments to the Involvement of Men with their Biological Children*

As noted earlier, there are certain cultural practices that are essential for some men as they are for women. These rituals and customs vary across ethnicities, with evidence suggesting that some are in fact eroding as a result of many factors, including urbanisation and economic conditions. Most of the participants in this study indicated that these cultural practices applied among their ethnic groups. While the men were expected to fulfil the cultural expectations, they were not in a position to do so as a result of their economic circumstances.

We began with the case of John who indicated his inability to pay *inhlawulo* to his children's mothers' families as the main reason behind the challenges he was facing with gaining access to his children. Another man who spoke on the impact of *amasiko* such as *inhlawulo* was Sthe, a father of two. In the extract below he highlights his desire for marriage. But, he says, he cannot afford to get married because he does not work.

> *I am supposed to be living with them and their mother, but now I am what you call. . .not married, I have not yet had enough money to get married because of work, I don't work.*
> -Sthe

The extract from the interview with Sthe again indicates joblessness and lack of money as a decisive but unfavourable fact in the lives of many of the men in this study. Because they do not have stable gainful employment, men like Sthe, John, and Spikiri are not seen as legitimate fathers within their communities and families, and as such, have little authority and decision-making power in their children's lives. These men often feel a continued sense of disempowerment and are excluded from the privileges afforded to men who meet the requirements associated with dominant and successful masculinity and fatherhood (Strier et al. 2014).

Similar to John's case, 30 year-old father of one Siseko did not have access to his child. He was not married to the mother although he was still in a relationship with her. He said he could not take the children to live with him as he would like to because he had not paid *inhlawulo*. The mother's family denied him access to the child despite the relationship with the mother – as she still lives with her family who helps her support and raise the child.

Father of three, Demaine, was another man who did not have access to his child. He used legal means to challenge the maternal family for access to his child. He highlights that it was in fact the mother's brother that had denied him access to the child following her (the mother's) death. Highlighted here is the role played by social fathers (uncles, grandfathers, brothers) who take responsibility for the child and play an important role in shaping their life (Morrell 2006).

> *It is a big problem, we went to court with her uncle over these children. The court found that he had no rights to my children. The only person with rights is me, the father. If their mother was around she would have the right to them, but because their mother passed away, the person left is their father, so I am the one who has a right to these children. But they also*

know being where they are, that I am the one who has a right to the children, but I am not taking care of them.- Demaine

While they previously had no legal rights to their children, unmarried men in South Africa now have rights to their children (Morrell 2006). However, in order for these rights to be enforced, these men would need to challenge the maternal families through the Courts, which they often cannot afford. In Demaine's case, even though the courts granted him access to his children, they continued to live with their maternal uncle. Demaine stated that he could not afford to provide for his children and hence continued to let them stay with their uncle. In some cases, this would be viewed as abandonment, but according to him, he was doing what he thinks is best for his children.

Demaine's experience also highlights a point noted earlier– the value of kin networks. According to Datta (2007:102), these networks are consequential as they shield the child, and it is often the maternal grandfathers and uncles who are then expected to "integrate such children into their own lineages thus guaranteeing them social positions as well as ritual, political, rural, and economic rights and responsibilities." It is, however, not only the maternal kin networks that contribute to the child's cultural status. In cases where paternity was acknowledged and the father given access to and the opportunity to live with their child, it is the paternal family that often helps with supporting the children of unemployed men. For example, Spikiri and Mzo below make the point that because they are not able to provide for themselves and their children, they often rely on family for support.

Eish, I am just saying sister that I am receiving some support from my family, I understand that I am struggling on my side but at least I have my family's back-up because they know that I am not working, when I work like this I am not working. So I can talk to my brothers and sisters and say 'I need this and that' because it is the same as not working when you work like this. -Spikiri

No my mother and them try to help me with the 'pay' money…I do try when I get the opportunity…I try so that there is something coming from my side. -Mzo

Spikiri indicates that he has his family's "back-up." Mzo refers to "pay" money – meaning old-age pension grant. In both instances, we have a fascinating and vital aspect of South African Black life, a worldview captured by the notion of *ubuntu*. The word refers to a way of life characterized by values that favour collectivist over an individualist orientation; that well-being emerges from reciprocity, caring for others, and compassion (Lesejane 2006). *Ubuntu* is centred upon the harmonious co-existence and sharing among communities, as captured in the saying "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"*. The common saying translates into "a human being (*umuntu*) is human (*ngumuntu*) because of other humans (*ngabantu*). Alternatively, we could render it as "I am because we are." Men like Mzo and Spikiri (and their children) benefit from *ubuntu*; specifically, they benefit from collective fathering where uncles, grandfathers, and brothers all participate in providing for children and other family members (Mkhize 2006). As shown by Mzo above, he also has to make sure that when he does get a job, there is also "something" coming from his

side to reciprocate his family's support for him. While clearly important, anecdotal evidence suggests that even the principles of *ubuntu* (the cultural ethic of taking care of each other) are eroding in some parts of the communities, especially in the context of poverty, dispossession, displacement, and the resultant destitution, where people are now constantly in competition with each other over resources.

5 Conclusion

This study showed that the fatherhood practices of unemployed/precariously employed and marginalised men are challenged by their economic circumstances as well as cultural norms. At the same time, these men have a strong desire to not only provide for their children but to also be present in the children's lives and show them love. Fatherhood as understood by the participants in this study, then, involves an integration of fatherhood roles, rather than a shift from one type of fatherhood to another. While clearly acknowledged and accepted by this group of poor and unemployed men, the nurturing father ideal remains somewhat inaccessible to the men as they have to prioritise providing for their children's economic needs over meeting other needs like emotional support and physical presence.

A critical implication of the study is the importance of having a stable, secure job – a major constraint in countries with high levels of joblessness – in shaping men's fathering practices, a finding noted in previous studies. It remains important, however, that we continue to explore the views and experiences of men in various socio-economic positions so as to deepen our understanding of the changing socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts and their impact on fathering (as opposed to rehashing stereotypes). It is noteworthy that the participants in this study saw rituals and customs such as *inhlawulo* as a hindrance to their parenting. Yet the cultural practices associated with the conception or birth of a child (or with marriage) may have favourable outcomes for children and men themselves through the extended kin support networks and social capital they enable, as well as the support unemployed men are able to receive as a result of such networks. However, these cultural practices and rituals need to be continuously examined in the context of the economic circumstances South Africa is confronting.

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