

***Indoda iyanyamezela (a man perseveres): Exploring the perceptions, experiences and the psycho-social challenges of Xhosa young men in the Western Cape who have transitioned from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers.***

BY

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## DECLARATION

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## ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** Father absence or uninvolved involvement is a growing problem worldwide, which not only negatively influences child development, but also the masculine identity formation of boy children. South Africa is one of the countries that has high levels of father absence, yet there has been scant research which particularly focuses on the perceptions, experiences and psycho-social challenges experienced by young men with absent fathers. Thus, the aim of this study was to explore the perceived influence of father absence or uninvolved involvement on Xhosa young men who have transitioned from adolescence to manhood. The first objective was to explore the perceptions, experiences and the psycho-social challenges of Xhosa young men in Khayelitsha, Western Cape who have transitioned from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers. The second objective was to explore Xhosa male elders' perceptions of the experiences and challenges of Xhosa young men who culturally transition from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers. The third objective was to identify the support needs of Xhosa young men before, during and after transitioning from adolescence to manhood in the absence of a present or involved biological father.

**METHODOLOGY:** Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a conceptual framework, the study employed a qualitative approach to investigate factors that shape and influence experiences of Xhosa young men with absent or uninvolved fathers at individual, family, community and societal levels. Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were conducted using interview guides covering various topics: family life; conceptualisation of manhood and fatherhood; father absence in Xhosa communities and its causes and impacts; the value of social fathers as well as the possible preventative interventions at different levels of the society to promote father presence or involvement and mitigate the impact of father absence. All interviews took place at different venues offered by community organisations in Khayelitsha (Ilitha Park, Site B and Nkanini) in the Western Cape province. They were conducted in isiXhosa, audio-recorded, transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis utilising the NVivo 12 software package. During transcription, three researchers read the transcripts and developed an initial coding framework which was then used to code the rest of the data, making adjustments as necessary. The data were categorised thematically paying attention to dominant themes that addressed the research questions, while being open to additional themes arising in the data, and this process occurred until no new themes emerged.

**ETHICAL APPROVAL:** The ethical approval of this study was provided by the UCT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC 654/2018).

**RESULTS:** The interviews were conducted with 22 Xhosa young men with absent or uninvolved fathers (ages 18-22) and five Xhosa male elders (ages 55-73). Due to the sensitivity of the topic initiation, a vignette was used to avoid directness. The main perceptions, experiences and psycho-social challenges of Xhosa young men who have transitioned from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers, were synthesised as follows:

- (i) The meaning given to cultural male circumcision by young men and elders were its individual family benefits.
- (ii) The challenges of Xhosa patriarchy, a father's role, and his absence, and paternal connection needs during initiation: planning, masculine guidance and protection, emotional and cultural support.
- (iii) The significance of the fatherly role and implications of father absence before and beyond initiation: the traditional and modern role.
- (iv) Barriers to father presence or uninvolved: financial constraints, maternal gate-keeping and mother's negative attitudes.

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the support needs of Xhosa young men without present or involved fathers before, during and after transitioning from adolescence to manhood were identified as follows:

- (i) At the microsystem level, single mothers and maternal families of Xhosa young men need to be open regarding father absence, acknowledge the pain it causes and avoid maternal gate-keeping and paternal identity concealment. However, they also need to receive psycho-social support in order to be able to link the young men with social fathers, especially around initiation.

- (ii) At the mesosystem level, the social institutions such as churches, schools and sports clubs should have awareness regarding father absence or uninvolvement as a social problem in order to be sensitive towards the emotional needs of children with absent or uninvolved fathers.
- (iii) At the exosystem level, there is a need for fathers' environments (such as family, friends and the workplace) to encourage and foster lifestyles that promote father presence or involvement.
- (iv) At the macrosystem level, the media should raise awareness of father absence, and there must be policies and programmes that promote egalitarian parenting.
- (v) At the chronosystem level, there is a need to embrace and practice the modern fatherhood role which requires the father to be warm, spend quality time and have strong communication with his children.

**CONCLUSION:** Cultural initiation is a crucial time for emotional and cultural growth which largely contributes to the development of manhood identity; it benefits the person on an individual and family level. However, this study notes that initiation comes with advantages and disadvantages for the Xhosa young men. It is a vehicle for growth, but also serves as a reminder of the vacant paternal role during this culturally significant process, especially in the midst of maternal gate-keeping and paternal identity concealment issues. Furthermore, in the course of their lives, the young men also experience loss related to not being exposed to the various positive roles a father would play, including the roles of disciplinarian, provider and the nurturer. Even though social fathers and strong maternal kin support could help Xhosa young men to cope better, the void of the biological father remains unfilled, especially around the period of initiation due to the emotional, cultural and financial implications of the ritual.

This study shows that the young men could experience depression, be suicidal, have anger and resort to substance use when not supported. There is thus a need for multi-dimensional interventions to address these issues. These should start with psycho-educational support for maternal families to empower them to be supportive towards the emotional and cultural needs of the young men as the families do not always possess the necessary skills to support a child in this predicament. Absent fathers also need to be engaged in order to understand the reasons leading to their disengagement, and to sensitise them regarding the consequences of their absence for them to better understand the



permanence of fatherhood. Advocacy is needed to make the wider society aware of the support needs of Xhosa young men who go through initiation in the absence of a father. Finally, the strategies that seem to yield positive results in managing father absence need to be strengthened, namely: strong maternal family support, social fathering, counselling and mentorship.

#### **KEY WORDS**

Fatherhood, father absence or uninvolvement, father absence causes, maternal gate-keeping, paternal identity concealment, initiation, traditional role, modern role, social fathers

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AIDS - Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

CSG - Child Support Grant

FAMSA - Family and Marriage Society of South Africa

HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

PND - Paternal postnatal depression

SADAG - South African Depression and Anxiety Group

SANCO - South African National Council on Alcoholism

StatsSA - Statistics South Africa

TMI - Traditional Male Initiation

US - United States

VMMC - Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### (operationalised for this study)

An **absent father** refers to a father who is still alive or assumed to be alive but who is absent from the child's life.

An **uninvolved father** is a father who is physically present and known by the child, but does not play his role as a parent and is unavailable either financially, socially or emotionally.

A **single mother** is the biological mother to the child who is not supported by the father of the child even though he is alive.

**Modern fatherhood** refers to the belief that a father has to be present in all aspects of his children's life even the ones previously reserved for women: child-care and nurturing.

**Traditional fatherhood** refers to the belief that a father has to play the provider, protector and disciplinarian role

**Maternal gatekeeping** refers to when the mother and the maternal family prevent the father from seeing or interacting with the child

**Going to the 'mountain'/bush/wilderness** is when the young men go and spend time in the wilderness during the initiation period

**Social fathers** are the men in the child's lives who play a fatherly role. These men may contribute financially, socially, emotionally or culturally, and they do not necessarily have to be related to the child.

**The Child Social Grant (CSG)** is the government financial service provided for all South African children under the age of 18 whose family income is less than R 48 000 a year for a single parent and less than R 96 000 when combined

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is an African proverb which depicts the social structure of the African society, stating that: “It takes a village to raise a child”. This means that a child is not only raised by his or her biological parents, but by all the adults who are surrounding him or her (Ratele, Shefer, & Clowes, 2012). In other words, raising a child is a complex task that needs to be undertaken collectively. While the spirit of collectivism and family union was common in the past (Medich et al., 2018), currently, South African communities have changed and are still changing due to cultural, political and historical factors (Ramphela, 2002). In black communities, the predominant family structure has in many instances shifted from extended families and nuclear families to female-led single parent families (De Goede, 2018; Diaku, 2016; Mayekiso, 2017). As a result, many South African children grow up in homes where the father is absent, and thus miss out on enjoying fatherly support unless there is some other father figure in their lives who plays the social father role (De Goede, 2018; Diaku, 2016; Ramphela, 2002). This pattern of female single parenting tends to strain the female parent who usually has to juggle between the provider, disciplinarian, protector and the nurturer role (Helman, 2015; Manyatshe, 2013).

For this study, an absent father refers to a father who is still alive or assumed to be alive but who is absent from the child’s life. An uninvolved father is a father who is physically present and known by the child, but does not play his role as a parent and is unavailable either financially, socially or emotionally (Eddy, De-Boor, & Mphaka, 2013).

Against this backdrop, Richter and Morell (2006) warn that many mothers find themselves in this predicament because fatherhood is a responsibility that some South African fathers find it difficult to accept: some abandon their off-spring and sometimes deny paternity. They tend to treat it as a matter of choice which they can easily excuse themselves from (Dabula, 2018). This trend is common in South Africa (Morrell, Dunkle, Ibragimov, & Jewkes, 2016), and there are a number of reasons influencing fathers failing to take the responsibility of fatherhood. Some factors are within their control while others are beyond their control (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016; Mavungu, 2013). For instance, as a rainbow nation with an array of cultures, languages and races, the issue of father absence or uninvolved involvement in South Africa has been perceived as being influenced by culture, race and class (Franklin, Makiwane, & Makusha, 2014). Louw (2018) posits that the occurrence of father absence or uninvolved involvement is more common among black families. In their South African survey on fathers’ attitudes towards childrearing, Franklin et al. (2014), found that most Indian or Asian (83%) and White (74%) children reside with both biological parents in contrast to Black Africans, with

considerably fewer children residing with both co-resident parents (27%). They also noted that compared with other racial groups, many black South African males tend to believe that children are a financial burden who restrict employment choices and opportunities. In line with these findings, a study conducted by The Centre for Social Development in Africa (2017) indicated that of children who receive the Child Social Grant (CSG), 90% are black. It was further noted that in 30% of these cases, these children neither had contact nor support from their fathers. The CSG is a form of cash support that is given by the government to all South African children from birth up to 18 years of age based on family income. If the parent is single s/he must earn R48 000 a year or less (R4000 a month). If the parents are married, their combined income must not be above R96 000 (R8000 a month).

One other possible influence for father absence or uninvolvement among black South Africans is culture. For example, in the Xhosa culture, if a man impregnates a woman out of wedlock, he has to pay a pregnancy fine known as *intlawulo* to the family of the woman to show remorse, and should he wish to have unlimited access to the child, he must marry her, and pay *ilobola* (bride price) (Mayekiso, 2017; Sagner, 1999). Failure to do one of these could result in him being refused contact with his child. Unfortunately, due to the high rate of unemployment among young people, especially black youth (30.1%) (Maluleke, 2018; Marcisz, 2013), many men cannot afford to meet these culturally embedded financial obligations (De Goede, 2018; Madhavan, Townsend, & Garey, 2008; Manyatshe, 2013), as well as usual obligations regarding child maintenance. In this way, the rate of unemployment in the black community has a ripple effect, and this also means that unemployed men are often culturally denied access to their children and find it difficult to be involved in their children's lives (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016; Mayekiso, 2017). Finally, the belief that fathers should be providers causes some men to be excluded from parenting by their partners when they fail to provide and at times (Eddy et al., 2013), they exclude themselves out of fear of emasculation (Khunou, 2006a).

### **1.1 Xhosa culture, masculinity, the initiation process and social fathering**

Among many African people there is an array of cultural rites of passage such as naming the child, introducing the child to the ancestors for protection and guidance, and transitioning from one life stage to another. During these rites of passage father absence could be felt the most because both parents are needed, and such absence may affect the child profoundly. This is true for Xhosa people who perceive paternal involvement as being vital for certain beliefs, practices and customs. One of these rituals is the Traditional Male Circumcision (TMC) rite of passage. There are many terms used to refer to this

rite of passage: initiation, initiation school, going to the mountain, the bush or the wilderness. Both in this dissertation, in the literature and in practice, these terms are used interchangeably. In the Xhosa context, the TMC is also referred to as a school, as it is the time set aside for Xhosa adolescent boys (Froneman & Kapp, 2017) to spend time in the wilderness doing introspection and learning about responsibility, independence and respect associated with being a man.

The TMC or initiation is undertaken by boys in late adolescence or in their early twenties where they culturally transition from boyhood to manhood through guidance from their fathers and male elders who have also undergone initiation (Magodyo, 2013; Mavundla & Netswera, 2009). During this process, a father is needed to take the lead in introducing the child to the paternal ancestors and in guiding and supporting his son as he transitions from boyhood to manhood (Vincent, 2008). This necessitates father presence or involvement as the Xhosa traditional culture is still largely based on social hierarchy and patriarchy whereby females, young people, boys, and unmarried people are at the bottom of the hierarchy, and cannot take part or lead certain rituals or rites of passage (Sagner, 1999).

The value placed on the TMC and role of the elders becomes problematic for the young men who opt for the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC), which is being circumcised in the hospital without having gone through the cultural process and receiving lessons from the elders. These young men are often treated as outcasts and with disdain. They are usually seen as less “manly”, and thus often excluded from the circle of Xhosa men due to not having been exposed to the cultural nuances that accompany the physical circumcision such as the manhood language taught there which is called “*isidoda*” (Froneman & Kapp, 2017), effectively making this sacred ritual a weapon of exclusion. While the practice of initiation holds significance among Xhosa men, some men opt to go through it only to avoid this exclusion (Mayekiso, 2017).

During this period, the initiates have to rely on the natural environment and leadership of male Xhosa elders for wound healing, survival and learning about manhood (Ncaca, 2014). This ritual is characterised by 3 stages: (i) the removal of the foreskin followed by seclusion which means being physically and socially separated from the family, society and normal lifestyle, (ii) a transition which refers to culturally crossing over from boyhood to manhood, and the success of this transition is measured by overcoming the physical and emotional hurdles of the wilderness and exhibiting evidence of having embraced male elders’ teachings, and finally (iii) re-integration when the initiate

returns to the society to be socially re-integrated and welcomed to the society and family through celebration after having endured and survived the manhood challenge in the wilderness (Mavundla & Netswera, 2009). Throughout the initiation process, there are periods set aside to explicitly teach the initiate about manhood by his father if he is present and other male elders from the extended family and community where he is given words of wisdom on life. This teaching is called “*ukuyala*” and this practice is an integral part of the ritual. The male elders support and encourage the initiate to have respect for people, nature and ancestors and have perseverance in life. The elders also teach him about the importance of protecting and providing for his family as well as the importance of showing leadership both at home and in the community (Mavundla, Netswera, Toth, Bottoman, & Tenge, 2010).

The elders are an important part of this journey because in the Xhosa culture they are valued due to the wisdom and knowledge they possess. However, seniority is not only an age construct, instead, it is a culturally, socially and morally constructed phenomenon and there are different constructions for women and men. A Xhosa male elder is someone who has numerous initiation school anniversaries – that is, many years since his own initiation (*izilimela*) and is expected to be knowledgeable about manhood as a concept and process, to lead by example at home and in the community and to have positively influenced young men on manhood. To be considered an elder, a man must have a family of his own that he provides for. He must be a responsible and a reliable person who shows initiative when it comes to problem solving at home and in the community. He must also possess vast life experience, maturity, a wealth of knowledge and wisdom which he shares and passes down to the younger generation (Sagner, 1999).

The supportive role played by male elders from the community and family during initiation is undisputable, but the role of the biological father is not easily filled by anyone else due to the sensitivity and delicacy of this process (Mayekiso, 2017). The biological father ensures that all correct processes are followed with the initiate’s best interest at heart. He also plays a key role in consulting the paternal ancestors and inviting them to protect the adolescent during this spiritually, emotionally and physically challenging period (Mhlawuli, 2016). So, if the biological father is absent or not involved, the initiate may feel as though there is a missing piece in the process as he only relies on the maternal ancestors for protection and guidance (Ncaca, 2014). This is also worsened by the fact that the mother of the initiate cannot assist in any other way except assisting financially and sometimes

emotionally before the process, depending on the boy's openness to receiving explicit emotional assistance from the mother. In many instances the boy may shun the emotional assistance in avoidance of being labelled as weak since women are culturally prohibited from being involved in this patriarchal process (De Goede, 2018; Mavundla et al., 2010; Ncaca, 2014). In such instances, this is where social fathers would come in (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012).

Social fathers refer to non-biological fathers or the men in a child's life who assume the fatherly role. Nevertheless, despite the role of social fathers, there are limitations in conducting the initiation ritual, especially when the social father is from the maternal family or not related to the child (Magodyo, 2013), and this causes some young men to question their manhood identity in the absence of their biological father. Furthermore, even though social fathers play a pivotal role in the lives of children with absent or uninvolved fathers, this practice is threatened by the decline of social and family unity and increase in familial breakdown in Xhosa families caused by an increasing individualism and limited access to resources (Mabusela, 2014; Mayekiso, 2017; Medich et al., 2018; Ntozi & Zirimenya, 1999). This is due to the fact that Xhosa people are no longer self-sufficient as they were in the past when they had livestock and crops for their livelihood and sustenance (Anderson, Kaplan, & Lam, 1999; Sagner, 1999). Currently, there is competition for resources and individuals have to search for employment, and as a result, social and family ties are being weakened and broken down by migration and scarcity of resources (Ncaca, 2014). Therefore, individuals are finding it difficult to avail time and resources for one another, and this sometimes leads to competition which threatens unity and co-operation (Patel et al., 2017). These issues sometimes compromise the availability of support from extended family members, depending on employment status, geographic proximity and family unity (Clark, Madhavan, Cotton, Beguy, & Kabiru, 2017). Therefore, in the absence of the biological father, the kinship and social father system can no longer be relied upon as a sufficient source of support and protection during the initiation period (Madhavan & Roy, 2012; Mayekiso, 2017). This research thus aimed to explore how this rite of passage positively and negatively affects the boy child who has a disengaged father.

## **1.2 Rationale**

In most countries, there is an acknowledgement of the important role that a father plays in parenting when he extends his role beyond just material provision; as a result, more studies on the evolution of fatherhood have emerged (Dick, 2016; Richter, 2004; Sternberg, 2001), including studies

investigating the role of a present or absent father in a child's life (Allen & Daly, 2002; Manyatshe, 2013). A father's presence is beneficial to the holistic growth of his child(ren), his relationship with their mother, which both in turn benefits communities (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). As a result, father absence or uninvolvement is perceived as a concern and an important area of focus as it seems to affect children in various life domains: emotionally, culturally, socially, behaviourally and cognitively (De Goede, 2018). Mabusela (2014) describes the impact of absent or uninvolved fathers as causing an emotional void that children carry through to adulthood, especially boy children. According to Patrick (2006) most clients who consult her for counselling are boys with absent fathers. Research further points out that a boy child with an absent or uninvolved father is deprived of an opportunity to be exposed to masculine counsel, learning about conflict resolution skills, healthy self-expression and exercising healthy masculinity (Allen & Daly, 2002; Marcisz, 2013; Thwala, 2018). However, there is also an acknowledgement of how some boys with absent or uninvolved fathers become independent and emotionally strong men who aspire to become present and involved fathers in the future (Chideya & Williams, 2014).

Recently, the topic of father absence or uninvolvement has been investigated to some degree in South Africa (Cherian, 2001; Clark, Cotton, & Marteleto, 2015; Richter, 2004), but mostly across different races, ages and ethnic groups (Holbron & Eddy, 2011; Mavungu, 2013; Ratele, 2017). According to East, Jackson, and O'Brien (2006) "Little is known about multicultural perspectives on father absence, and issues for multi-ethnic families are not adequately addressed in the literature." p.292. Likewise, there is a lack of research that specifically investigates the perceptions, experiences and psycho-social challenges of Xhosa young men who have absent or uninvolved fathers, especially those who undergo the Xhosa cultural male circumcision and thus transition from adolescence to manhood. As a first step towards addressing this gap, this study seeks to understand young men's challenges pertaining to the paternal support required around initiation. It also seeks to contextualise the numerous drivers and implications of father absence before, during and after initiation within Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Utilising this social ecological framework may assist in informing future interventions at different levels of society in order to promote coping and resilience among Xhosa young men who go through this delicate manhood transition process without a present or involved father. Additionally, it is hoped that the findings of this research will increase awareness

on the implications of father absence among Xhosa young men and advocate for support by informing fellow researchers, policy makers and intervention implementers.

### **1.3 Aim**

This study aimed to explore the perceived influence of father absence or uninvolved fathers on young Xhosa men who have transitioned from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers

### **1.3 Objectives**

- (i) To explore the perceptions, experiences and psycho-social challenges of Xhosa young men who have transitioned from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers in Khayelitsha, Western Cape
- (ii) To explore Xhosa male elders' perceptions of the experiences and challenges of Xhosa young men who culturally transition from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers
- (iii) To identify the support needs of Xhosa young men before, during and after transitioning from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The review of the literature below will provide an in-depth discussion of key issues pertaining to fatherhood and father absence. Father absence is a complex phenomenon which manifests itself in different forms, thus having impacts in varying degrees. For example, (i) there are children who reside with their fathers, but receive no financial support or affection from them, and then (ii) those with paternal identity knowledge, but with no relationship or contact with them, and (iii) those with no knowledge of paternal identity.

Firstly, this section begins with an overview of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system as a theoretical framework for this study in order to locate the various factors that could be influencing father absence and associated distress. Secondly, it explores the prevalence of father absence globally and in Africa. Thirdly, looks into the changing family structure, globally and in Africa. Fourthly, it presents literature on the conceptualisation of fatherhood and provides the meaning of father presence. Evidence is then presented on the importance of father presence or involvement, as well as the negative implications of father absence or uninvolvement on male children. Finally, there is a depiction of the significance of having a present or involved father as a protector and supporter during the cultural male circumcision of Xhosa adolescents. The chapter then ends with a summary of what is known on the study topic and the gap this study aims to address.

### **2.1 Theoretical framework**

#### **2.1.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory's application to father absence or uninvolvement**

This study utilises Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems as a theoretical framework to understand the existing literature on father absence. This theory has a multi-level approach to factors affecting child development. It encompasses the personal characteristics of the individual (the child); the nature of relationships the child has or is exposed to in their immediate environments; the community in which a child grows up and the wider society which includes cultures and beliefs, encountered globally and in online environments (Buchanan, 2014). These levels are reflected in five interactive and evolving systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and



chronosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). These evolving systems also influence each other; for example, if among friends and within the culture men are dissuaded from playing the nurturer or carer role (exosystems and macrosystems), a father might refuse to assist with household chores despite the need (microsystem). If the mother and the child believe that a father should be a provider (macrosystems), they may fail to appreciate his non-financial efforts, and such lack of appreciation could lead the father to seek belonging and validation elsewhere and engage with friends or environments that promote unhealthy masculinities (exosystem).

Originally, this theory was used in child development (Pleck, 2007); however, due to its flexible and rich nature, it has been applied to other phenomena, including the conceptualisation of father absence or uninvolved (Mabusela, 2014). In this paper it is used to identify the various barriers that prevent fathers from being present since father absence or uninvolved cannot be linked to a single cause in South Africa. It is thus also used to make recommendations in order to help the young men to cope better and for the wider society to play a role in helping fight father absence. The use of Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems is ideal for exploring the impact of this phenomenon within a specific cultural milieu. The systems are outlined below using examples of factors at these levels which are relevant for this study.

### **2.1.2 The microsystem environment**

The most common and immediate environment that an individual finds him or herself in is the microsystem environment: this is an individual's immediate environments such as the family, church, community and school. Since an individual interacts with the microsystem environment daily, this system has a significant impact on an individual's wellbeing, resilience and world view. It is also in this system that father absence or uninvolved may be felt most keenly by the child. In this study, the microsystem is emphasised due to the fact that a present father would be an integral part of this system, and given the nature of this exploratory qualitative study which recruited young Xhosa men, it was anticipated that these factors would be central to their experience. To concur this, according to Mbokazi (2021) in order for "interventions to promote non-resident fathers' involvement with children should target the family system, including the father, mother, child and involved extended kin, rather than individuals." (p.40). This is because, in the African context, an additional family aspect of the microsystem environment consists of extended family members such as aunts,

grandparents and cousins, in addition to parents and siblings, meaning that there is a rich sense of community including social fathers (Clark et al., 2017).

When a child is born out of wedlock, the maternal grandparents usually assume the parental role while the mother is at school or at work. In most cases, due to migration practices, the grandparents tend to be based in the rural parts of the country (Hall & Sambu, 2017; Salami & Chinedu, 2017). In these instances, the maternal family plays a key role in supporting a child with a disengaged father emotionally, financially and culturally (Buchanan, 2014). Consequently, a greater number of children are found in rural areas of South Africa than in the city, often far from their biological parents (Hall & Sambu, 2017). The father usually has little to no contact with the child, especially among black South Africans due to cultural restrictions such as pregnancy fines (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). This means that he is largely excluded from the child's microsystem: he does not have a strong and continued interaction with the child and thus has a limited influence on him or her (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

### ***2.1.2.1 The microsystem associated father presence barriers***

Within the microsystems setting, there are numerous factors that promote or heighten father absence and one of those is socialization. According to Karpov (2016) socialization is a process of learning from one's surroundings and people, including mimicking others' behaviours. In the process of socialisation, community, family members, and the media are the sources of messages to the child. The process of socialization is particularly important when it comes to fathering (Marcisz, 2013; Shwalb & Shwalb, 2014). Boys usually learn about fatherhood, manhood and masculinity from their fathers (Marcisz, 2013). Thus, boys who grow up with absent or uninvolved fathers are deprived of an opportunity to learn about fatherhood and manhood (Mavungu, 2013). Due to the prevalence of father absence or uninvolved in South Africa homes, many young men are at a disadvantage of being less equipped to become present and involved fathers in their lives, and thus could be at risk of being absent fathers themselves (Marcisz, 2013; Mavungu, 2013; Mayekiso, 2017). This fatherhood un-readiness due to negative experiences or lack of paternal exposure is termed a "generational transmission of negative fatherhood". For example, in her study of absent fathers, Mabusela (2014) had fathers who linked their absence to their own ordeal of having absent fathers.

### 2.1.3 The mesosystem environment

The links or connections between the child's microsystem environments is called the mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1994) refers to this level as a "system of microsystems". These connections have an influence on the child and his or her environment as a part of a complex and inter-connected system. For a child to develop maximally and holistically, there must be synergy and a strong inter-relationship between these environments e.g. between the family and school or between the maternal family and paternal family. Any disjuncture between these can cause confusion to the developing individual, and also, when one of the systems is not functioning well, the child is negatively affected. For example, at school when parents are called for a meeting, the single mother could end up missing some of those meetings due to other commitments or due to shame over not being able to afford school items (Duister, 2021). The mother's non-attendance and inability to provide resources may result in the child being labelled and mistreated by his or her teachers.

Another example is that for a child born out of wedlock, when there is no relationship or a weak relationship between the maternal and paternal family this has an impact on the child (Mbokazi, 2021). She or he receives less support and may be caught in between the two families, without necessarily having a sense of belonging. On the other hand, a 'healthy' mesosystem could be a beneficial as the child would enjoy the benefits of rich social networks. The strength of the mesosystem is that it works in favour of the child when it functions well, because it means that missed opportunities in one environment (e.g. in the immediate family) could be gained outside the family (church or soccer practice).

In the Xhosa culture, the mesosystem can be beneficial to a child with a disengaged father. It can promote resilience as the child could receive support from male neighbours, teachers, uncles, coaches and other men in the community. These men could play a social father role and teach the child about positive fatherhood and healthy masculinity (Allen & Daly, 2002; Medich et al., 2018). They step in and play the fatherly role and provide emotional, financial or social support depending on the need and their ability (Helman, 2015; Ramphele, 2002). These men do not only play a role to boys but girls too, and do not necessarily have to be related to the children they serve. This practice of social fathers is influenced by the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* (humanity) based on the belief that, "*Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*" (A person is a person through others) (Mayekiso, 2017). Within the Xhosa

culture, the social fathers particularly play a key role among boys during the initiation process, especially the “*ikhankatha*”, which is the person who cares for the initiates in the wilderness.

### ***2.1.3.1 The mesosystem associated barriers***

As much as the South African society is moving towards embracing the role of a father as a carer and nurturer, men who seek to be involved or present in children or their children’s lives sometimes encounter suspicion. At times, they are not perceived as people who have the best interest of their children and are suspected as potential child abusers due to the negative father involvement image that men have in the South African media (Prinsloo, 2002). This suspicion may be one of the reasons behind maternal gate-keeping (Salami & Chinedu, 2017), which is one of the issues that influences father absence or uninvolved in South Africa (Hawkins, 1999; Krampe, 2009; Mayekiso, 2017). Maternal gate-keeping refers to a situation when the mother prevents or deters the father from co-parenting and her unwillingness to share parenting roles (Makusha & Richter, 2016).

Maternal gate-keeping stems from various reasons such as the mother’s traditional gender role attitudes, conflict in a relationship or when the father has financial difficulties, drinks alcohol excessively (Manyatshe, 2013) or has a history of abuse or being unreliable (Allen & Daly, 2002; Hawkins, 1999). Allen and Daly (2002) add that maternal gate-keeping could also be as a result of having doubts about the partner’s paternal competence, mother’s dominance in child rearing, fear of losing control over the child and the reluctance to negotiate childcare practices. Sometimes maternal gate-keepers tend to have rigid parenting standards, and may fail to see the father as a nurturer and thus become less flexible and less collaborative in parenting (Hawkins, 1999). In extreme instances, according to Manyatshe (2013), it is not uncommon for some mothers to hide paternity when they think that the father is abusive or unreliable, or in instances where he denied paternity. Some mothers believe that gate-keeping will physically and emotionally protect the child. At times maternal gate-keeping could also be influenced by the belief that the father will not be able to financially support the child – the belief in the provider role (this is discussed in depth under macrosystems). Irrespective of the mother’s reasons for maternal gate keeping, it can facilitate and intensify father absence or uninvolved (Manyatshe, 2013).

#### **2.1.4 The exosystem environment**

Furthermore, the ecological systems theory recognizes that an individual is also influenced by environments or events that happen to the caregiver, such as the caregivers' or parents' world of work or their networks such as friends or clubs (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). When the surroundings of the caregivers or parents are humane and well-functioning, they positively impact the developing child. They could promote resilience to help the child to develop well and be able to overcome life challenges. For example, in the South African workplace as of 2020, fathers were granted 10 days paid paternity leave. This is meant to provide them an opportunity to bond with their new-born babies and be involved in their care at an early stage to avoid father absence. This relates to the belief that father-child bonds formed earlier tend to strengthen the father-child relationship later in life. Thus, this decision taken in the labour trajectory may directly benefit the child by promoting father-child relationships through egalitarian parenting attitudes and practices (Eddy et al., 2013). Another example is the fact that single mothers also have to provide for their children; this means they have to work. Some may work under strenuous and harsh conditions for longer periods without having quality time with their children, and this could negatively affect the relationship with the child and also the child may get opportunities to experiment with destructive behaviours (Duister, 2021). Therefore, this means that caregivers or parents should be critical of their surroundings, the choices they make in life and their social networks as they directly impact the innocent child.

##### ***2.1.4.1 The exosystem associated father presence barriers***

South Africa has high numbers of children born out of wedlock and fathers who are non-resident (Morrell et al., 2016), and these two factors alone can be facilitators of father absence when not monitored on the exosystem level. Furthermore, since these fathers do not reside with the child, the best way to reach them is through the exosystem. The issue of father absence at this level is sometimes caused or worsened by the fact that some men continue to occupy social spaces that are not in-line with fatherhood such as heavy drinking, spending time in taverns and having multiple partners (Mayekiso, 2017). Friends and intimate partners often play a destructive role by encouraging them to neglect or relinquish their paternal role (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016). In extreme cases, the new partner may even prevent the father from maintaining a relationship with his children (Eddy et al., 2013). In their actions, some men treat fatherhood as optional and a responsibility that the single mother has to handle alone (Duister, 2021).

### **2.1.5 The macrosystem environment**

The macrosystem environment refers to the political, cultural ideologies and traditions that shape and influence child's development. The media is often the platform to spread these ideologies. Generally, the cultural and spiritual beliefs and traditions that an individual is born into tend to shape his or her world view, choices and actions. Many African societies usually operate on specific tribal cultural practices which often carve intrapersonal and inter-personal relations (Sagner, 1999). In the Xhosa culture, one of the most common traditional practices are: initiation (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2014), bride price and pregnancy fine (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016). These practices have a direct impact on parenting, and such impact could be positive or negative. For example, in the Xhosa culture, a man who did not go through initiation is not considered as an adult and cannot partake in adulthood duties such as parenting and leading. This would then have implications for a boy child who would not have access to the guidance of a father who has experienced the ritual.

#### ***2.1.5.1 The macrosystem environment associated father presence barriers***

Firstly, the tradition of paying the bride price prevents some couples from getting married due to financial constraints (Ramphela, 2002), and thus an increasing number of children born out of wedlock possibly miss out on an opportunity to be raised by both parents as cohabitation is also culturally frowned upon (Clark et al., 2015) (this is discussed in section 2.5). Furthermore, since fatherhood seems to be equated to provision, fathers from financially constraints backgrounds are automatically disqualified by this kind of thinking (Mbokazi, 2021). They do not stand a chance in fatherhood compared to their counter-parts who are well off (Mavungu, 2013). Despite the rampant assumption that these fathers lack commitment, there is evidence that some do wish to be involved, but are sometimes prevented from doing so by the mothers of the child and their families (Madhavan & Roy, 2012; Ratele et al., 2012). They end up being side-lined from parenting and get labelled as fathers who are “deadbeats” or “dead alive” due to their inability to play the provider role. These terms are used to refer to an absent or uninvolved father – meaning that due to the absence or uninvolvedness, the father seems dead even though he is alive (Helman, 2015). This occurrence depicts the power of the inter-influence between family dynamics and culture.

Finally, the advent of democracy in South Africa gave birth to new laws and policies that affect families and parenting, and one of those is the Maintenance Act 99 of 1998. It seeks to ensure that parents maintain and support their children, and the parent who fails to do so gets taken to court. The number of men who have been taken to court, resent this act and are of the view that “the maintenance system favours women and is biased against men” (Khunou, 2006b). This influences some of them to elect to be intentionally absent from their children after having gone through it. A participant in Khunou (2006b) did not only absent himself but also expressed hatred and the desire to kill his daughter after being taken to court.

### **2.1.6 The chronosystem environment**

Finally, the chronosystem level refers to how the era in which the individual lives in affects his or her nature and quality of life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It also includes important milestones and rites of passages which change one’s life. Time is an important factor in the concept of fatherhood and due to time and historical changes, views on fatherhood have evolved in South Africa. For example, in the past women and men played parallel roles in parenting: women as carers and men as providers. As a result, women were usually home-makers, mostly in rural areas while men were in the cities working in order to fulfil the provider role (Holbron & Eddy, 2011; Manyatshe, 2013; Mayekiso, 2017). This parallelism still continues to be entrenched in the beliefs and actions of some parents. Clearly, “The dismantling of apartheid has not erased the patterns of behaviour entrenched by the system” (Ramphela, 2002) (p. 154). The end in this parallelism is a necessity because the positive changes in women’s rights, their access to education and employment mean that they are now in a position to assume the provider role, effectively causing a blur in lines of parenting (Mbokazi, 2021). Such progression in women’s lives has to some extent influenced the evolution of fatherhood: from a traditional role of provision to a modern role of nurturing (Dick, 2016). According to Morrell et al. (2016) fatherhood is one of the spheres that is gradually transforming masculinity into a non-dominating gender identity where distinct gender roles are becoming blurred.

#### ***2.1.6.1 The chronosystem environment associated father presence barriers***

The parallelism mentioned above is one of the factors affecting father absence, and the society seems to be lagging behind in embracing these developments, and this is causing conflict, and unhealthy gender-based competition in parenting. The failure to adapt could cause father absence or

uninvolvement to remain one of the leading social challenges in the post-apartheid era among black families compared other races (Brils, 2012).

In summary, as shown throughout this section, there are various factors that cause fathers to be absent or uninvolved – some are within their control and some out of their control (Allen & Daly, 2002; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). The literature points out that some fathers elect to be absent out of lack of responsibility (Mabusela, 2014) while others give in to the constraints such as maternal gate-keeping or lack of finances (Mavungu, 2013). Nevertheless, this section has depicted that father absence is not always purely the father's choice (Allen & Daly, 2002; Khunou, 2006a; Lesch & Kelapile, 2016), as a result, some men have guilt, regrets and are troubled by not being involved in their children's lives. Their absence or uninvolvement sometimes bothers them to an extent of engaging in self-harming behaviours such as substance abuse and womanising in order to minimise the guilt (Mabusela, 2014). According to Patel and Mavungu (2016) some fathers even become unproductive at work while others may even commit suicide. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to understand the array of reasons for father absence or uninvolvement and in order to be cautious of labelling all absent or uninvolved fathers as irresponsible (Eddy et al., 2013; Fazel, 2017; Madhavan et al., 2008; Makusha & Richter, 2016; Morrell & Richter, 2006). This would help to devise interventions that are not one-sided or mis-fitting.

## **2.2 The prevalence of father absence or uninvolvement globally and in Africa**

Father absence or uninvolvement is a global phenomenon (Allen & Daly, 2002; Celik & Bulut, 2019), and has been documented in countries such as Namibia (Posel & Devey, 2006), the United Kingdom (Boothroyd & Perrett, 2008), the US (Mabry, 2004), South Africa (Madhavan & Roy, 2012; Salami & Chinedu, 2017; Semega, Fontenot, & Kollar, 2017), Botswana (Kesebonye & Amone-P'Olak, 2020) and Mexico (Nobles, 2013). In Mexico, the increase in father absence has been due to father migration, especially in rural areas (Nobles, 2013). On the other hand, the United States and South Africa share a history of racial, economic and social inequality and unemployment which put a strain on the functioning and composition of black families. In Zimbabwe it is linked to the fact that a man who impregnated a woman used to be culturally obliged to marry her, but this practice is declining and thus contributing to father absence or uninvolvement. Secondly, due to the economic decline in Zimbabwe, some men have been forced to leave their wives and children at home in pursuit of



employment opportunities elsewhere (Nyanjaya & Masango, 2012). In South Africa, there has been an increase of father absence or uninvolvement since the introduction of labour migration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (De Goede, 2018; Eddy et al., 2013; Holbron & Eddy, 2011; Mavungu, 2013; Ncaca, 2014; Salami & Chinedu, 2017). Black South African men had to leave their families in rural areas and go and work as mine workers in the cities. In Botswana, some men left their families to be mine workers in South Africa. In many instances, due to being away from their families for lengthy periods, men became involved in extra-marital relationships, which directly caused an increase of children born out of wedlock (Kesebonye & Amone-P'Olak, 2020). These macrosystemic factors have contributed to the high levels of father absence or uninvolvement among black people (Madhavan & Roy, 2012).

Even though there is limited data on father absence statistics in Africa (Kesebonye & Amone-P'Olak, 2020), the limited available research does reveal the prevalence of single motherhood in Africa (Clark & Hamplova, 2013; Clark et al., 2017). In Tanzania it is 52%, 60% in Kenya, 61% in Malawi, 69% in Zimbabwe (Clark & Hamplova, 2013) and 70% in Botswana (Kesebonye & Amone-P'Olak, 2020). In their study on the impact of father absence among university students in Botswana (Kesebonye & Amone-P'Olak, 2020), discovered that only 38% of children resided with both parents, while 30% reported to have never had a father figure in their lives. Clark and Hamplova (2013) warn that in addition to the high prevalence of pre-marital single motherhood, 50% of women in sub-Saharan Africa will become single mothers due to death of a spouse or divorce (post-marital single motherhood).

### 2.3 Globalisation and changes in family structure

Communities are made up of families, and thus to understand communities, it is important to first understand the nature and composition of families (Ntozi & Zirimenya, 1999). Globally, the family structure has evolved in terms of family headship, size and composition (Department of Social Development Republic of South Africa, 2013; OECD, 2011; Shwalb & Shwalb, 2014). These changes are influenced by factors such as the decline in birth rate, an increase in delayed parenthood, a higher divorce rate and single motherhood (Dlamini, 2015; OECD, 2011; Shwalb & Shwalb, 2014) as well as the fact that more women are joining the workforce (Toossi & Morisi, 2017). To reflect these changes, (Lundberg, Pollak, & Stearns, 2016) states that during the 1950s, 80% of female high school graduates and 70% of college graduates were married in America. By 2010 these numbers had declined to 59% among high school graduates and 69% among college graduates.

Generally, in different parts of the society the family unit has transformed from being a rigid and predictable composition to fluid and unpredictable families such as same-sex parents, inter-racial parents etc. Against this backdrop, in East Asia and some parts of China there is a practice of “one child family” (Buchanan, 2014), whereby families are rewarded for controlling child birth in order to decrease the overall population. In some African countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa, the family structure has changed from large families or polygamous male-headed families with many members (grandparents, cousins and distant relatives) to nuclear, single female-headed or child-headed families (Department of Social Development Republic of South Africa, 2013; Dlamini, 2015; Ntozi & Zirimenya, 1999).

Across different contexts, there is an array of reasons for the changes in the family unit, including societal changes related to economy, employment, education, politics and health. Currently, there is an increase in acknowledgment of human rights. For example, in many Africa countries, marriage is no longer ‘compulsory’, there has also been a decline in the practice of arranged marriage and forcing young girls to marry older men (*ukuthwala*). Individuals have rights to express themselves and thus free to choose to remain single without necessarily conforming to the macrosystem social expectation of a nuclear family practice.

Nowadays women are becoming more liberated, they have a voice on decisions that affect them the most at home (Berhane et al., 2018). They have more access to education and employment opportunities than before and therefore have more financial freedom and less reliance on men for financial support. Further, there is more freedom of movement (physical and digital) in pursuit of better opportunities (OECD, 2011). As a result, for most women, marriage is preceded by the pursuit of education and career advancement, and thus causing some women to prefer single motherhood than marriage (Moore, 2013), and this preference is now no longer socially questionable because single mother-led households are no longer mislabelled as outcasts or dysfunctional (Moore, 2013) like the way they were in the past.

Furthermore, while there have been positive economic changes that elevate the status and position of women in the society, there is also a growing number of men who have difficulties in paying the bride price due to limited financial resources (Mangena & Ndlovu, 2013). This difficulty has a relationship with the increasing cohabitation rate compared to the past whereby paying the bride price was practical as people had livestock and used cows to pay the bride price. In some cases, the family of the man would even offer to pay dowry on behalf of their son. Now with the high rate of unemployment and economic instability most families cannot afford to do this (De Goede, 2018; Ntozi & Zirimenya, 1999).

Another reason for single motherhood is the decline of the tradition of widow inheritance by the late husband's lineage (De Goede, 2018; Ntozi & Zirimenya, 1999). In previous times, according to this tradition, a male relative or a younger brother of the deceased husband was traditionally obliged to marry and take on the family of his late brother as his own, especially if the widow can still bear children (Sagner, 1999). This tradition was meant to preserve the family unit, to avoid single motherhood and having children of multiple clans under one roof.

Even though the evolution of family composition has advantages, its disadvantage in the African family means that many women have the burden of raising children alone due to giving birth out of wedlock and not having supportive partners (Richter & Morell, 2006) or being widowed and receiving little or no support from extended family members. Children have less social support and access to extended male family members due to the diminishing practice of extended kin in African families. The issue of limited resources and increasing individualism also make it difficult for extended family

members to support one another (Mayekiso, 2017; Ramphele, 2002). Clark et al. (2017), in their study on kin support of single mothers, found that 36.2% of them did not receive support from family members. Likewise, when sharing their experiences, the single mothers of offending youth in Duister (2021)'s study, they labelled single-motherhood as "lonely and troubled journey". This means that the changes in the family structure need to be scrutinised in light of these disadvantages.

## **2.4 Fatherhood and the meaning of father presence or involvement**

### **2.4.1 The meaning of fatherhood, and views of fatherhood roles**

Fatherhood and the role of a father is socially constructed (Dick, 2016) and therefore the meaning differs depending on the socio-cultural context according to the influence of the macrosystem and chronosystem: societal values, economic state, social structure, circumstances and time progression. As a social and dynamic construct, fatherhood remains topical in relation to what constitutes or does not constitute fatherhood. Pleck (2007) differentiates between two types of fatherhood: fatherhood as fertility status, and fatherhood as behaviour and identity. Fatherhood as fertility status affirms one's masculinity, and confirms one's ability to reproduce. On the other hand, fatherhood as a behaviour and identity refers to the man's actions as a father: how he describes and understands the active role he plays and the responsibility he has as a father. Fathers who fall into this category may also be men without biological children of their own who elect to be present and involved with children of others, also known as social fathers (Brils, 2012).

With that being said, compared to a single rigid role of a father, there are now multiple roles which can be condensed into two major roles: a traditional role (a provider and a disciplinarian) and a modern role (a nurturer) (Mavungu, 2013). According to the traditional role, a father is seen as a guide who teaches children technical skills for future survival and independence. This kind of father is seen as playing a pivotal role by sharing skills for future security of the family and society. Additionally, in this traditional role, a father is positioned as a provider of resources such as food, clothes, money and does his utmost best to meet all material needs of his family. He provides cultural orientation to his children, and he is also seen as a disciplinarian, a guardian and a protector (Malherbe, 2015). He supports his partner and brings dignity into the family (Patel & Mavungu, 2016).

In an African context, this traditional role has been widely embraced and practiced. A father has always been seen as a sole provider of resources, a decision maker and thus not expected to be involved in the nurturing of children (Clark et al., 2017; Helman, 2015). As a result, some fathers are more familiar with this role and continue to embrace it, because it was inherited from their fathers (Mavungu, 2013). This sometimes causes them to be less welcoming to the modern role which requires them to be active in child care. To a point that despite being unemployed, some fathers still regard themselves more as breadwinners than nurturers (Brils, 2012). This was noted in Brils (2012)'s study, where a participant espoused that a father has an obligation to provide irrespective of unemployment. Unfortunately, despite the prevalence of these beliefs, in practice, it is difficult for unemployed fathers to maintain provider persona.

The fathers who acknowledge the negative impact of their finances on their fatherhood refer to themselves as: "Fathers without *amandla* (power)" (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). This concept of "Fathers without *amandla* " depicts the powerlessness that some men find themselves in and explains why South Africa is known as one of the countries where most fathers lag behind both in financial provision and child care (Salami & Chinedu, 2017). In the midst of unemployment which is common among black men, it is thus not surprising that some fathers elect to abandon their offspring completely (Mavungu, 2013). In a study of black absent fathers by Patel and Mavungu (2016), two thirds of fathers were not employed, and those with work had low paying jobs. This has caused some poor families to rely on CSG and old age pensions, and has also made those not eligible destitute. This occurrence has put some men into shame, stripped their dignity as in the family and community they do not get the same level of respect they would receive if they were providers (Granlund & Hochfeld, 2019).

In contrast to the traditional fatherhood role, there is a new fatherhood role which is called the modern role. This role requires a father who engages in unpaid care at home, a nurturer who spends quality time with his children and has a relationship and open communication with them (Pleck, 2007). In many developed countries, the modern role has been adopted for some decades (Celik & Bulut, 2019). It is only until recently that this role is beginning to be embraced by some South African men (Dick, 2016). The nurturer and the carer role that has always been expected from the mother is now also being placed on the shoulders of the father (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Nevertheless, this shift will take time to materialise, because this new role requires an attitude shift and an adoption of a

gender egalitarian stance in parenting. It requires fathers' willingness to ignore societal expectations that prevent from engaging in unpaid domestic work. It further requires commitment and unlearning unhealthy masculinities that make them undermine child-care as unmanly (Morrell et al., 2016).

Even though there is an observable move towards the modern role, the prominence and importance of either traditional or modern role is still largely influenced by the location and availability of resources. For example, Japanese fathers embrace the role of being involved and spending quality time with children while fathers in Australia spend less time with their children due to long work hours that are necessitated by a high cost of living (Shwalb & Shwalb, 2014). On the other hand, some Russian fathers tend to relinquish the provider role to the mothers (Shwalb & Shwalb, 2014). The South African government is showing evidence of embracing the modern role; this is evident in the implementation of the new policy of 10 consecutive days of paid paternity leave which came into effect as of January 2020. This policy allows fathers to take time off and spend time with their newly born infants (Eddy et al., 2013). Some black fathers who have been resistant to this role citing culture as the reason for the resistance are also beginning to embrace it. Madhavan and Roy (2012), confirms this gradual shift by stating that, "For Black fathers in South Africa, responsible fatherhood includes providing the child with role model(s) and social capital, emotional support, and most importantly, love and care." (p.4).

Despite the observed shift from traditional to the modern role, the transition has ushered in some challenges in South Africa. One of the challenges is the gap between the older and younger generation of fathers (Nduna, 2014). Unlike the older generation, the younger generation of fathers is drifting away from describing fatherhood in absolute traditional terms of provision, protection and discipline. They are determined to be different from their own fathers by being more involved in all aspects of the child's life, to nurture and create memories with their children (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). They aspire to take part in every aspect of parenting such as being there from birth, being part of the child's growth and education, playing with the child, bathing and feeding the child without limiting their role to financial provision or discipline only (Madhavan & Roy, 2012; Swartz & Bhana, 2009).

Nevertheless, since the role of a father as a provider has been entrenched culturally in South Africa, there are also some younger men who struggle to embrace the new role of fathers as nurturers, claiming that only women are suitable for the nurturing of children (Arno, 2014). This was evident in

a study of young absent or uninvolved fathers by Mavungu (2013) whereby most believed that their role was mainly that of a financial provider. Some went further to indicate that by nature, women are the ones meant to care for children due to their caring nature, and they questioned their ability to nurture a child as men and pointed out that men find it difficult to attend to a child's needs.

The prevailing rigid provider discourse among some men needs to be disrupted in order to support the mothers who often step in to play the provider role. Indeed, Morrell et al. (2016) warns that fathers who are less egalitarian in their attitudes tend to be less involved in child nurturing. So, to be an involved parent, a father has to adopt egalitarian parenting, and they need to be aware that irrespective of his financial standing, a father is expected to be involved in various aspects of a child's life: emotionally, socially and cognitively for the holistic growth of the child (Chideya & Williams, 2014; Clark et al., 2015; Hamer, 1998; Sagner, 1999). Furthermore, in order not to be threatened by women's ability to play the provider role, men need to reposition themselves according to the unique contemporary needs of the family (Dick, 2016). So, there is a call for fathers to pay attention to the diverse nature of fatherhood. They need to adapt to the new role as the distinct role that a mother and father used to play in a child's life is becoming blurred (Makusha & Richter, 2016). They need to know that irrespective of how unattainable fatherhood seems to be, mothers do need support from their partners, and the children also need their fathers' involvement too.

#### **2.4.2 The meaning of father presence or involvement**

As discussed above, historically, a large portion of child-rearing and nurturing has been left to the mother as the main carer, thus creating a gap for many fathers to relinquish their responsibility of being present in all aspect of a child's development (Boothroyd & Perrett, 2008). It is only up until recently that there has been an acknowledgment that paternity acceptance paternity, being married or residing with the child's mother and the child does not automatically constitute father presence or involvement (Morrell et al., 2016; Sikweyiya, Nduna, Khuzwayo, Mthombeni, & Mashamba-Thompson, 2016). What constitutes a present or involved father is an "emotional closeness and attachment" between the father and the child (Celik & Bulut, 2019). Allen and Daly (2002) report that an involved or present father is "sensitive, warm, close, friendly, supportive, intimate, nurturing, affectionate, encouraging, comforting and accepting." (p. 11), and the children do not feel abandoned

and neglected by him. Father presence or involvement consists of constant constructive interaction between the father and the child, whether face-to-face or through technology.

Despite these definitions of what constitutes an involved or present father, the quality and level of father presence or involvement can differ and may be perceived differently by different children (Krampe, 2009). Consequently, it is difficult to measure father presence or involvement as it largely depends on the child's evaluation of the depth of the relationship. For instance, some children idolise their fathers, and thus easily appreciate their father's efforts irrespective of how small they might seem (Krampe, 2009; Patrick, 2006). Some children prefer quality time and affection from their fathers while others evaluate the father-child relationship on the basis of father's ability to meet their material needs such as buying toys, clothes and paying for excursions. Father presence or involvement also fluctuates based on various factors, such as the child's age, the father's social, financial and emotional standing as well as the quality of the relationship between the mother and the father. In other words, even though there are definitions of what constitutes father presence, this concept could be subjective. The literature also suggests that the quality of interaction between parents is one of the key factors that influences father presence or involvement, with parental discords usually causing fathers to distance themselves from their off-spring (Allen & Daly, 2002; Anderson et al., 1999).

## **2.5 The importance of father involvement and the implications of father absence or uninvolved**

Both local and international investigators have studied the contemporary definition of fatherhood and co-operative parenting and found that father involvement in different aspects of a child's life is crucial as fathers positively contribute to child development. This is because the father exposes the child to various experiences that a single mother cannot afford to give due to time and resources constraints (De Goede, 2018; Fletcher, May, StGeorge, & Morgan, 2011). Fathers provide a different care from the mothers, such as their physical approach to play (Fletcher et al., 2011), and their exploratory play which contributes to the child's emotional and cognitive development. Furthermore, children with a present or involved father enjoy his protection and support emotionally and financially (Richter, Chikovore, & Makusha, 2010). It is of great importance for fathers to be involved especially during the early stages of child development as the father-child bond is formed during the early stages of a child's life. This early bond is believed to help to prepare the child for life experiences such as knowing how to relate to men (Mabusela, 2014).



Additionally, father presence or involvement positively affects children in various aspects of life (Cherian, 2001; Holbron & Eddy, 2011; Mavungu, 2013), such as cognitive development (Marcisz, 2013), learning self-discipline and self-control, emotional well-being (Allen & Daly, 2002), as well as helping boy children develop a healthy masculine identity (Helman, 2015). There is evidence that some fathers are aware of the importance of their involvement. (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016). Likewise, absent fathers in Patel and Mavungu (2016)'s study when asked about their awareness of the implication of their absence on their children, they cited: emotional, behavioural, social, financial as well as cultural implications. Below these implications are explored in-depth.

### **2.5.1 Cognitive development, self-discipline and academic achievement**

Children who have present or involved fathers tend to develop well cognitively due to the attention, play, exposure and the stimulation they get from them (Holbron & Eddy, 2011; Mavungu, 2013). They also tend to do well at school (Allen & Daly, 2002), as their father's involvement or presence could mean that they get additional support and guidance with homework compared to children with absent or uninvolved fathers (Cherian, 2001; Eddy et al., 2013; Mabusela, 2014). Children with present or involved fathers may also benefit from their father's presence or involvement in terms of self-discipline as the guidance and discipline from both parents may provide additional encouragement to develop this (Helman, 2015). On the other hand, those with disengaged fathers are also more likely to be exposed to temptations and social ills such as drugs and gangsterism, especially in instances where the single mothers have jobs that require them to be away from home for days or do sleep-ins (Duister, 2021). This lengthy absence sometimes exposes them to destructive temptations.

### **2.5.2 Emotional and financial well-being**

More than girls, boys with absent fathers are affected negatively by father absence (Thwala, 2018). Generally, boys, who grow up with present or involved fathers may receive more emotional stimulation and contentment than those with uninvolved fathers (Louw, 1991; Sternberg, 2001). They are more likely to be able to regulate their emotions more effectively (Allen & Daly, 2002; Diaku, 2016; Patrick, 2006). They tend to feel more supported, fulfilled and are able to express themselves constructively as a result of learning about conflict resolution from a male perspective (Allen & Daly, 2002). On the other hand, children who grow up with absent or uninvolved fathers can experience a

lingering sense of loss (De Goede, 2018) anger and fear of rejection (Tau, 2020). They have a longing for a fathers' love, care and involvement (Medich et al., 2018; Nyanjaya & Masango, 2012). Additionally, Nyanjaya and Masango (2012) warn that boy children with absent or uninvolved fathers are negatively affected, feel lost, betrayed and abandoned by their fathers. Even though it is sometimes assumed that they would connect with their mothers, this is not always the case, especially if their mothers are under emotional duress, working and spending most of time away from home. To echo this detachment, a single mother of a youth offender in Duister (2021)'s study lamented: "I worked from early morning till late at night and came home too exhausted to ask my child how his day went, to spend time with him and to listen whether he had a good or bad day." 108.

Finally, children from single mother-led families often find themselves unable to keep up financially with their counterparts who have both parents. This financial gap sometimes propels them to engage in destructive behaviour out of fear of not wanting to over-burden the mother. Some young men resort to crime involvement in order to acquire the necessary resources. Some lose concentration in class due to their dire financial situations posed by father absence, while others engage in truancy or drop out of school due to the embarrassment of not having the necessary resources (Tau, 2020).

### **2.5.3 Identity, self-concept and masculinity**

Parents play a pivotal role in influencing their child's self-concept: that is how the child sees him or herself. Children, especially boys, who have present or involved fathers may have a positive self-concept as their fathers are there to guide and support them on the journey of masculinity. They can greatly help them to position themselves as men who add value to the society (Allen & Daly, 2002; Medich et al., 2018; Ramphele, 2002; Sternberg, 2001) while some children with absent fathers may feel unworthy as a result of being abandoned by their fathers (Patrick, 2006; Smith, Khunou, & Nathane-Taulela, 2014). Some may also feel a cultural dislocation and a weakened "kin identity" (Madhavan & Roy, 2012) since the African culture requires the father to link the child to the ancestors for spiritual connection and formation of masculine identity (Nduna, 2014). (See section 2.8 below)

Risky behaviours and unhealthy masculinity may be observed in some boys (Mabusela, 2014). They might be involved in substance abuse and unsafe sexual experimentation at an early age and in some cases also exhibit aggression, misdirected anger, gangsterism or violence in order to assert their role and relevance in the society as men (Diaku, 2016).

While the literature reiterates how father absence negatively affects children, especially boys (Nduna, 2014; Nyanjaya & Masango, 2012; Patrick, 2006; Ramphele, 2002; Ratele et al., 2012), there is also evidence that some boys or male adolescents do build coping skills to deal with their father absence and uninvolvement constructively (Patrick, 2006; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). They become emotionally healthy young men who become responsible, self-sufficient and loving fathers (Marcisz, 2013). Others do not feel that father absence affected them in anyway as they have never known the experience of having a father before, citing the important role played by their mothers in their contentment (Tau, 2020). A young man participant in Tau (2020)'s was of the view that the absence of his father largely contributed to his independence, self-worth and maturity. Others thanked the support they got for extended kin. So, when it comes to fatherlessness and fatherhood in South Africa, (Morrell & Richter, 2006) not all is bleak as there are men who are not fathers biologically but who willingly and competently assume the fatherhood role by becoming social fathers and father figures to the children of other men (Richter et al., 2010). So, tireless investigations are needed to help support those who are usually extremely affected by father absence.

## **2.6 The need for a present or involved father for boys in the Xhosa culture**

As indicated before, African people have spiritual beliefs and practices that they value and continue to practice despite colonisation and globalisation (Mangena & Ndlovu, 2013; Sagner, 1999; Salami & Chinedu, 2017). These practices and beliefs tend to be hierarchical, effectively placing women at the bottom. This is causing dilemma in the contemporary society because while there is an increase in women empowerment socially, economical and politically, in the sphere of culture women are still at the bottom of the cultural hierarchy. They have no power or a say in majority of the revered traditions. One of these traditions is Traditional Male circumcision (TMC), also known as initiation which is practised by the Ndebeles, Sothos, Vendas, Tsongas, Pedis and Tswanas (Mavundla & Netswera, 2009; Ncaca, 2014; Sagner, 1999; Salami & Chinedu, 2017). This section explains the rationale for this ritual in the Xhosa culture, and its patriarchal nature. It also depicts the need for a present or involved father during this challenging process (before, during and after).

### **2.6.1 The Xhosa initiation process and the need for a present or involved father**

Many Xhosa people practice Christianity but continue to follow some of the traditional customs which involve a spiritual link to their ancestors for spiritual protection (Ncaca, 2014). One of these key practices that remain intact is that of culturally transitioning from boyhood to manhood called

*ulwaluko* (initiation/cultural male circumcision) (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2014; Mayekiso, 2017; Ncaca, 2014; Sagner, 1999). It is a ritual of foreskin removal without anaesthesia conducted by a traditionally trained surgeon using a traditional tool (Mavundla & Netswera, 2009) followed by the period of seclusion which lasts for a few weeks. This ritual used to occur in June where initiates would spend between one to three months in the wilderness; it then changed to being also conducted in December. Due to time constraints and the demands of civilisation, initiates currently stay in the wilderness between 3 weeks to 4 weeks during school holidays in order to cater for the boys who attend school (Mayekiso, 2017).

This ritual is a lengthy process which is usually done in late adolescence where a boy would approach his father upon his readiness to attend initiation school. In some instances, a boy gets forced to attend the school if he is misbehaving as the school is perceived as manhood rehabilitation. At the onset of the process, the father of the boy calls a meeting with extended family members to inform them about the boy's desire or readiness to become a man. The extended family would then assess the readiness of the boy and also consult the ancestors and sometimes traditional healers regarding the process that the boy would undertake. The boy would then be taken for medical evaluation and then the traditional surgeon and the traditional carers are identified and approached (Mavundla & Netswera, 2009).

Since cultural initiation is an emotionally strenuous process, on the night before the day of circumcision, the boy and his peers would have a night vigil to help the boy to emotionally prepare for the process. This is the same night that a small grass hut is built by the elders to house the initiate during his stay in the wilderness. In the morning the boy is then accompanied by the elders as well as the surgeon to the wilderness where the actual circumcision will take place and where he would also spend the subsequent weeks.

The seclusion process is a sacred journey where the initiate follows a strict diet. In the first week, he eats samp (dried maize kernels that have been broken down into smaller pieces) with no salt, oil or vegetables and drinks water which is diluted with powder from burnt ashes which sometime leads to dehydration. According to Ncaca (2014) the first eight days are the most strenuous – during which the young man must familiarise himself with the new environment, cope with less sleep and change the bandage on the circumcision wound every 20 minutes (looking after it like a baby). He also has to deal with the isolation of not having contact with other people except the carers (the elders who are

appointed by the family because of their knowledge of cultural initiation) and older men from the family. The initiate is expected to show strength during this period and not complain. After the first week there is a fast-breaking celebration which happens in their wilderness homestead where the initiate is based. An animal is slaughtered and then they are allowed to eat other kinds of appropriate foods and they can get visits from male villagers and peers – female peers included, but no older women are allowed to visit, even if they are family members. During this process, the initiate is taught by respected older men about what it means to be a man compared to being a boy (Otter, 2007), and he is required to introspect and ponder about manhood. He is also taught about respect both for the dead and living (Ncaca, 2014).

In the remainder of the weeks, he is explicitly taught the manhood language which he uses as evidence that he attended initiation school when outside. This is the kind of language that culturally separate boys from men. During this period, the initiated men in the village regularly and randomly pay the initiate visits to keep him company and to pass on manhood teachings in addition to the teachings he gets from his carers. The initiate is also allowed to roam around the wilderness in order to learn more about survival in the wilderness.

Once the healing occurs, preparations for his returns are made at home and in the morning of returning home, his wilderness hut is burnt. He then gets taken to the river by the elders to wash his body, put on new blankets as a symbolism of a new start. The welcome ceremony aims to help him integrate into the community as a new member. On the first night, there is another night vigil with his new peers – the young men who have gone through initiation where they orientate him with regards to manhood and girls would sing and there is feasting. This is also where the young man would be given a new meaningful manhood name which expresses the community's or family's wishes for the young man such as "*Zanethamsanqa*" – which means the bearer of luck (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2014). On the next day, a big celebration which includes everyone occurs where the male and female elders take turns to give words of wisdom on what will be expected from him as a man as well as how his life has changed as man. This is the most important aspect of the ritual as the young man is taught life important life lessons, and usually a man who has not transformed after initiation is judged according to how well he listened to these words.

As a “supposedly” transformed community member, the initiate is admired, honoured and celebrated as a well-taught soldier who overcame physical and emotional hurdles. Hence the Xhosa expression which says, “*Uyindoda emadodeni*”, which translates into English as “You are a man among men”. This expression means that manhood is an achievement - an acquired status which does not come automatically (Ncaca, 2014). Likewise Froneman and Kapp (2017), posit that this is “A test of manhood, and pain and bravery are essential components of this test ” (p.1). Those who did not go through initiation are judged and excluded on the basis of this ideal. As a result, even though this process is rigorous, scary, potentially deadly and strenuous (Froneman & Kapp, 2017; Magodyo, 2013), boys eagerly wait for their turn, which can only take place when they reach late adolescence (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2014; Sagner, 1999).

Due to the prestige and exclusivity that Xhosa cultural initiation has, those who seek modern intervention or medical help in the middle of the ritual are seen as failures, ridiculed and emasculated in the community. The young men who refuse to go through it or opt for medical circumcision at hospitals are ostracised and become unrecognised and overlooked by other Xhosa men (Medich et al., 2018). While those who do not get circumcised get treated as children; they cannot get married and are not supported or respected by the Xhosa society (Mavundla & Netswera, 2009). The mistreatment of boys is due to the fact that they are seen as immature physically, emotionally and intellectually before this process; hence they are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy socially (Ncaca, 2014). Froneman and Kapp (2017) depict how boys are treated in the community, they are: “Given leftover food at celebrations, are not allowed to socialise with other men in taverns, cannot use the clan-name to introduce themselves and sometimes their girlfriends are forcefully taken away from them.” (p. 1). Therefore, to escape this inhumane experience, Xhosa boys usually long for initiation in order to be socially re-positioned as responsible and respected men whose views are recognised and considered by elders. Being initiated also places them in the position to marry, start a family of their own and inherit property (Froneman & Kapp, 2017; Mavundla & Netswera, 2009; Ncaca, 2014).

The initiation ritual is a secretive process that women are excluded from; sharing this information with them, including the mothers of the initiates is a taboo (Mavundla & Netswera, 2009). Consequently, even though some mothers would prefer a medical circumcision over the traditional one for their sons, their wishes cannot materialise as they have no say in this practice (Mavundla & Netswera, 2009). Generally, the initiation ritual is an intricate and secretive masculine process which is not patriarchal but also hierarchical. It is not just led by males, but male elders, and in the Xhosa culture being an

elder is a position that is based on merit. It is not only an age construct, but a cultural and social construct. Therefore, the position of being an elder is a prestigious position that is earned by meeting certain criteria such as being married, having children, meeting certain gender expectations and being a responsible man who adds value to one's family and the wider community (Sagner, 1999). The elders who meet this criteria are usually consulted to impart wisdom and are an integral part of initiation, especially since it is sometimes a matter of life and deaths where some young men have lost parts of their genitals caused by various calamities such as dehydration, over-bleeding, loss of appetite, substance abuse, neglect and abuse by the carer (Froneman & Kapp, 2017).

So, due to the patriarchal nature and intricacy of this practice, adolescents boys who go through it without a present and involved father, tend to feel the father's absence or uninvolved keenly at this point (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2014; Mayekiso, 2017). To underscore the importance of an involved father during initiation, a participant in Ncaca (2014)'s study recalled fondly that "the most enjoyable times were when uTata (my father) was visiting and sharing with me, man to man about his story. I learnt a lot from those." (p.53). Indeed, the role of the biological father is a need not only to prepare his son emotionally for the journey ahead, but he is also needed as a link between the child and ancestors, which is a vital part of the process. It is believed that the link to the ancestors is to spiritually protect the initiate while in the wilderness. In cases of father absence, social fathers often step in. Nevertheless, the reliance on social fathers is becoming unpredictable as the practice of social fathering is being affected by an increasing focus on one's own nuclear family caused by limited resources and competition for survival among the Xhosas (Mayekiso, 2017).

## **2.7 What is known about father absence or uninvolved**

Globally, in addition to the mother's involvement and care, the role of fathers is recognised as also being important for the cognitive and emotional well-being of children, especially boys, irrespective of whether the father lives with the child or not (Hamer, 1998; Krampe, 2009; Mavungu, 2013). It has also been noted that there is an array of factors (finances, class, culture, history and maternal gate-keeping) that inhibit fathers from being present and involved in their children's lives (Allen & Daly, 2002; Hawkins, 1999; Salami & Chinedu, 2017). Current research also shows that the concept of fatherhood is evolving from provision towards fathers being carers and nurturers (Hawkins, 1999), and that through inner resilience, social fatherhood support and a strong mesosystem, father absence could be bearable. The young fathers also recognise the importance of taking part in child rearing; so

there is hope that with intensive efforts, it could be mitigated (Mavungu, 2013; Morrell et al., 2016; Richter et al., 2010).

## **2.8 What is not known about father absence or uninvolvement**

While the phenomenon of absent or uninvolved fathers has been identified as problematic among black South Africans, the perceptions, experiences and the psycho-social challenges of Xhosa young men with absent or uninvolved fathers, especially around the initiation ritual has not been explored yet. This study is aimed at addressing this gap. It is hoped that the findings of the study may be used to benefit young men by encouraging awareness and discussion on father absence or involvement in communities, in the media and at government levels and to also encourage them to actively support and strengthen their resilience.



### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research design

This study employed a qualitative approach, because it is ideal when the researcher aims to understand and explain a social phenomenon (Hancock, 1998). It helps to capture the voices of the people studied while reducing the risk of imposing preconceived ideas on the research process. Furthermore, qualitative research focuses on exploring a phenomenon about which little is known, which is the case for this study. This approach was ideal for this topic since it is an under-researched area. It allowed the researcher to go into the nuanced deeper understanding of the experiences of participants. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that qualitative findings are not generalizable to other populations (Hancock, 1998), but do provide insights into the needs of the study population specifically.

#### 3.2 Setting

South Africa has a history of oppression and discrimination which racially segregated and categorised people according to the following ethnic categories: Africans, Asians (Indians), Coloureds (mixed African and European ancestry), and Whites (European ancestry) (Anderson et al., 1999). Black and Coloured people were placed in townships (Anderson et al., 1999; Ramphele, 2002), which are still in existence. They are usually long distances from towns and suburbs, usually have poor infrastructure, have limited space, poor service delivery and limited economic opportunities (Medich et al., 2018).

This study took place in Khayelitsha, which is an urban lower income township near Cape Town in the Western Cape province of South Africa (Otter, 2007). It was established in 1983, and it is located on the Cape Flats and is the largest township in Cape Town. It is home to around 391, 749 people (Statistics South Africa, 2018). It is predominantly populated by Xhosa-speaking people who are originally from the Eastern Cape province who migrated to Cape Town for labour and political reasons in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Anderson et al., 1999). Only 4.9 % of its resident adults have higher education. More than 50% of its population lives in shacks (small houses made out of zinc metal and wood) (Statistics South Africa, 2018). In general, young men in South African townships are vulnerable to unemployment, substance abuse and HIV (Medich et al., 2018; Otter, 2007). Father absence is one of the social problems (Helman, 2015; Mavungu, 2013; Mayekiso, 2017) present in

Khayelitsha as in most South African townships and 42% of its households are female led (Medich et al., 2018). Khayelitsha was chosen as an ideal place where future interventions on this topic could be carried out in partnership with organisations that are already in the sphere of development. It was also an area with good potential for snowballing since the main researcher already had relationships there.

### **3.3 Participants**

The participants of this study were Xhosa speakers from Khayelitsha from three areas: Ilitha Park, Site B and Nkanini. This study had a clearly defined sample (De Goede, 2018), with two groups of participants: it aimed to have 25 Xhosa young men and five Xhosa community male elders. So, thus have 30 participants in total.

The inclusion criteria for the Xhosa young men included: (i) being between the ages of 18 and 22 years; (ii) having attended the initiation school within the last 5 years; (iii) having had a father they never knew or who was physically present but emotionally or financially uninvolved; (iv) had a father-son relationship which they themselves described as poor or average. The inclusion criterion addressing their perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their fathers was based on the amount and quality of shared activities, as well as on the father's involvement in decision making for the son (Allen & Daly, 2002). Young men who indicated having a strong relationship with their fathers were excluded from the study, as well as those whose father died. This is because the experience of a father loss due to death differs to that of the experience of an absent or uninvolved father (Clark & Hamplova, 2013; De Goede, 2018).

Xhosa community male elders were eligible participants if they were: (i) 55 years or older; (ii) had children and had been married for more than 10 years; (iii) had been involved with young people over a period of time and usually voluntarily and willingly coached and guided them through life; (iv) had a strong understanding of the Xhosa culture and the initiation process; (v) had some form of leadership position in the community, such as being a community leader, mentor, coach or traditional leader, and (vi) reported having regular contact with his children (at least more than once a month), either face-to-face or telephonically.

### **3.4 Sample**

Non-probability, criterion-based purposive sampling was used as this research focused on a specific population (De Goede, 2018; Froneman & Kapp, 2017), namely Xhosa young men and Xhosa community male elders. Snowballing was used in order to have access to potential participants by using as many networks as possible. Snowballing is a sampling procedure employed by asking people or participants to look into their networks and refer potential participants to take part in a study; hence it is also called the networking method (De Goede, 2018). The benefit of the networking aspect of this sampling is that it could help to put the participants at ease due to being referred to the study by a person they are familiar with (family, friends or community members) (Ncaca, 2014). Manyatshe (2013), (p.26) warns that “a shortcoming of this technique is that its success is dependent on the initial contacts and connections made, as well as the ability to keep the information active.” This shortcoming was avoided by being able to tap into the array of services in community development available in Khayelitsha.

### **3.5 Recruitment, screening and informed consent**

Khayelitsha has a number of organisations that offer an array of services in community development, entrepreneurship, education and health and people tend to have wide and rich networks due to the social structure of *Ubuntu* (‘I am what I am because of you’) and sharing (Otter, 2007). Due to the sensitivity of the study’s topic and its specific target populations, it was crucial to tap into already established relationships.

To contact potential participants, the main researcher tapped into the relationships she already has with community leaders through her community involvement in the sphere of education and entrepreneurship. These groups and organisations included the South African National Council on Alcoholism (SANCO), Nkosinathi centre, Ngova Community Development Foundation and Gatyeni Music group. The scope of the work of these community groups or organisations was diverse. Some were in the sphere of community development, mentoring and entrepreneurship while some were in entertainment and others providing psycho-social support to young men. They thus had strong networks and relationships in the Khayelitsha community. These community leaders, groups or organisations were first contacted telephonically and then in person in order to clearly explain the research study purpose to them and relay correct information about the study to potential participants.

The organisations were left a hard copy of an invitation letter and then a study flyer was sent through WhatsApp in order for them to disseminate to their networks. The documents were written in a non-technical style, clearly stipulating the purpose of the study and inclusion criteria both for Xhosa young men and elders. All recruitment material included the main researcher's contact details (phone number and e-mail address) and supervisors' e-mail addresses (See Appendix 7, 8 and 9). Potential participants referred by the community groups or organisations did not necessarily have to be receiving services from them or be affiliated to them to be included in the study. Furthermore, some potential participants were referred by their mothers to the study, they were then called by the researcher and invited to the nearest venues offered by the organisations that were assisting with recruitment. These venues were: Nkosinathi centre, Ngova Community Development Foundation and Gatyeni Music group in Khayelitsha (Ilitha Park, Site B and Nkanini). Using different venues helped to ensure that potential participants are directed to the venues nearer to them in order to eliminate travelling time and costs, as well as any possible discomfort that could have been caused by an unfamiliar setting during the screening and the interview. The main researcher and research assistant met the potential participants at these different community organisation venues.

The current study had 35 potential participants who volunteered to be involved: 5 elders and 30 young men. They were invited to meet the researcher and research assistant for screening and completion of the interview if eligible. This took place in quiet and private venues that were not far from the potential participants' homes. At the onset of the screening process, the participants were welcomed, and the interviewers introduced themselves to put the participants at ease. Then the purpose of the research and the interview was explained after which they were asked if they had questions, which were answered. The screening questionnaire was then administered. For young men, the screening questionnaire covered questions regarding the year they attended the initiation school, whether they lived with their fathers or not and how they rated the quality of their relationships with their fathers (see Appendix 1 for the screening questionnaire). For the elders, the preliminary questionnaire covered questions regarding their age, their relationship with their children, the duration of their marriage as well their position of leadership at home and in the community (see Appendix 3 for the screening questionnaire).

All five of the elder men assessed for eligibility met the criteria and were recruited to participate in the study. Of the 30 young men who had expressed interest in the study, two did not arrive for the interviews: one did not respond to calls, and one showed eagerness to be interviewed but could not attend. A further five young men were eager to participate but were ineligible, with two young men reporting that their fathers were involved and present in their lives, one young man had not participated in the initiation school at the time of the interview, one young man's father had died and one young man was older than 22. Thus, in total the study comprised 22 young men participants who were eligible to take part in the study: two from Ilitha Park, two from Nkanini and 18 from Site B. The participants who met the criteria were given the hard copy of the study Information Sheet to take home and the written consent form was explained to them (See appendix 8 and 9). All participants who met the criteria, gave informed consent and agreed to be interviewed on the same day of screening.

### **3.6 Research interviews**

#### **3.6.1 Interview schedule**

A semi-structured interview schedule with clear instructions to guide the interviewers on what to do during the interview was employed (see Appendix 2 for young men and Appendix 4 for male elders). The formulation of the questions for both young men and elders was grounded on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory on how an individual's life is influenced by their immediate environments, including: (i) the family, community and institutions such as schools (microsystem); (ii) the interaction between these environments (mesosystems); (iii) the influence of environments that an individual is not a direct part of including the family members' networks such as sports clubs or church groups (exosystem); (iv) culture and traditions that directly and indirectly shape the individual (macrosystems) and (v) the changes in cultural practice around family life and circumcision over time (chronosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Furthermore, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, there was a use of a vignette of Ivile a boy who is raised by a single mother. Ivile is about to go on initiation but does not have support from his absent fathers and his uncles. He feels uncertain about what to expect during initiation.

Both for young men and elders, the following broad topics were addressed in the interview: family life; the influence of time on fatherhood (e.g the present time as compared to the past); understanding

of manhood and fatherhood; key periods in life when a boy child may need a biological father's support; the presence or absence of social fathers, as well as interventions that could be employed at different levels of the society to promote father presence or involvement. Although it is neither common nor permitted for men to have conversations that are initiation-related with a woman, the study had no direct questions about the actual initiation activities, but participants were rather asked about the experiences of male support regarding initiation and being a Xhosa man, as directness could be a barrier when addressing a sensitive topic like this, and because the aim of the study was to investigate these experiences of support rather than specifics of initiation activities.

### **3.6.2 Interview piloting and quality assurance**

Pilot interviews are recommended when exploring sensitive topics (Magodyo, 2013). The piloting was necessary to minimise discrepancies and to ensure consistency as the interviews were conducted by different interviewers of different genders, especially since the topic is a gender sensitive topic. They helped to test the quality and the impact of questions posed on the interviewees, especially since this is a scantily researched phenomenon (Manyatshe, 2013). This also helped to ascertain the role and the impact of the interviewer as a female tackling a masculine topic. Furthermore, a male research assistant was employed to advise on the study to counter-act gender biases and to conduct some interviews. He was in contact with the main researcher a month prior to the commencement of the interviews and the study information was sent to him in advance. In the planning process, for uniformity of the interviews, interview role plays between the researchers were conducted using the interview schedule, with each researcher then giving feedback and taking notes of matters to keep in mind to aid the interview process (De Goede, 2018). The male researcher acknowledged that the questions were phrased appropriately, sensitively and indirectly since they tackled sensitive topics of initiation and father absence or uninvolvedness.

The main researcher (female) and the male research assistant conducted two pilot semi-structured recorded interviews each, using the interview schedule (see appendix 2). A comparison of the four interviews was done and a difference was noted in how the word "circumcision" was used during the interviews conducted by the male and female interviewer. The male interviewer and his participants used the word freely, whereas the main researcher was cautious about using it due to the fact that circumcision is an integral part of initiation, which is a taboo to discuss with women. Some participants also acknowledged that they will not go deeper into initiation issues as they had some

reservations. Most importantly, such discrepancies were minor and did not influence the depth of the interviews. Thus, no further adaptation was deemed necessary.

### **3.6.3 Interview process**

All interviews were conducted in isiXhosa and audio-recorded, and the duration of all interviews was between 40 and 70 minutes. The first five minutes of each interview was spent building a rapport with the interviewees. In these five minutes, the interviewer initiated a light social conversation by asking general and friendly questions to help put the interviewee at ease (Manyatshe, 2013). There after a vignette of Ivile – an adolescent boy who with an absent father who is about to go on initiation without any form of paternal support or involvement was read to the participants. The participants were then asked about their views regarding the story and whether it's a common occurrence or not. The aim of the vignette was to put participants at ease and minimise jumping straight into their personal stories. This vignette was intended to spearhead the conversation on this topic. Gourlay et al. (2014) remark that vignettes are employed to tackle sensitive topics in research.

Ranney et al., (2015) stresses that, “An ideal qualitative interview will feel like an extended conversation for the participant – yet will yield data on each topic area outlined.” (p.3). In addition to making the participants feel at ease, during the interview, interviewers employed interviewing skills such as probing, reflection, active listening, clarification, and minimal verbal responses (Mavundla et al., 2010). To ensure the well-being of the participants, the last part of the interview had closing questions that inquired about the emotional well-being of the young men, and this was particularly important for them due to the sensitivity of the topic. This sought to ascertain any impact the questions posed might have had on their emotional well-being or thinking process in order to ascertain if a referral was required (see section 3.11 Distressed participants protocol and referrals). It is also at this concluding stage where their questions or concerns regarding the study were explored and heard. All participants received a R100 Pick and Pay voucher as a gesture of appreciation for their time at the end of the interview.

Most importantly, several measures were taken to avoid possible gender-based biases or challenges. Firstly, the male research assistant had experience in research interviews and lay counselling. Secondly, he was present in a separate room during most interviews with young men in order to intervene should challenges arise due to the gender sensitivity of this topic. Nevertheless, there were no complications that arose. The main researcher and research assistant alternated in conducting

interviews, and upon completion of some of the interviews, there were check-ins and comparison of the responses to ascertain whether gender influenced the quality and the depth of the responses of the participants. Even during the process of interviewing, there was no difference detected in the quality, length or detail of participant responses.

#### **3.6.4 Trustworthiness**

According to Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) qualitative research has gained momentum, but yet to continue yielding meaningful and useful results, it needs to be conducted methodologically. The researchers need to be intentional and clear of the processes and procedures they follow in order to establish trustworthiness in their work. Nowell et al. (2017) emphasises the importance of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Firstly, in terms of credibility the research process needs to accurately present the experiences and the narratives of the participants. To ensure this in this study, during data collection, different techniques were employed such as pilot interviews, making use of field notes and conducting debriefs before embarking on data analysis. Secondly, even though qualitative research cannot be generalized; however, the researcher should detail the procedures followed during the research process so that other people in similar contexts could transfer the findings. Even though this study had a small sample, the findings of this research can be used to understand the experiences and challenges of other adolescent boys who go through initiation in the absence of the father in similar settings. Thirdly, qualitative research needs to have dependability by provision of sequential and well-documented research steps, and if there are deviations they need to be documented too. The necessary documentation which details how the study was conducted can be seen in the appendices section. Furthermore, qualitative research needs confirmability; that is, it must be clear how conclusions were reached. Confirmability is often assisted by clear theoretical and methodological choices selected. The current study was informed by specific theories and methodologies.

#### **3.7 Reflexivity**

Although the researcher attempted to elicit participants' views and interpret their statements without influencing the process unduly, it is pivotal to understand that researchers are social beings who are not immune to the influences of society, such as influences on the selection of the research topic and study sample (De Goede, 2018; Marcisz, 2013). Reflexivity calls for researchers to perceive themselves as socially constructed beings while also being constructors in the research process



(Howell, 2013). Therefore, the researcher should not divorce him or herself from the research process but rather search and locate him or herself (Manyatshe, 2013). Howell (2013) points out that a researcher has three kinds of “self”: the self as a researcher, the self as a result of socio-historic existence and the self as a result of the research environment. Howell (2013) explains that reflexivity challenges the researcher to get to know the self through the research process, and to be aware of their direct and indirect influence on the research process.

The main researcher was aware that her background or social construction could have had an influence on the research. For example, in the Xhosa culture, it is not common for men and women to have conversations about manhood related matters or for a man to show vulnerability in the presence of women; hence the use of the vignette to manage this. So, it was noteworthy that these dynamics could have an influence on the interactions between the researcher and the participants. It was thus key for the researcher to reflect on her role and possible influence as a female researcher tackling a gender sensitive topic (Marcisz, 2013; Parker, 2005). During the interview, particular attention was paid by the researcher to her semantics on the questions around initiation. The main researcher used an indirect style when mentioning topics pertaining to initiation and such indirectness was also evident in participants’ responses as they did not directly use the word circumcision.

It could be assumed that their indirectness meant that they were not comfortable to utter the word circumcision when conversing with a woman or it could mean that their response was influenced by the main researcher’s indirectness and unwillingness to freely use the word. In the male-led interviews, this word was used freely both by the interviewer and interviewees. In the interviews conducted by the main researcher, there were also instances where participants acknowledged that they will not go deeper into their circumcision experiences when reflecting on the negative role posed by father absence around initiation in their lives. In one interview, a young man participant acknowledged the importance of this topic, but recommended that topics of this nature should be led by men in order to put participants at ease.

During the data analysis process, the main researcher was cognisant of her own biases (Louw, 2018; Parker, 2005). To address this, the main researcher had regular discussions with her supervisors, who do not share the main researcher’s cultural or academic background. Possible biases were discussed and reflected on throughout the data collection and analysis process.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is an essential aspect of research whereby the gleaned information is thoroughly explored, categorised, packaged and presented in a meaningful fashion. Upon completion of data collection in this study, the audio files were labelled using participant numbers to ensure confidentiality. The data were transcribed verbatim and translated into English by a home language Xhosa speaker. The main researcher, also a home language Xhosa speaker and a professional transcriber/translator, double-checked the relevance and accuracy of the transcripts by listening to the audio recording for consistency and there were no discrepancies found.

Thematic analysis was then used to analyse the data. This type of data analysis is commonly used in qualitative research to analyse primary data. It is a process of making sense of data by categorizing it thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and reporting on themes that are identified by the researchers. Thematic analysis captures the experiences, meanings and reality of participants by examining and dissecting their utterances in a descriptive manner. The study employed the six step thematic analysis process described by Braun and Clarke (2006): (i) familiarisation with the data; (ii) generation of initial codes; (iii) searching for themes; (iv) reviewing themes; (v) defining and naming themes; and then (vi) producing the report. In summary, for familiarisation and immersion, the main researcher listened to the audios several times and then read through the transcripts in detail and repeatedly, and took notes of important points. In collaboration with her supervisors who also read transcripts in detail, an initial coding frame was devised which was then used to code the rest of the data, making adjustments as necessary. At this stage, the two supervisors coded a sample of the transcripts and the three researchers resolved any discrepancies.

Following the data-driven approach, and using NVivo, broad categories (themes) were formed with sub-themes being identified. There was then a repeated thorough search of themes across different transcripts for cross analysis, continuous note-taking and this process was done until new transcripts did not add any more themes. Themes were then agreed on, and all remaining transcripts were coded according to these themes. With constant communication between the main researcher and her supervisors, the naming and definition of themes were discussed at length and this led to the production of the findings of the study. Thematic saturation was reached in this study by analysing data until no new themes were identified.

### **3.9 Data storage**

After data collection, the audio files were code protected and then sent to a bilingual translator who signed a confidentiality agreement contract. The information was kept on password-protected computers, and during transcription, confidentiality was assured by ensuring that only the research team had access to the recordings and transcription. No identifying information was kept in the transcripts (e.g. names, addresses or other information). The transcripts were password protected Word documents. After two years upon completion of the study, the audio recordings will be destroyed.

### **3.10 Ethical considerations**

This research was approved by the Faculty of Health Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Cape Town and was conducted according to its guidelines. During the research process, voluntary participation was ensured and all participants were treated with respect, their safety was prioritised and their confidentiality ensured. The researchers' safety and the participants' safety was prioritised by scheduling interviews in a safe area and at a safe time, as it is not advisable to be outside the house at specific times due to gang violence and robbery in the areas where the study took place. This ensured that no form of harm or danger was encountered by study participants or researchers.

All participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions, experiences and the psycho-social challenges of Xhosa young men who had transitioned from adolescence to manhood with absent or uninvolved fathers. Information regarding the study was provided to the potential participants both verbally and in writing in non-technical language that they understood (See appendix 8 - Consent Information Sheet for young men and appendix 9 - Consent Information Sheet for male elders). They were also given an opportunity to ask questions about the research process, and they were given answers before the screening. Once the potential participants had agreed to participate in the study, the screening took place in order to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria. A written voluntary informed consent was obtained from all of those who met the inclusion criteria.

Before the commencement of the interview, the interviewers reiterated that the participants were not obliged to participate in the study, and could withdraw at any point. It was important to reiterate voluntary participation since some participants were accessed through snowballing and referrals (Mayekiso, 2017) from their mothers, community leaders or organisations who were assisting with recruitment. It was made clear that they were not obliged to participate in the study, and that withdrawal would not impact on their access to services, or standing in the community in any way. It was emphasised that their participation or non-participation would not be made known to their families or the community organisations. The participants were informed that the information they shared during the interview was confidential and any reporting would not involve revealing their identity and that no names would be mentioned in the study dissertation, presentations or papers. It was also expounded that the data would be labelled, organised correctly and locked away and only the research team would have access to it (See appendix 5 for Interview administration form).

Participants were informed that there were no known direct benefits to them as a result of participating in this research. However, they were informed that they would get an opportunity to express their views and opinions on the needs of Xhosa young men who enter manhood without present or involved fathers. It is said that some participants find it beneficial being in a contained space where they can talk about sensitive topics and their experiences to an empathetic listener (Seedat et al., 2004), and this sentiment was verbalised by most young men participants in the study. Finally, if the participants were interested, they were informed that they could contact the researcher to be given access to the research findings, either in the form of a written summary written in ‘non-technical language’ or a meeting at one of the community organisations where the interviews were held.

### **3.11 Distressed participants protocol and referrals**

Father absence or uninvolvement is a sensitive topic which is also a little explored phenomenon in general, and especially in Xhosa communities if a child was conceived out of wedlock. This means that exploring this topic could be emotionally challenging and had a potential of eliciting negative memories among the young men who were participants in this study. So, a protocol was put in place for participants who may have struggled to express themselves or wanted to explore this matter further, or who needed emotional support.

Firstly, all potential participants who were screened received a resource list with contact details of well-established Khayelitsha-based community organisations in the sphere of psychology, social work and community development for referrals. The resource list for referrals included organisations such as Lifeline telephone counselling services, SANCA, South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) and Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA), where participants could phone or walk in should they see the need after the study (See Appendix 8 - Consent Information Sheet for young men and Appendix 9 - Consent Information Sheet for male elders).

Secondly, the researchers received support and guidance on the protocol of dealing with distressed participants in the research field. Since the research assistant had worked as a lay counsellor in a busy emergency centre, he also had extensive experience in dealing with distressed individuals. Additionally, at the beginning of the interview, all participants were informed of the availability of telephonic counselling with a registered counsellor if necessary. Thirdly, during the interview, the researchers were cognisant of paying attention to participants who seem distressed or said they were distressed during the interviews (Seedat et al., 2004). No participants became very distressed and there was no need to contact the registered counsellor during the study.

## 4. RESULTS

This chapter begins by describing the characteristics of the study participants, followed by the findings of the study, which will be presented under the following categories that emerged from both participant groups (young men and elders): (i) the meaning given to cultural male circumcision by young men and elders; (ii) Xhosa patriarchy, a father’s role, father absence, and paternal connection needs during initiation; (iii) the fatherly role and implications of father absence or uninvolved involvement before and beyond initiation; (iii) barriers to father presence and involvement; and (v) recommendations for addressing father absence or uninvolved involvement.

**Table 1: Themes and sub-themes**

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Subthemes</u>
<b>1. The meaning given to cultural male circumcision by young men and elders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The benefits of initiation for the individual and his family</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>The benefits of initiation at a personal level</i></li> <li>○ <i>The benefits of initiation at a family level</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>2. Xhosa patriarchy, a father’s role and his absence, and paternal connection needs during initiation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Xhosa patriarchy and a father’s role during initiation (planning, masculine guidance and protection)</b></li> <li>• <b>Paternal connection needs: emotionally and culturally</b></li> </ul>
<b>3. The significance of the fatherly role and implications of father absence before and beyond initiation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The traditional role</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>The role of a father as a protector</i></li> <li>○ <i>The role of a father as a disciplinarian</i></li> <li>○ <i>The role of a father as a provider</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The modern role</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>The role of a father as a gentle guide</i></li> <li>○ <i>The role of a father as a loving presence</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Barriers to father presence or involvement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Financial constraints</b></li> <li>• <b>The mother’s negative attitudes to the father and maternal gate-keeping</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Recommendations for addressing father absence or uninvolved</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Microsystem recommendations: Openness about paternal identity</b></li> <li>• <b>Mesosystem recommendations: Strengthened awareness and communication</b></li> <li>• <b>Exosystem recommendations: Positively tapping into father’s social spaces</b></li> <li>• <b>Macrosystem recommendations: Mass media awareness and promotion of egalitarian parenting</b></li> </ul>

(Main themes are numbered and sub-themes are in bullet points)

#### **4.1 Characteristics of the study participants**

Of the 22 young men who took part in the study, three of them were studying, one was working and 18 were neither working nor studying. Eleven participants lived with their biological mothers at the time of the study and the remainder reported living with other relatives. Twenty participants reported not having a child yet, one already had a child and one had a pregnant partner at the time of the interview. The nature of the relationship of the young men with their fathers varied: three young men had neither seen their fathers nor knew their whereabouts; 19 had met them or knew them but had no relationship with them. Eighteen participants described receiving support and guidance from maternal uncles and grandfathers during initiation, with one participant describing being assisted only by men from his paternal family. Three young men reported receiving support from male outsiders (neighbours, church leaders) due to lack of support from maternal male relatives.

Five male elders participated in the study, and their age range was between 55 and 73 years, and the numbers of children they reported to have ranged between two and four. Two elders were ‘street leaders’, meaning that they are responsible for ensuring peace and order in the community, one of whom was a pensioner and the other was self-employed. The third elder was a school teacher and a secretary at a church; the fourth elder supported vulnerable youth in his street and acted as a social father, and the fifth elder was a church leader and a father figure in the community.

#### **4.2 The meaning given to cultural male circumcision by young men and elders**

##### **4.2.1 The benefits of initiation to the individual and his family**

##### ***4.2.1.1 The benefits of initiation at a personal level***

Participants acknowledged the significance of initiation in the Xhosa culture, as well as the additional meaning it holds for young men with absent or uninvolved fathers. On a personal level, the initiation period was seen as a sacred period to connect and build meaningful relationships with the elders. This was labelled as a crucial period where the young men are afforded individual and cultural growth by joining in the ranks of adult men, and receiving words of wisdom on what manhood entails. They perceived the resulting status of manhood as being a hard-earned and exclusive position to aspire to in the Xhosa culture. One young man described how initiated men relate to boys, “[As men] we don’t share our secrets with boys.” (Young man participant, 5).



The initiation period was further perceived as a great contributor to the individual's growth: *"When you come back from the mountain, they [the elders] tell you that there is something that has changed in you, you are now old and should not think childishly* (Young man participant, 21). This shift was also emphasised by the elders regarding the responsibility and expectations of manhood: *"The boys ... [during initiation] they have to be told that life has changed and a particular thing [behaviour] is expected."* (Male elder participant, 3). Initiation was also seen as an opportunity to reflect on their current lives, identity and the aspired future. One young man portrayed the process of initiation as key in forming one's identity by remarking that, *"The ritual of circumcision helps the child to know how to handle himself and be able to respect and to know himself, and to also know his background."* (Young man participant, 17). Additionally, due to the emotional and physical hardships that the initiation process poses, the young men also saw it as a learning opportunity or an instrument to carve out resilience. One young man stated that, *"[Initiation] is a school to learn about being strong and being careful not to fall on the way."* (Young man participant, 17).

#### ***4.2.1.2 The benefits of initiation at a family level***

Young men perceived initiation as an empowerment tool which transforms and grants one an opportunity to be a part of decision-making at home or in the family. The aspect of decision making was reported as being particularly important as it enabled the young men to support the woman of the family (their single mother) and bring dignity to the home. This was evident in one young man's statement who claimed his role and position, that as a newly initiated man: *[you should] work with [your] mother in order to fight the thing [struggle] that has been in the house."* (Young man participant, 21). One participant compared his role as a newly initiated man to being *"the lamp at home"* – as a person who sheds light and chases away the darkness brought by father absence or uninvolvedness. Among the participants in this study, it was clear that initiation was not only seen as a prestigious cultural process to go through, but also brought in a sense of responsibility for one's home. Another young man recalled being informed by the elders that as a newly initiated man, he should show responsibility and work hard to re-pay the expenses that his mother incurred to send him to initiation. The young men seemed to embrace this responsibility:

*"Even here in the house, there is no one. I will stand. So, which means I am the father to the kids who come after me. I am a man. I will be able to talk to them, like the thing my father was supposed to do to me."* (Young man participant, 7).

It also became apparent that manhood also comes with dignity and respect, and in fulfilling a role in the community. On this point the young men shared their learnings about their responsibility in not only building homes but also healthy communities by being role models and being seen as problem solvers in their communities. They mentioned being taught about the importance of being articulate as a man and leader in the community, not being vindictive or using violence when solving problems:

*“... being a man is not about being a gastro [macho man] or a fit man; [not being arrogant or behaving violently] like there is no one who could do anything to me.”* (Young man participant, 19).

#### **4.2.2 Xhosa patriarchy, a father’s role and his absence, and paternal connection needs during initiation**

Even though the young men confidently cited the benefits of initiation, they also acknowledged how this process magnified the father void in their lives. They vehemently explained the unmet cultural and emotional needs during this process. They then described initiation as a process which is intricate, linear and exclusionary in nature, starting from when: (i) the boy has to approach the father as the custodian of the initiation ritual, and (ii) the father facilitating paternal spiritual links to the ancestors, which is also one of the initial steps

##### ***4.2.2.1 Xhosa patriarchy and a father’s role during initiation (planning, masculine guidance and protection)***

There was a mention of a gap for guidance and important masculine conversations with the father before the initiation: the planning period. An elder participant drew attention to the delicacy and sensitivity of the father-son relationship around this period. He cautioned that this period can either break or strengthen the relationship between a young man and his father, and mentioned that:

*“At the time of passing to the manhood stage - that is circumcision, if you ignore the child there, that thing will haunt you and not give you a rest and he will never value you as a father in his life.”* (Male elder participant, 3).

The planning period was then described as a risky stage for young men as it is characterised by cultural and emotional uncertainty. There was a caution that when handled haphazardly, it could bear

dire consequences: "...[going astray] happens at the time of wanting to go to circumcision and not find someone who can guide him and advise. It then slips there." (Male elder participant, 3).

This sentiment was then echoed by a young man who depicted the callous manner in which his uninvolved father handled the planning period:

*"Like the distance between us [emotional distance between him and the father] was not making us able to communicate maybe things like going to initiation. For example, when I went for initiation, I never even spoke to my father [getting guidance]. Just to say...I spoke to him, he agreed, but there is nothing he told me. 'My son, you are going on initiation now, so you have to do this and that'. We never went to those details like that."* (Young man participant, 7).

This young man was bothered by this encounter as he had to suffer in the presence of his father who was there physically but did not play the active supportive role of imparting masculine wisdom which the child felt he needed to hear from his biological father at that time.

Other young men who only had access to male elders and not their fathers, also spoke of the sense of loss regarding a father's input. Here is what one young man had to say about receiving words of support in the absence of a biological father: *"I hear the brothers, I hear others, I hear the uncles but it does not satisfy me the way I would find it from my father if he was around."* (Young man participant, 8).

To expand on this yearning, another young man laid out the type of support he would have loved to get from his father and how this affected him:

*"It became difficult for me to get someone to give me words of wisdom and tell me the way I will have to behave when I am... [in the wilderness] and the things that will happen when I am there."* (Young man participant, 10).

Therefore, in addition to support, during this period, another identified role of the father was that of a protector as the young men do not know what to expect in their new wilderness environment. They reported that it is important for a father to fulfil the protector role because sometimes some men who did not have a positive experience themselves when they were initiates, mistreat the vulnerable and impressionable initiates. The young men vaguely mentioned that lots of "things" happen during the

initiation process, making the initiates with absent or uninvolved fathers particularly vulnerable as there is no one to prevent or follow up on the mistreatment.

Finally, both participants groups acknowledged the need for ongoing paternal support not only before, but during and after initiation. They spoke of the ongoing need for support on 'how to be a man' due to the continuous and evolving nature of manhood depending on one's stage of life. A participant expressed that despite having gone through the initiation process, he still needed his father:

*“There are certain pieces of advice I would like to get from my father. It's like I am a man, but still young and will still grow and experience things in life.”* (Young man participant, 12).

#### **4.2.2.2 Paternal connection needs: emotionally and culturally**

Due to the intricacy and the exclusionary orientation of the initiation rituals, the elders cautioned that irrespective of single mothers' economic liberation or determination to play the fatherly role, a father of the child will be required one way or the other. An elder participant explained that, *“Even if the mother is a single parent feeling that, ‘I work hard and know how to bring in money’, there is somewhere where it will get stuck.”* (Male elder participant, 1). It was underscored that culturally, the initiation ritual has some nuances, *“ which, you [a woman or mother] will never know until death”* (Male elder participant, 2).

The exclusion of single mothers was rationalised using cultural terms. It was mentioned that the child will always need his paternal ritual which requires the father to perform the spiritual linking to the ancestors, *“The mother's family has no ritual for the child especially around initiation.”* (Male elder participant, 1). The elders went on to highlight that this cultural exclusion of mothers is because different clans have different processes for conducting rituals. He then cautioned that these rituals cannot be duplicated as different families conduct them secretly and meticulously. An elder participant expanded: *“Maybe at [maternal family clan] a cow is used for rituals, whereas at [paternal family clan] I use a goat. Those things have a contradiction ... especially with a boy child. I will be in trouble. You will get my child into trouble. And find him being mad on the road.”* (Male elder participant, 2). To avoid such occurrences, he further counselled that even if the parents are not married, the father of the child must be involved somehow during the ritual, since his role could not be easily replaced by the uncles. An elder espoused that in the spiritual realm, the maternal uncles:

*“are just an extended family. There are certain things that they will not get to or understand because the [maternal] uncle and the father of the child can never be the same clan.”* (Male elder participant, 2).

To support the assertion of the elders, a young man underscored the spiritual role of the father at this time by pointing out that, *“...because as Xhosa people, when we go to the forest [initiation], you take the clan-name of your father.”* (Young man participant, 4). He then elaborated on the emotional and cultural challenges and a lack of sense of belonging posed by going through initiation in the absence of a father. He shared the cultural humiliation he felt for using his maternal clan-name: *“...when I take the maternal clan name while others have those of their fathers, how will that thing be?”*

Due to the intense nature of this period culturally and emotionally, some young men in this study indicated longing for a reunion with their estranged fathers not only for support, but in order for them to witness their growth. When this failed, they were left with a sense of disappointment and destroyed hopes caused by the missed opportunity for father-son reunions. One young man explained: *“The problem is that when I was a child, I did not mind it [father absence] but I wanted him to be present and see me change from what I was but he never came.”* (Young man participant, 6). They went into detail regarding the additional pain that they went through: *“...on the day I went to initiation, my father was not there and I wanted him to be there. The things that hurt me in life are such things.”* (Young man participant, 1).

#### **4.3 The significance of the fatherly role and implications of father absence before and beyond initiation**

Both participant groups described parenting as a partnership which requires parents to support and complement each other in their parenting values and practices. They then categorised fatherhood in two ways, which corresponded to views of the traditional and modern fatherhood roles. Some participants maintained the importance of the traditional role, whereby a father’s primary roles were perceived as those of a protector, disciplinarian and provider. This view was more common among the elders. Others alluded to a more modern idea of a father as a gentle guide and loving presence. This view was more common among the young men. This section thus presents the views of both groups, and also highlights the contrast in their perspectives regarding fatherhood conceptualisation. It also details the young men’s sentiments on the role they wished for their absent fathers to have fulfilled in their lives, as well as the emotional, financial and social implications of this absence.

### 4.3.1 The traditional role

#### 4.3.1.1 *The role of a father as a protector*

Those who subscribed to the traditional role of the father commonly positioned him as the head of the family, a responsible person and a protector. A father was described as a person who keeps the family united and intact by mitigating and resolving family discords, and shielding family members from visible and invisible external threats. This role of the father was seen as key, particularly since communities were not perceived as safe spaces:

*“...when you are a man, you have to play that father’s part in your family. That ok, your child, if something happened on the street, is able to say, ‘I will go and report you to my father.’”* (Young man participant, 19).

An elder participant corroborated this by recalling an experience of having to play the protector role for his daughter who was mistreated by a boy at school.

*“I said, as the school is coming out, I want you [the daughter] to show me the child who did this to you. ‘No father...’ I said, ‘Ay, I say show me this one.’ She pointed him out. I called him and said, ‘You see, I have not given birth for you. If you have not been disciplined at your home, I will beat you and make you bring your father along and tell him that tomorrow he will find me here.’”* (Male elder participant, 1).

Due to this lack of fatherly protection, both participant groups believed that children with disengaged fathers are more vulnerable to social ills. It was mentioned that their vulnerability is sometimes facilitated by their attempts to seek to establish a protective, masculine network or seek role models for example through associating with gangs. Here is how one young man painted the picture of the social vulnerability that children with absent or uninvolved fathers sometimes find themselves in:

*“... there are things outside, my sister, that you will catch up having not grown up with a father. Especially drugs ... people who hijack cars and such and because this person ... did not grow up with a father, he will find himself in the wrong hands.”* (Young man participant, 1).

#### ***4.3.1.2 The role of a father as a disciplinarian***

The disciplinarian role emerged prominently from both participant groups. Fathers were perceived as being more suited for this role compared to mothers as participants were of the view that children tend to value and adhere to the rules set by their fathers compared to the mothers. They also mentioned that single mothers may struggle to fulfil the disciplinarian role due to being burnt-out from simultaneously playing the motherly and the fatherly role. However, some participants held the impression that women do not have what it takes to instil discipline:

*“You find out that the mothers are too empathetic towards our children too much and then when there is a man, he puts the belt [uses physical punishment]. It becomes difficult to take the wrong direction when the father’s eye is there.”* (Young man participant, 21).

Corporal punishment was not seen as a bad thing but rather an instrument that men use to instil order and discipline. This use of corporal punishment was thus explicitly recommended by some young men and one of them corroborated that *“when there is a man in the house even the way children carry themselves changes. Like when there is no man in the house – there is no listening in the house.”* (Young man participant, 12). To add on the absence of the father as a disciplinarian, an elder indicated that the contemporary youth has a short life span due to the lack of the father’s firmness: *“The children of today grow underneath the earth like potatoes because of lack of respect for elders”* (Male elder participant 1)

They proclaimed that fathers are able to give “tough love” and the hard-core disciplinarian role was perceived as key in pointing children in the right direction. One young man equated growing up without the discipline of the father to an abandoned tree, and lamented:

*“A tree cannot grow on its own; it is watered. If it has grown by itself, it just does this [indicated with hands a tree growing sideways]. If there is a wind to this side, it follows – a wind to that side, it follows.”* (Young man participant, 7).

Consequently, most young men yearned for the disciplinarian role and expressed regrets for not having received discipline from their fathers. Some felt that had their fathers been present to take on the disciplinarian role, they would have been more disciplined, finished their education and thus had opportunities to develop themselves and succeed in life. This regret for missed opportunities was

evident in a participant's statement who regrettably expressed: "*Maybe I would have a home, wife and children like him.*" (Young man participant, 7).

When it comes to discipline, the elders advised that as the man of the house, the father should continue to instil discipline even when the children are older. An elder participant mentioned that even though his son has gone for initiation, he still sets and enforces rules that the young man has to abide to, such as the curfew time of returning to the house at night:

*"It's like the young man, I tell him even though he is a man that, 'Listen man, this is not your place. This is my home. This house comes through my shoulders. There are my things that are here. I sent you to initiation school and did everything for you. Even now as you go to school, I pay for you ... As for me, if 22:00 arrives and you are not in the house and people come in there saying you have done a particular thing, and at that time you were not there ... I tell them nicely that, man, take him there he is, he must answer for himself."* (Male elder participant, 1).

The perspectives described above are aligned with what was mentioned by the young men participants in the previous section that despite having gone to the initiation, they still need the father to be there to point them in the right direction them on their journey.

#### ***4.3.1.3 The role of a father as a provider***

In both participant groups, it became clear that being a protector and a disciplinarian was not enough. To be complete as a man, it was stated that the father should provide financial resources for his family to buy food, pay for children's education and ensure that the family lives comfortably. It was said that when the father cannot provide, even if he wants to discipline or protect the family, no one will listen because, "*the voice of a man without money is inaudible.*" (Young man participant, 12). A participant echoed this by saying: "*It is usually said that a man is a man through work; you are not a man if you do not work. Even if you are a man, you are like a boy because manhood is work.*" (Young man participant, 17). However, it was mentioned that this role is sometimes unattainable, considering the rate of unemployment, with participants describing the powerlessness and helplessness of financially constrained men.

The young men then went on to share their personal experiences of how they were negatively affected by their fathers' financial absence. Some young men described feeling excluded when peers would



speak about how their fathers provided for them. One participant shared how he would lie to his friend about his imaginary father who was financially there for him. Another young man recalled a painful experience of watching his stepfather taking care of his younger brother financially, while he had no father to provide resources for him. Young men with strong extended kin such as uncles and grandparents acknowledged the pivotal financial role they played in the absence of a father.

#### **4.3.2 The modern role**

##### ***4.3.2.1 The role of a father as a gentle guide***

Even though some young men were proponents of the disciplinarian role, others were critical of it. They mentioned that an ideal father is gentler and warm towards his children. They proposed that children should easily relate to their father without being scared of him so that they can confide in him to avoid being enticed by bad role models.

*“[A father] does not use corporal punishment on children. When a child had done something wrong, as kids we err, but he does not jump and beat you. He talks to you first.”* (Young man participant, 19).

One young man participant warned against the downfall of being too authoritarian and said: *“As a father you should not be that scary person who is gastro [macho person] whom your children can never speak to.”* (Young man participant, 10).

They emphasised the need for strong communication, particularly between male children and their fathers in order to enjoy a close father-son connection. Some participants shared how awkward it felt in their homes when women were having what they termed as “feminine conversations”. This caused them to long for a father to converse with. They mentioned that there are certain things that boys find uncomfortable to discuss with their mothers, such as bodily changes and initiation-related talks:

*“...a father is very important in life, especially as a man. Especially when you cannot share certain things with a woman. Things that happen to you as a man.”* (Young man participant, 2).

An ideal father was also seen as the one who provides moral and ethical guidance. He was expected to be selfless and be a leader who serves others both at home and in the community. A participant explained that, *“a man has to involve himself with others, speak and not isolate himself.”* (Young man

participant, 10). Young men participants reported that such a man is often valued in the community and can be entrusted with responsibilities to lead and be part of important decisions in the society:

*“...he can get respect in the community and can also be appointed as a street committee [leader of the street] because he is someone who has respect and can talk to other people.”* (Young man participant, 11).

#### **4.3.2.2 The role of a father as a loving presence**

Additionally, as opposed to the young men who emphasized the importance of provision, some young men were vocal and spoke passionately about the act of showing love to one's offspring. For them it mattered less whether a father has money or not, as long as he is present, spending quality time and creating a bond and memories with his children:

*“When a person is a father ... he must show his fatherhood through love. Money comes last, what is first is love. Even if you don't have money, you can come to your child and when your child sees you, she or he is satisfied that father has come.”* (Young man participant, 5).

Similarly, even though the elders emphasised the importance of provision, they also cautioned that it is objectionable for a father to abandon his offspring and relinquish paternal involvement on the basis of financial constraints. This assertion was made, *“You want your children to know you whether you have got money or no money.”* (Male elder participant, 1). An elder participant recommended that it is important for a father *“to go beyond the provision of money, but to open his heart and also build a relationship... Even with homework, to assist him or her when getting stuck.”* (Male elder participant, 2).

Regarding the importance of the father as a loving presence, most young men then spoke of the emotional and mental impact caused by the lack of emotional connection with their fathers, especially in cases where families and communities do not offer avenues to explore their pain. A participant described suicidal ideation directly linked to the absence of his father and the inability to express his ordeal to his mother, *“I almost killed myself because of thinking about the father who is not present in my life to play his role.”* (Young man participant, 9).

Some cited a sense of hopelessness:

*“I cry and get no answer but anger. My thoughts do not end far and [I] never got the answer I wanted. And that anger will lead me to something else [alcohol or drugs].”* (Young man participant, 13).

#### **4.4 Barriers to father presence or involvement**

Both elders and young men participants corroborated the prevalence of father absence or uninvolvement in their communities and also provided some possible reasons that influence it. They mentioned financial constraints and maternal gate-keeping (when the mother prevents the father from having a relationship with the child).

##### **4.4.1 Financial constraints**

Based on the conceptualisation of fathers as providers, both groups pointed out that fathers who fail to meet the provider expectation are usually dismissed from the fatherhood role and are misconstrued as being callous. It was mentioned that in such instances, the mother fails to value the need for the father when he cannot live up to this expectation, and thus opts to take on all aspects of parenting single-handedly. This view was espoused by an elder participant who described the helpless situation that economically inactive fathers find themselves in by saying: “Having no means makes you seem as though you have no care. While you care and are pained by what is happening.” (Male elder participant, 4).

##### **4.4.2 The mother’s negative attitudes to the fathers and maternal gate-keeping**

Both participant groups concurred that in most cases when the relationship ends between the parents, mothers tend to harbour resentment, dismiss the father and ignore how the child could be impacted by father absence later in life. Examples were given of how a mother may go to the extent of terminating the father-child relationship by changing phone numbers, location, sending the child to the grandparents and instructing the father to stop making contact. So, the participants were of the view that fathers sometimes find themselves in powerless situations where they have to try to reach out and locate the child, while also having to be the ones later explaining the disappearance to the child: “... I last looked for you at your aunt, your aunt said, ‘You were taken and thrown there, thrown there.’ And I felt that I am giving up on you.” (Male elder participant, 1).

The elders were of the opinion that at the demise of a relationship, the success of co-parenting depends on: “*The kind of a person [the mother] she is.*” (Male elder participant, 2). So, in this instance men were positioned as helpless if the mother does not co-operate as she is the one who lives with the child. The participants went on and mentioned that it is the negative and uncooperative character of the mother that sometimes make it easy for men to be absent. They reported that in such instances, the mother tends to resort to calling the father names in front of the child. The name-calling mentioned by elders was evident in some young men’s language where they positioned their fathers as non-existent, and used names such as ‘sperm donors’. A young man participant acknowledged that the father’s role:

“...is played by my mother in my life because she is the one...she sometimes says, ‘I am your mother; I am your father that will never change. Your father will remain a dog on that side.’ She tells me straight. I second her.” (Young man participant, 3).

Some participants felt that the pride of the mothers was linked to their ability to play the provider role. They referred to this as being short-sighted on the mother’s side as the child will suffer in the absence of the father irrespective of his financial standing.

#### **4.5 Recommendations for addressing father absence or uninvolved**

This section covers the suggestions from both participant groups on what could be done at multiple levels of the society to prevent and mitigate the effects of father absence as per the ecological systems model. Nevertheless, the chronosystems level is not covered in this section as participants did not make significant recommendations at this level. However, in the recommendations participants indirectly alluded to the chronosystem by recommending bringing back certain traditional values and practices, such as social fathering, while challenging other traditional norms and practices, such as excluding certain fathers from parenting due to children being born outside of a marriage.

##### **4.5.1 Microsystem recommendations: Openness about paternal identity**

This level refers to the individual’s immediate environments such as the family, church, community and school. The recommendations made by the participants mainly focused on the family aspect as participants seemed to perceive father absence as an issue that stems from family dynamics.

Firstly, even though present to their own children, the elders in this study seemed to empathise with children in this predicament. They put forward the need to actively and intentionally respond to father absence. The significance of interventions was emphasized, and one elder acknowledged that:

*“... [father absence] usually leaves a pain and mess where ... an intervention should occur to see how do we solve this problem. If we will just talk about it with no follow up and interventions ... it is same as just conversing there without knowing what we were saying. It needs intervention, a serious one which is fast because for sure, it is furthering.”* (Male elder participant, 3).

The mother as the person who has a direct relationship with the child compared to the absent father, was positioned as a key role player in helping manage or prevent father absence. Both groups thus recommended that the mother should embrace the father as a co-parent and allow the child to get to know him even if he is unable to provide financially. The onus was put on her to at least:

*“... show him or her, ‘My child, there is your father’. Even if he is a drunkard who drinks wine but tomorrow, you don’t know what that person will change and become.”* (Male elder participant, 1).

Transparency regarding paternal identity was seen as vital irrespective of how troubled the relationship is between the parents. A young man proclaimed that: *“Knowing the truth [is key] because not knowing the truth hurts and you only know things when you are old.”* (Young man participant, 1). The participants asserted that father absence or uninvolved could be dealt with effectively when the child has his or her questions answered regarding paternal identity. They thus recommended that at home, it would be beneficial for young men to be provided with opportunities to speak openly about father absence and its implications as opposed to treating it like a taboo as this could lead to emotional distress. The grandmothers were also acknowledged as key role players, and it was advised that, them and the mothers, should recognise and acknowledge the emotional turmoil inflicted by father absence or uninvolved.

#### 4.5.2 Mesosystem recommendations: Strengthened awareness and communication

The mesosystem describes the influence of the interaction between different parts of the society that the child exists in, such as the relationship between school, religious institutions and home. Participants mentioned the need for creation of awareness about father absence in different parts of the society, as well as advocacy to lobby their involvement in addressing father absence and linking young men to social fathers. An elder participant showed eagerness in this regard and spoke of the actions he would be willing to take in being part of the solution through his position as a teacher and church leader. *“I am going to preach this also within the church. I am going to preach this in my workplace. Whereas I am still working with the young ones, but I will preach this to them so that they know.”* (Male elder participant, 3).

There was a specific mention that, *“Pastors have been trusted by people. They are the ones that can also come as solutions.”* (Male elder participant, 3). It was further mentioned that as the person who has a direct contact with the child, the mother could play the role of a facilitator or a link between the child and the society (NGOs and welfare organisations), including social fathers such as the uncles, teachers and pastors. Single mothers facilitating links to male support figures was particularly seen as necessary for boys around the age of attending initiation as this is a critical point that need social support. They were encouraged and empowered to be pro-active in their role as facilitators regardless of the patriarchal nature of the initiation process. A suggestion was offered for the mother to spearhead the process and guide the child by instructing him: *“My child, go and ask ...the uncles from the step of the blanket [the regalia for initiates] going forward.”* (Young man participant, 13).

As for the young men, the importance of drawing strength from the people in the same situation was also seen as key. It was mentioned that a young person could also approach elders who have been in that situation:

*“There are lots of people who grew up without fathers so it’s like they meet up and be like, ‘Oh maarn, I have this pain’ and one also says, ‘I also have my pain like this’. And then they try to support each other in that way and then it becomes better.”* (Young man participant, 5).

#### 4.5.3 Exosystem recommendations: Positively tapping into father's social spaces

The exosystem refers to the direct influence that the caregivers' or parents' social spaces have on the child's life and his or her well-being. These could be their social circles (the workplace, the social, religious and community and health facilities that they attend) and the media. Most of the young men seemed adamant that there is little that the civil society or the government could do to prevent or mitigate father absence as child rearing is a matter that revolves around the father and the mother of the child. Thus, on this level, unlike in the microsystem, the father absence remedy was placed in the hands of the father. One young man asserted, "*When you are making a child, you must know that you will have responsibility. You must know that each action has its consequences.*" (Young man participant, 5). They felt that currently men are not doing enough to beat the odds (child's relocation, maternal gate-keeping and unemployment) in order to be there for their children. The young men portrayed fatherhood as something meant to be fought for, not just a state of being or a matter of choice.

There was an identification of the fathers' social circles as one of the potential leading causes of paternal disengagement. It was thus recommended that fathers need to be in social settings or circles that empower them to practice healthy masculinity and embrace fatherhood:

*"In churches where there is usually a gathering of fathers ... it would be said that on a Saturday, it is a unity gathering for men ... If there could be programmes within the church [on] ... how do we stay with our wives ... how do we raise our children?"* (Male elder participant, 3).

There was an overall impression that fatherhood is a skill that fathers could be taught both directly and indirectly. The young men particularly suggested that to develop their fatherhood skills, absent fathers should have access or be linked to fathers who epitomise healthy masculinities and egalitarian parenting. To show the importance of continuous exposure and engagement on fatherhood issues, despite being an involved parent, one male elder participant acknowledged that engaging on this topic through this research was enlightening and motivated him to take a stand as a father:

*"We didn't have enough knowledge and didn't care while looking at it. But what do we do? I am thinking this is broad, as men we are prepared to take an action to make sure we support - even if it's a year [short-term support], we make a difference."* (Male elder participant, 3).

Despite this call to embrace and empower absent fathers, there were a few young men who seemed to be greatly affected and angered by the act of father absence. They proposed a harsh punishment saying that, *“there must be an action for one to know his father, to be supported by him until he goes to the mountain”* (Young man participant, 17). They described the term “an action” as meaning that the father must be prosecuted if he relinquishes his responsibility.

#### **4.5.4 Macrosystem recommendations: Mass media awareness and promotion of egalitarian parenting**

This level is the most distant to the child, but yet very impactful on his or her growth. It refers to cultural beliefs, values, political and economic systems of the society. Both participant groups placed emphasis on the government and the media. A positive media stance and government’s active involvement on this issue was called for. Both participant groups proposed TV shows and dialogues where positive and constructive dialogues on manhood and fatherhood are held. Most young men felt that currently their predicament is neglected and treated with less urgency by the government and the media:

*“You see these are topics that are not spoken about. Most of the time child abuse by men is being spoken about - abuse is high, but the thing of absent fathers is being ran away from. A person says, “No my father beats me”. Let’s speak about the one who has no father and hear how is that child.”* (Young man participant, 5).

Among the elders there was some acknowledgement of the mistakes made by men who elect to be absent, but they strongly felt that men have little to no space in parenting as the law is not on their side. *“The area that I cannot backslide from in our interview, a man is trampled upon by the government in South Africa. It even comes in our homes.”* (Male elder participant, 2).

Another elder lamented that, *“the law should not only beat one side. Because the lashes of the South African law is on one side.”* (Male elder participant, 2). They thus called for a gender-balanced approach to parenting suggesting that the government must take action to protect and empower fathers to take up their space in parenting instead of victimising them. It was proposed that the government, *“must end this thing of, if me and you did not get along, to block me from the child.”* (Male elder participant, 3)



In instances when the mother refuses contact with the father, it was proposed that there should be a government-facilitated father-child meeting where the government could step in to ensure that the father does have access to the child. This was particularly seen as of significance in instances where the child gets sent to other provinces or areas without the knowledge of the father. One participant asserted what he thought the mother should do if they are no longer in a relationship, “*Send the child to me for me to see my child. I can go with him or her and buy him or her something there. That looks like a treatment. There must be an Act that is used there.*” (Male elder participant, 2).

In order to re-claim their space in parenting, many male elder participants recommended that men need to be more educated about their paternal rights. They were advised to report emotional abuse in their relationships and to refrain from fearing being labelled as cowards when speaking up about it. There was also a feeling that the government facilities are structured in a manner that discourages men from seeking help as they usually get ridiculed by officials when seeking assistance on matters of gender-based violence or family discords. It was mentioned that some men suffer in silence and then choose to distance themselves from the mother and the child. “*We are scared of being called.... Moffie...[a derogatory term used for a man who shows feminine traits] we are scared of these things whereas that is our rights...[to report]*” (Male elder participant, 4).

To counteract the helplessness that some fathers find themselves in, a militant suggestion was also made that to secure presence in their children’s lives, men must take a firm stand against the government:

“*...as a parent, you are able to say, ‘this is my home, these are my walls, this is my property, so here beyond these slabs and that yard, is the government. But once you come in here to me ...the law that goes is mine.’*” (Male elder participant, 1).

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a reminder of the study aim and objectives followed by a section discussing the main findings according to each study objective. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is used to: (i) contextualise the findings related to objective 3 (the needs of Xhosa young men), and (ii) explore the implications of the findings for policy, practice and research. Thereafter, a description of the study limitations and recommendations is presented and finally, the conclusion of this dissertation is provided.

This study aimed to explore the perceived influence of father absence or uninvolved fathers on young Xhosa men who have transitioned from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers. The specific objectives of this study were:

- (i) To explore the perceptions, experiences and psycho-social challenges of Xhosa young men who have culturally transitioned from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers in Khayelitsha, Western Cape.
- (ii) To explore Xhosa male elders' perceptions of the experiences and challenges of Xhosa young men who culturally transition from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers.
- (iii) To identify the support needs of Xhosa young men before, during and after transitioning from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers.

The following main findings emerged regarding objective one and two, reflecting perceptions of both young men and elders:

- (i) The meaning given to cultural male circumcision by young men and elders: the benefits for the individual and his family.
- (ii) Xhosa patriarchy, a father's role, and his absence, and paternal connection needs during initiation: a father's role during initiation (planning, masculine guidance and protection). Paternal connection needs: emotionally and culturally.

- (iii) The fatherly role and implications of father absence before and beyond initiation: the traditional and modern role.
  
- (v) Barriers to father presence or uninvolved: financial constraints, maternal gate-keeping and mother's negative attitudes.

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the support needs of Xhosa young men without present or involved fathers before, during and after transitioning from adolescence to manhood were identified as follows:

- (vi) At the microsystem level, single mothers and maternal families of Xhosa young men need to be open regarding father absence, acknowledge the pain it causes and avoid maternal gate-keeping and paternal identity concealment. However, they also need to receive psycho-social support in order to be able to link the young men with social fathers, especially around initiation.
  
- (vii) At the mesosystem level, the social institutions such as churches, schools and sports clubs should have awareness regarding father absence or uninvolved as a social problem in order to be sensitive towards the emotional needs of children with absent or uninvolved fathers.
  
- (viii) At the exosystem level, there is a need for fathers' environments (such as family, friends and the workplace) to encourage and foster lifestyles that promote father presence or involvement.
  
- (ix) At the macrosystem level, the media should raise awareness of father absence, and there must be policies and programmes that promote egalitarian parenting.
  
- (x) At the chronosystem level, there is a need to embrace and practice the modern fatherhood role which requires the father to be warm, spend quality time and have strong communication with his children.

## **5.2 The meaning given to cultural male circumcision by young men and elders**

### **5.2.1 The benefits of initiation at a personal and family level**

Participants in this study described the initiation process as a meaningful and momentous event in a Xhosa young man's life due to its deep cultural, spiritual and social significance. Since the Xhosa society is built on patriarchal ideals, similar to the young men in other studies (Magodyo, 2013), the young men in this study felt that the initiation process conferred a number of benefits. The first benefit was the personal benefit of being allowed into the inner circle of elders (gaining masculine guidance on life and manhood). The young men spoke fondly of this benefit and seemed elated to finally become 'a man', especially since boys are usually treated harshly and disregarded by male elders. This elation is common among Xhosa men; there is even an endearing expression for it which says: "*Indoda emadodeni*", which means 'being a man among men'.

The young men further seemed appreciative and positively impacted by the words of wisdom they received from well-meaning elderly men. From their utterances, it was apparent that the practice or aspect of words of wisdom was a cornerstone in this ritual. Generally, the act of sharing words of wisdom between elders and young people is a valued cultural practice in the Xhosa culture, and it is called "*ukuyala*" (Mavundla et al., 2010). As a result, almost all the rituals are characterised by this and their success is judged the quality of the listener as well as the change in behaviour or growth as result of the learnings. Among the young men in this study, it was evident that this practice was a highlight for them. It seemed to have empowered them to accept their manhood role with pride and gave them determination to be able to graciously handle the strain of paternal disengagement.

At a family level, their 'new man' identity seemed to place them in a socially accepted position to fill the father's gap upon their return to their homes. It enabled them to take responsibility to protect, restore respect and create balance in their household which previously lacked a father figure. Participants in Tau (2020)'s study also confirmed that a household that doesn't have a man is easily targeted, taken advantage of and often treated with disdain in the community. As a result, in studies on the quality of life experiences of Xhosa boys before initiation, some boys expressed how they eagerly waited for this transitional ritual, and despite being aware of its rigour, they voluntarily elected to go through it because of its various benefits mentioned in this study (Froneman & Kapp, 2017; Mavundla et al., 2010). Some also cited the sense of accomplishment as well as the elevated social status it brings to a newly initiated man in the Xhosa society.

In conclusion, according to this research, the ritual of initiation still continues to stand the test of time as a ritual that separates men from boys and the one that transform them to be “men amongst men”. It plays a huge role in bringing dignity into a Xhosa home ran by a single mother. The young men in this study embraced the sense of family responsibility that initiation brought and showed determination to work with their mothers. So, in the absence of the father, this ritual does seem to provide some form of relief to the paternal absence strain among the young men.

## **5.2.2 Xhosa patriarchy, a father’s role and his absence, and paternal connection needs during initiation**

### ***5.2.2.1 Xhosa patriarchy and a father’s role during initiation (planning, masculine guidance and protection)***

Even though the young men spoke fondly and positively of initiation, they also vocalised certain emotional and cultural challenges this period brought to their lives. The fact that it excludes their mothers as their known and familiar sources of support, it heightened and deepened the role of the father as a supporter. Further, in addition to excluding the mother as a familiar source of support to the young man, the Xhosa initiation ritual prohibits the young men from raising questions or concerns throughout the process. They are expected to accept and hope that everything that happens is in their best interest, although this is not always the case (Nomngcoyiya, 2015). Such mistreatment and negligence are sometimes linked to various factors: decaying familial and social connection, revenge, risky alcohol use and lack of experience among adult carers who oversee the process (Nomngcoyiya, 2015). This pattern regarding negligence was also noted in Mayekiso (2017) where it was reported that the initiates are sometimes neglected, mistreated and introduced to drugs and other social ills, capitalising on their vulnerability.

Some participants in this study expressed experiencing some form of confusion with regards to circumcision which required a biological father’s counsel and clarification. Such confusion seemed to have significantly affected the participants with weaker ties to their maternal male relatives or social fathers more. Some painfully recalled feeling alone as their maternal uncles distanced themselves due to family discords as well as the fear of incurring financial costs associated with this ritual. This occurrence challenges the general assumption that in the absence of the father, there will be readily available and well-meaning social fathers who will step in to play the fatherly role. This is in line with the literature which espouses that children with absent fathers who live with maternal families

sometimes receive inferior treatment from the extended family such as uncles and cousins (Nduna & Jewkes, 2010; Patel et al., 2017). Likewise, a participant in Ncaca (2014)'s study shared that when he approached his male relatives about his readiness to go to initiation, the responsibility was "pushed around". He then ended up speaking to his aunt who helped him identify men he could consult for guidance. So, the presence of male relatives should not be automatically equated to support or social fatherhood, and this instance also confirms what was discovered in this study, which is – women can position themselves as facilitators during this patriarchal and exclusionary process..

#### ***5.2.2.2 Paternal connection needs: emotionally and culturally***

Generally, for most young men in this study, while appreciative of the role and presence of social fathers such as uncles, for some their presence did not suffice. They felt that emotionally, the process could have been more fulfilling had their fathers been present not just for support but also witness their growth as men. The elders also confirmed and advocated for the importance of the presence of the biological father during the initiation. They were critical of fathers who abandon their children, especially around this period saying that such an absence create deep scars in a child's life and also could cause an irreparable rift in the father-son relationship. They further warned that despite their willingness and involvement, the maternal grandfathers and uncles also hold no knowledge of the paternal rituals, effectively placing the young man at a spiritual risk which could lead to spiritual disorientation, bad luck and mental illness. Similarly, the same concern was expressed by some single mothers in De Goede (2018)'s study. They showed a concern regarding the cultural well-being of their children in the absence of the biological fathers; they acknowledged that "there are things they cannot do for them". These perspectives counter-act the sentiments made by the elders in this study when they said women are oblivious of the cultural significance of the father in a Xhosa child's life.

Some young men expressed the embarrassment associated with using the maternal clan-name while peers are using paternal clan-names. They perceived this as cultural dislocation, and found their identity incomplete and questionable. In Nduna (2014)'s study, participants also expressed the same dissatisfaction and labelled their maternal surnames as the "wrong surname". This cultural discomfort prompts some young men to search for their fathers, especially before going on initiation. They usually report a heightened need for paternal connection and link to paternal ancestry for protection (Nduna & Jewkes, 2010). Likewise, a participant with divorced parents in Mhlawuli (2016)'s study mentioned his disapproval of having his manhood ritual done by his maternal family, citing the

importance of paternal involvement in this process. To underscore this, a father in Samukimba and Moore (2020)'s study also expressed his intention to change his child's maternal surname to his before he goes on initiation and also made a commitment to be fully present and oversee the entire initiation process. Additionally, another reason for the paternal clan-name to hold so much significance is because upon their return from initiation, they young men are addressed using these clan-names, not their actual names. This makes those who use their maternal clan-names to sometimes feel incomplete despite their new status .

If ignored, the shortcomings mentioned above could potentially minimise the benefits of this ritual which the participants in this study spoke fondly of. As a practice which continues to be widely practised and respected, it does need to be viewed in light of current South African literature and media reports so that it can continue to be improved and adapted according the needs and challenges of the modern society. Some of those challenges that call for scrutiny of this ritual are the decaying familial and social unity, alcohol abuse among the men who lead this ritual and its commercialisation (Ncaca, 2014).

### **5.3 The fatherly role and implications of father absence before and beyond initiation**

#### **5.3.1 The traditional role**

##### ***5.3.1.1 The role of a father as a disciplinarian and a protector***

According to Panter-Brick et al. (2014), irrespective of their presence or absence, fathers have an impact on children, mothers and family dynamics, and this could be for better or worse. Participants in this study emphasised the importance of the father's role as a disciplinarian and a protector. They highlighted a gap for him to instil order at home, shield his children from external threats and temptations, as well as shaping a young man's character. There was a firm belief that both parents are needed in order to balance and complement each other in child discipline: that is balancing the "mother's soft love" with the father's "tough love". It was thus emphasised that to be well-balanced morally, a child needs to receive discipline from both parents, and the absent fathers were blamed for not being present to play their part in this regard. The belief that mothers are soft was rampant among the participant groups in this study. As a result, some young men in this study regretted how paternal absence gave them a relative freedom to choose drugs, involvement in crime and dropping out of school. They felt that the premature freedom they got earlier in life turned out to be a draw back in

leading satisfying, productive and fulfilling lives as adults. This could be stem from the belief that mothers are sometimes authoritative to boys than girls (Roman, Makwakwa, & Lacante, 2016). Patrick (2006), also confirms that children with absent fathers are more likely to drop out of school, run away from home and abuse substances. The importance of the father's disciplinarian role is also evident in reflections by young fathers in de Wit (2016)'s study who opened up about township temptations and dangers of being exposed to drugs and alcohol at a young age. They emphasised the need for a father to exercise control in order to promote self-discipline and a strong sense of moral judgment among his children. Likewise, some young male participants in Louw (2018)'s study expressed doubts with regards to their levels of discipline due to lack of exposure to a father's sternness. This view is in contrast with the beliefs of participants in Tau (2020)'s study. They felt that single mothers could be too strict and overly protective in a restrictive manner. They felt that fathers' approach to discipline is an open one, effectively giving the child confidence to learn through experience and mistakes. This is in-line with Roman et al. (2016)'s findings that fathers are more open and permissive than mothers in discipline.

Furthermore, according to the literature, some mothers also confirm the importance of the father's role as a disciplinarian (Duister, 2021). In Patel et al. (2017)'s study mothers reported needing assistance in child discipline and one participant mentioned resorting to reporting her child to a community leader for assistance. This indeed confirms what transpired from this study, and that is: parenting is a partnership and both parents need each other. They should collaborate and not compete if they are to successfully shield their children from father absence. However, despite the overwhelming evidence on the role of the father as a disciplinarian and a protector, some young men appreciate father absence and see it as an opportunity to cultivate independence and maturity. To, them, the presence of the father could stunt resilience. So, they see father absence as a blessing to their individual growth (Tau, 2020). Therefore, generalisations should be avoided when tackling this issue, and the resilience that some children have should not be ignored, but rather adopted to inform future interventions.

### ***5.3.1.2 The role of a father as a provider***

The findings from this study suggest that both young men and elders do indeed recognize the various important roles that the father play and how keenly his absence is felt by the child. They both seemed to subscribe to the provider role: paying for children's education, food and clothes. They were also adamant that among his responsibilities, the father has to pay for initiation school expenses. As a



result, in the absence of the father, some young men reported attending initiation school later due to financial constraints. This delay seemed to be a draw-back and a painful reminder of their predicament, and thus incited anger and disappointment in some. These negative feelings are justifiable because the delay creates a social rift in their lives as it means being left behind by the peers who have the financial means to go on initiation. And, in the Xhosa culture, boys who are left behind by their counterparts are culturally prohibited from maintaining a relationship and interacting with their initiated friends upon their return (Froneman & Kapp, 2017). These young men thus become 'stunted' socially and culturally, remaining at the bottom of social hierarchy not only in the society but among their counterparts too (Vincent, 2008). So, in this way, the absence of the father generates numerous problems for a Xhosa boy. This means that the absent father does not only leave an emotional void, but could potentially create a social and cultural disharmony in the child's entire life.

Other than the initiation period, this study further notes that the absence of the father as a provider affects the young men in varying degrees. Some deemed the financial support from their mothers as inadequate and painfully remarked the social inadequacy and exasperation caused by the lack of paternal financial support. They maintained that the life quality of a child who receives financial support from both parents is better than that of a child who only relies on a single mother. Similarly, participants in Thwala (2018)'s study spoke of the social alienation caused by the interaction and association with their peers whose fathers provided for them and how this was a daily reminder of their predicament among peers. Participants in this study shared the embarrassment of not having a father who provides resources while peers show off what their fathers had done or will do for them. This compelled one young man in this study to create an imaginary father whom he bragged about to his friends. This financial gap compelled some young men participants in study to drop out of school due to the embarrassment caused by lack of resources. Similarly, in Tau (2020)'s study, some young men resorted to crime in order to provide for themselves out of empathy for their financially constrained mothers. So, the absence of the father as a provider does not only affect the child emotionally and socially but could lead to delinquency.

Even though the young men in this study acknowledged being socially and culturally disadvantaged by their financially absent fathers, some showed empathy and an awareness of the emasculation and exclusion faced by fathers who are unable to meet the provider expectation. However, despite this awareness, some participants affirmed that to protect his fatherhood and manhood status, a man must do his utmost to meet the social and cultural provider expectation. As a result, some participants

perceived their fathers as callous and untrustworthy for not financially honouring the father-son relationship, which includes supporting them through to initiation school. These viewpoints show that the provider role is still entrusted to the father, and this belief prevails despite the economic and employment challenges faced by many men in South Africa (Ramphela, 2002). The “masculation” of the provider has also been noted by Malherbe (2015), whereby fathers who failed to meet this expectation were labelled and discredited as callous and lazy. The literature warns that this view undermines the provider role that some women assume willingly, and it perpetuates gender division and stereotyping (Moore, 2013).

This provider belief is still very rampant. It was also evident among mothers in Mbokazi (2021)’s research where one mother expressed that she does not see the need of a father who cannot provide. In Payne (2019)’s study some mothers expressed that a father has to focus on provision instead of investing in honing his fatherhood skills through training. This belief made it difficult for them to support their unemployed partners who attended a fatherhood training as they did not perceive it as an investment. The similar lack of support was also noted in Hamer (1998)’s findings where mothers defined fatherhood on the basis of provision and thus overlooked and showed less appreciation of the father’s non-economic efforts. If this limited provider perspective prevails, father absence may continue to increase considering the rate of unemployment in South Africa (Eddy et al., 2013). So, interventions are needed to educate both the child, the mother and father on the fluidity of father and the modern role.

### **5.3.2 The modern role**

#### ***5.3.2.1 The role of a father as a gentle guide and a loving presence***

Even though both the elders and young men were in support of the disciplinarian role of the father, they emphasised the importance of flexibility and striking balance between instilling discipline and being nurturing. They also emphasised that the father’s warmth should precede his money expenditure on his children (Mbokazi, 2021). This is because, nowadays children value the time spent and memories created with the father as opposed to the money spent on them (Helman, 2015; Malherbe, 2015). In support of this, the literature shows that the contemporary youth relates differently to paternal involvement than the previous generation (Mabry, 2004). The contemporary youth describes ideal fatherhood on the basis of attachment: spending quality time with the family, involvement in family leisure, doing outdoor activities, playing and conversing with the children and assisting them

with homework (Helman, 2015; Malherbe, 2015). They believe that being an ideal father is not only confined within the parameters of physical presence, but is also defined by openness, love and affection towards one's children (Payne, 2019). A mother in Mbokazi (2021)'s research also expressed without focusing on the money, she sometimes wishes that the father would initiate contact with the child, and show interest in the child's welfare. Therefore, this calls for fathers to expand their role from that of the provider, protector and disciplinarian to be-friending their children. Participants in this study felt that the outside world is rough with some ill-meaning adults who are ready to mislead the youngsters, and therefore, if the young men cannot open up to their fathers, they easily fall prey to bad role models.

The men who already practice the nurturer role were admired and seen as role models. These were seen as men who exhibit healthy masculinities by respecting and spending time with their children and wives. Despite having not directly experienced the love of a biological father, the young men were very clear about the type of father they would have wanted to have. They would have wanted their fathers to role model a good behaviour, be a family man, and a friend who participate in recreational activities with his family. A man who teaches his children about respect, treating everyone in the family and community respectfully and practices healthy masculinity that does not condone domination and abuse. The preference of the young men in this study confirms that the young generation of fathers is willing to embrace modern fatherhood and its permanence (Dabula, 2018; Makhanya, 2016; Swartz & Bhana, 2009); it just needs to be encouraged and be practiced more.

#### **5.4 Support needs for Xhosa young men with absent or uninvolved fathers**

The father absence conundrum has been explained using either external (out of the father's control) or internal (within the father's control) justifications. Among the young men in this study, there was an empathy towards absent fathers, but also a strong opinion that fathers voluntarily choose to be "deadbeat fathers". They argued that with a strong paternal motivation, fatherhood is a navigable trajectory even in the face of financial adversities and other challenges, especially since children value attachment over expenditure. This perspective was also maintained by some participants in Tau (2020)'s who blamed their fathers for not making the relationship work with their mothers. They felt that they were not invested enough and were not 'man enough' to salvage the relationship. In Mbokazi (2021) when mothers were asked about the role they could play to bring fathers closer to their children, they also indicated that fathers have a responsibility to reach out and maintain contact with

their children, especially now that children also own phones. Similarly, some single mothers also feel that the reason for fathers to lag behind is due to the fact that they tend to perceive fatherhood as an option which they can easily turn their backs on when they cannot keep up (Duister, 2021).

By contrast, the elders in this study labelled fatherhood as an unattainable ideal due to external pressures such as high unemployment, maternal gate-keeping as well as the emasculation of men by women and the government. These diverging views show that there are no easy answers to father absence. Against this backdrop, the literature also concurs that since father absence is a culmination of various causes (maternal gate-keeping, father's lack of responsibility and paternal financial constraints), it thus requires adoption of a holistic and supportive approach (Richter et al., 2010).

Therefore, despite being the primary recipients of the negative impacts of father absence or uninvolved, the young men's suggestions regarding their support needs were not solely directed to themselves; they targeted family as an inter-related system (the child, the mother and the father and the community). Young men and elders made a call for sensitive, multi-level and synergised interventions that target the various levels of the society, aligning with Bronfenbrenner's ecological system. This section thus presents the recommendations made by both groups using Bronfenbrenner's model as a framework. It is structured as follows: (i) the need for openness and support, (ii) social institutions' awareness and sensitivity towards the emotional needs of children with absent or uninvolved fathers, and strengthened social fatherhood (iii) fathers' environments that promote father presence or involvement (men's conferences, mentorship and empowerment), and (vi) media hosted community dialogues and the need for policies and practices that promote egalitarian parenting and the creation of awareness on father absence and its impacts.

#### **5.4.1 The microsystem environment: The need for openness and support**

This study notes paternal identity concealment as an issue that needs to be remedied in the maternal family setting. Reflecting on their experiences, the young men equated the pain of paternal neglect to an invisible or a neglected wound which the maternal family tends to shun or ignore. From both participant groups, it was clear that lack of knowledge and answers regarding one's paternal identity causes more harm emotionally, spiritually and culturally. The maternal family was positioned as having more power to assist the child in effectively dealing with father absence due to its daily interaction with the child as opposed to the absent father who usually lives his parallel life. So, as the first step in effectively utilising its unique position, both elders and young men recommended that the

maternal family should allow the child to know his father and afford him an opportunity to decide if he wants to continue the relationship or not (Mbokazi, 2021). Some single mothers in Lubbe (2020)'s study also shared the same sentiments while others maintained that a child born out of wedlock has no father, especially if the father did not pay the pregnancy fine. The latter view reveals that culture is sometimes a major factor in maternal-gate keeping and father absence.

In addition to identity concealment, the participants went on to warn against maternal gate-keeping and its negative consequences on the child. Maternal gate-keeping is different from paternal identity concealment in the fact that the child may know who the father is and his whereabouts, but banned from having a relationship with him. In this instance, the child will be punished if there is a suspected interaction, and the father may be bad mouthed in front of the child in order to keep the child disinterested in him (Mavungu, 2013). Eddy et al. (2013) warns that in instances of negatively discussing the father with or in front of the child, the child usually gets caught up in the middle of adults' business, and finds him or herself being used as a weapon to hurt the father while being a victim of paternal disengagement. Participants with separated parents in Mhlawuli (2016)'s study also espoused that parents should refrain from allowing their differences to affect the well-being of their children and to also avoid using children as a weapon to hurt each other.

Currently, despite the reasons for maternal gate-keeping or paternal identity concealment, the continued silence in the maternal setting about the emotional turmoil of paternal absence seems to deepen the pain caused by father absence on the child, causing the child to wallow in pain and confusion alone. The negative consequences of this silence were noted in Nduna and Jewkes (2010)'s study. A participant in their study shared that the maternal family's silence compelled him to isolate himself and cry secretly in order to avoid a backlash. To deal with this silence, other participants resorted to drugs and some secretly searched for their fathers without the knowledge of their maternal families. So, this means that being silent about paternal absence does not make the child forget his predicament nor stop him from attempting to remedy the situation alone.

Usually, there are various reasons for maternal gate-keeping and identity concealment and some are very complicated and sensitive. Some of the leading reasons are when the father did not pay the pregnancy fine (Madhavan et al., 2008), denied paternity or the relationship ended badly and in some cases due to rape (Manyatshe, 2013). Without downplaying the reasons that force mothers to handle father absence the way they do, the young men implored the prioritization of the child's well-being

and cognisance regarding the fact that the child is the one who ends up suffering when the mother and the maternal family refuse a relationship between the father and child. Indeed, some single mothers in De Goede (2018)'s study confessed that at the demise of the relationship some women do take out their frustration on the child and the father. Mothers in De Goede (2018)'s study implored that women should be cognisant of this as well its dire impacts. Another single mother in Duister (2021)'s research indicated that had she known how much father absence would affect her son, she would have tried harder to make their father-son relationship work. However, it is noteworthy that not all mothers engage in gate-keeping. According to the literature, some mothers do go out of their way to connect their children to their fathers, but some the fathers fail to reciprocate this effort (De Goede, 2018; Mbokazi, 2021), especially when they have new partners.

East et al. (2006) state that fathers do play a role in their absence as well and caution that attempts at tackling father absence tend to focus on the mother rather the issue. Against this backdrop, the young men in this study acknowledged their appreciation of the important role played by their mothers and maternal families in raising them in the absence of their fathers. They recommended that they should receive support in order to be able to maximally support them. Indeed, according to Lubbe (2020), single mothers are a vulnerable group who need to be supported. Against this backdrop, suggestions were thus made for the maternal families to be equipped and educated on openness in initiating and facilitating conversations relating to paternal disengagement as well as taking part in helping to remedy the resulting emotional scars. The gap for strengthened open communication regarding this issue was also noted in a study on the quality of life of caregivers who receive the child support grant (CSG) (Patel et al., 2017). The single mothers in that study advocated that the openness makes it easy for the child to open up about the challenges s/he faces regarding the emotional scars and the feelings of being abandoned by one's own father (Patel et al., 2017). That study however acknowledged that for this to occur, it needs time and effort.

Maternal support in this matter is indeed necessary because in the African culture, the act of talking or interacting with a father of a child born out of wedlock is a new practice (De Goede, 2018). This is because giving birth out of wedlock has long been a shunned topic and a taboo (Moore, 2013). So, some families are at times in doubt about their ability to hold such discussions and the right time or age to initiate communication regarding the absent father (Manyatshe, 2013). Therefore, even though the young men and fathers may not always feel that way, it would be an oversight to assume that the

mother and the maternal family always intentionally withhold the information to purposely hurt the child.

So, an investment in maternal support is of paramount importance because previous research reveals that a supportive maternal family environment is key to the coping of children with disengaged or unknown fathers (Gee & Rhodes, 2003). Finally, since the young men reported the financial strain that the single mothers usually go through in raising them, the government's support of CSG should be continued. Research does confirm that the CSG support has positively changed the trajectory of women, especially the single mothers by placing them in the provider position for their children (Granlund & Hochfeld, 2019). Such financial support for single mothers helps to ease stress and thus makes them more emotionally available to their children (De Goede, 2018). In conclusion, irrespective of their perceived or real shortcomings, the mothers and their maternal families must continue to be supported as they are the ones directly linked to the child who has a disengaged father, and their well-ness means the well-ness of the child.

#### **5.4.2 The mesosystem environment: Social institutions' awareness and sensitivity towards the emotional needs of children with absent or uninvolved fathers**

The young men participants observed that currently, the society turns a blind eye to the issue of father absence. They then demanded that different parts of society (churches, schools, social workers etc.) should play a role in preventing father absence and mitigating its effects. They pointed out that the focus is often on child abuse, while neglecting the emotional abuse and the scars of being abandoned by one's biological father. The elders acknowledged their limited awareness regarding the frequency and implications of father absence prior to their participation in this study. They expressed how this study enlightened them about the pain it causes as well as the responsibility that themselves and the wider society have in assisting to curb and manage the crisis of father absence. They then implored the different social institutions to join hands to support children in this situation. A recommendation was made for NGOs, churches, schools and social workers to be pro-active in prioritising these children. This is indeed a noble idea as it means that the mothers would not be grappling with these children alone. Unfortunately, some single mothers in Duister (2021) are of the view that the society is not yet ready to assist in father absence. They mentioned that certain doors were closed on them as single mothers and they went on and labelled single motherhood as a challenging and lonely journey.

Secondly, even though the role of the biological father was seen as irreplaceable in a child's life, the social fathering system was identified as an effective strategy to support a child with a disengaged father in this study. The participants thus advocated for the scaling up of the social fathering practices, especially the maternal uncles, male neighbours, pastors and teachers. The mother was identified as a perfect link and a pathway between the child and social fathers. This link was seen as important under the impression that even though keen, the social fathers are sometimes wary of initiating the relationship without the approval or an initiative from the mother. This hesitancy was associated with various factors such as gender dynamics, the decaying practice of collective parenting and unity and mistrust between family and community members. The mother here was being placed in a protector role, mentioning that "there are many bad role models out there", and if one is not careful, he could be recruited for drugs under the pretence of mentorship or social fatherhood.

To echo and emphasize the benefits of the social fathering system, this study noted a distinction in the quality of experiences and confidence levels between the young men with a strong social father network than those who did not. As a result, this study commands that despite the need for a biological father during the initiation process, the young men with strong links to social fathers, especially their maternal extended kin do reap the benefits of this ritual. Ratele et al. (2012) also recommends that a strong social support could ease the emotional burden around the initiation period. Ideally, the social fatherhood practice should not only be availed around initiation, but earlier so that the child can enjoy the benefits for longer. This would help to avoid some of the negative impacts cited by the young men in this study such as confusion, feeling abandoned and dislocated. This strategy is one of the strategies that would be cost-effective and easy to implement as long as the mother is involved, in conjunction with proper and careful identification of the individuals who still embrace the notion of Ubuntu and those who truly believe that, "It takes a village to raise a child".

#### **5.4.3 The exosystem environment: Fathers' environments that promote father presence or involvement**

The young men in this study were adamant that there is a little that could be done externally to make fathers involved or present in their children's lives if they elect not to. However, despite this view, suggestions were made on what could possibly work if the fathers also co-operate and take responsibility. As a result, the exosystem was identified as the space that could be used effectively to



reach out, access and positively impact the fathers, especially seeing that many South African fathers tend to be non-resident fathers (De Goede, 2018). This research thus identifies this level as an untapped space which could be used to instil positive fatherhood practices. The young men cautioned that when not capitalised on, this gap is a pathway for fathers to default and continue subscribing to unhealthy masculinity practices such as spending time in taverns, excessive drinking, denying paternity (Manyatshe, 2013; Nduna & Jewkes, 2012; Swartz & Bhana, 2009) prioritising their new relationships and having multiple partners (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006).

On the importance of the quality of the environment that the father is in, a single mother in De Goede (2018)'s study mentioned receiving a call from the new partner of her child's father who was instructing her to take care of the child alone. Some single mothers in that study also shared how the fathers would postpone meeting the child because they had to meet up with friends. This means that fathers do need to be followed upon and exposed to alternative practices and opportunities that could help to support them to be responsible fathers. Some of these alternatives were mentioned in this study. That is, for fathers to create time and space to engage in duties such as spending quality time with the child, taking the child to soccer games or spending time at the park instead of being out drinking with friends. The literature further adds that to address this gap, fathers also need to start seeing themselves as carers and stop perceiving childrearing as a women's domain in which men can be intermittently involved or even be excused from (Patel et al., 2017). So, to make strides in positively impacting their thinking, their social spaces need to be infiltrated and positively disrupted.

Even though the young men perceived father absence as inexcusable, most of them adopted an empathetic stance indicating that some fathers may be absent due to being recipients of father absence in their lives. Indeed, adopting the empathetic stance could be beneficial in uncovering some unknown reasons for the absence such as mental illness (Makusha & Ratele 2021). An example of this in this study would be that of a participant whose father was heavily involved in drinking and emotionally unavailable. According to this participant, his father did not even attempt to offer emotional support when the young man communicated the intention of going to the mountain despite being the custodian of this ritual, and knowing very well the emotional support needed. Even though this topic hardly surfaces when exploring father absence causes, it is worth noting that men's mental health may also play a role in father absence (Mabusela, 2014; Makusha & Ratele 2021). Hammarlund, Andersson, Tenenbaum, and Sundler (2015) in their study of fathers with paternal postnatal depression (PND), also discovered that some fathers suffer from PND, especially those with history of depression and

difficult upbringing. They noticed that these fathers are often plagued by lack of concentration and feelings of inadequacy which could effectively make them emotionally callous as parents. Likewise, an absent father participant in Khunou (2006b)'s study acknowledged and linked his behaviour to negative generational fatherhood as his own father had also abandoned him.

Due to the cognisance of some of the factors beyond the control of the fathers: both the known and the unknown, the young men in this study suggested mentorship for absent fathers to learn about fatherhood from men who are succeeding in this regard. Makusha and Richter (2015) also concur that absent fathers should be embraced and empowered instead of being punished as they might be facing challenges themselves. This is also grounded on the belief that transitioning to fatherhood is a holistic journey which requires a father to consciously reposition himself mentally, emotionally, financially and socially, and this is not always easy for men as the society is not oriented in a supportive manner for them (Hammarlund et al., 2015). To concur this, a father in Mabusela (2014)'s study of absent fathers confirmed his non-acceptance of his new status as a father and this denial led him to alcohol abuse. This highlights that throughout their fatherhood journey, fathers may require psychological support (Payne, 2019). Patrick (2006) also adds that therapy services should be available to support the fathers so that they can become aware of how their actions have been impacted by their life experiences in order to avoid transmission of negative fatherhood. Indeed, Makusha and Ratele (2021) also espouse that "fathers need gender-specific mental health care and support for their own needs" (p. 146). However, to make this possible, fathers also need to actively seek assistance and refrain from suffering in silence.

Finally, a more social approach to supporting fathers was also suggested in this study, namely: constructive social gatherings that seek to improve the mental wellness of men such as men's conferences, church support groups or community gatherings where fatherhood matters are discussed. These were identified as sacred spaces where men could be afforded an opportunity to open up about their fatherhood experiences and challenges. But for such interventions to be effective and impactful, they need to be cognisant of some of the requests made by the men in this study, that is: they should prioritise the mental wellness of men and to be led by men. This request is a sign of hope that men do acknowledge needing assistance, but there is still a long way to go because fathers do not easily open up mental un-wellness as yet. This was evident in Hammarlund et al. (2015)'s study where the nurses reported that, during their home visit meetings, fathers tended to be quiet about their mental health struggles. It was usually the mother who tended to report the matter. Therefore, looking at this study's

findings and previous research, there is evidence for a need of an empathetic approach in relating to absent fathers at this level.

#### **5.4.4 The macrosystem environment: Media hosted community dialogues and policies for promotion of egalitarian parenting and awareness on father absence and its impacts**

The young men and elders pointed out to the current lack of attention that father absence is receiving at the macro-level. They suggested that to help curb or mitigate paternal disengagement, the media should host talk shows and community dialogues to illustrate how the mother, the child and the father are affected by father absence. It was suggested that the media could mandate itself to have a period that is dedicated to father absence coverage. In this way, the children in this predicament would also feel cared for too in the same manner that survivors of other forms of child abuse are cared for (Mbokazi, 2021).

Among the elders, there was an outcry for the presence of government interventions that make the father feel valued (Nyathi, 2021). They pleaded with the government to refrain from engaging in what they termed as an ‘over-promotion of women’s rights’ as well as its interference in family matters at the expense of men. Such interference was perceived as weakening the ties of parenting partnerships, effectively causing some fathers to distance themselves out of fear of being in trouble with the law. The elders labelled their relationship with the government as a contentious one. They particularly blamed the advent of democracy and the notion of women and children’s rights as some of the factors that disrupted the smooth functioning of the African family. This perceived imbalance or outcry needs to be attended to as South Africa is known for high cases of gender-based violence.

The elders in this study then called for a review of some of the government practices which they saw as disempowering fathers from playing the disciplinarian role in their homes. The same sentiment was also held by some elder participants in Granlund and Hochfeld (2019)’s study where they felt that the promotion of children’s rights has disrupted the family order. Similarly, the elders in this study firmly opposed and challenged the ban of corporal punishment use on children saying that the government laws are not applicable to their houses. They seemed to equate corporal punishment to father presence and involvement. These views show a need to educate fathers on what father presence means and alternative forms of discipline to avoid what was discovered in Van den Berg (2015)’s study where

some fathers acknowledged being firm proponents of corporal punishment until they attended a fatherhood training that taught them about its negative implications on the child. The literature reveals that some fathers who have not received training on implications and alternatives to corporal punishment continue to believe that corporal punishment is the only way to show their present as parents (Eddy et al., 2013). Such training is pivotal because some fathers have only been exposed to corporal punishment; hence they view it as the only effective strategy (Payne, 2019; Van den Berg, 2015).

To remedy the contentious relationship between the government and fathers, the promotion of egalitarian parenting was identified as key. A call was made for an increased and improved paternal support, provision of paternal rights education as well as paternal user-friendly government services (Mavungu, 2013). These findings are in-line with Nyathi (2021)'s research which shows that the government facilities are not yet ready to accommodate and assist unmarried fathers who wish to apply for birth certificates for their children. According to Nyathi (2021) when they do get assisted, they are sent between different offices and it could take up to more than a year to receive the certificate. Nyathi (2021) further states that children who live in paternal families are often categorised as orphans by the government officials even in instances where the mother is alive but abandoned them.

The notion of empowerment and the promotion of egalitarian parenting could help avoid the kind of resistance that was reported in a Rwandan study among fathers. These fathers acknowledged feeling threatened by the notion of women's rights under the impression that it is a strategy to disempower and emasculate them (Van den Berg, 2015). Their resistance was mitigated by their attendance of a fatherhood training which focused on the rationale for the promotion of women's rights as the protection of women as well as redressing the gender imbalances of the past (Van den Berg, 2015).

Finally, the external orientation of the utterances and the recommendations made by the elders seem to point out that they perceive egalitarian parenting as a matter that could only be introduced and facilitated by the government. Similarly, absent fathers in Mbokazi (2021)'s study also positioned them as powerless by indicating that they were waiting for the mothers to initiate contact when the children were young and when the children grew, they expected them to be the ones contacting them first. This thinking could cause them to be passive in the parenting process and leave most of the parenting duties to the mother (as currently seen), and this approach has proven to be futile (De

Goede, 2018; Duister, 2021). This kind of passiveness was also noted in (Hammarlund et al., 2015) Hammarlund et al. (2015)'s study, during their interaction with the nurses, the fathers tended to take less leadership in discussions and often positioned themselves as outsiders. So, awareness is needed about the value of positive fatherhood and skills training.

## **5.5 Implications for policy & practice**

Adolescents in Mbokazi (2021)'s study expressed a longing for an access to an involved and a responsive father. As a result, some of them agreed to participate in her study with the hope to be brought closer to their fathers. Similarly, around the initiation process, young men in this study also expressed hopes for a re-union. This means that children in this predicament are in need of support and closure. Against this backdrop, a number of implications for practice arose from this study, and they are presented according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system. This model is appropriate because solutions to remedy or mitigate paternal disengagement require a multi-dimensional approach, which focuses not only on the child, but on the environments and people who have both a direct and indirect impact on him or her. Approaches to mitigate paternal disengagement also need to be rooted in the understanding that the needs of a child who knows his or her father are different from those of a child with no knowledge of the father, and this section introduces such interventions as per these unique needs.

### **5.5.1 The microsystem**

Within the microsystem, it would be an oversight to devise interventions that only target the children with absent fathers, while neglecting the parents and maternal grandmothers, especially since attempts at remedying father absence are still new and scant. Such multi-dimensional programmes should focus on: (i) creating awareness around the fatherhood needs of the contemporary youth, (ii) provision of psycho-social support for maternal families, including support groups for single mothers, and also (iii) encouraging open communication between fathers and children and between the parents.

This study and previous research show a shift from the traditional, rigid and distant conceptualisation of fatherhood which was based on provision and instilling discipline to a modern form of fatherhood which is characterised by quality time, compassion and attachment to one's offspring (Chideya & Williams, 2014; Mabry, 2004). While most women seem to willingly assume the provider role (Moore, 2013), some men lag behind in assuming the nurturer role. According to Sonke Gender

Justice and Council (2018), there is only around 11% to 12% of fathers who are currently involved in child care in South Africa. This shows that many fathers continue to shun the nurturer role as they see it as a domain for women. This belief continues to prevail among them despite the heightened need to defend and protect their fatherhood standing in these financially volatile times (Eddy et al., 2013). As a result, single mothers in De Goede (2018)'s study made a plea for fathers to meet them half-way by also playing the nurturer role and for them to know that fatherhood is not about financial provision anymore. These mothers vocalised the strain of playing multiple roles alone. Fathers need to explore an array of non-monetary activities such as helping around the house, taking children to school and helping them with homework. Payne (2019) recommends that such activities could also strengthen the relationship between the parents by promoting partnership and collaboration.

Participants in this study revealed that a father who does not have money is not usually given space in parenting. This shows that it is not only the fathers who still believe in provision but some mothers too. This makes these mothers to grapple to value a father who cannot provide, especially when they can successfully take up this role themselves. So, there is a need for educational interventions that educate the mothers and maternal families on the changes in traditional gender roles and fatherhood too. An awareness should be raised among maternal families or guardians with regards to the positive contribution fathers could make to mitigate or prevent paternal disengagement by being afforded an opportunity to embrace the new and multi-faceted fatherhood role. These interventions could be part of a robust response to prevent financially constrained fathers from electing to abandon their paternal role due to a perceived failure to meet the provider role (Patel & Mavungu, 2016).

Furthermore, father absence is invariably linked to challenges such as emotional and financial hardships on the side of the mother. So, it is important to prioritise and pay attention to the emotional wellbeing of the caregivers (Patrick, 2006). According to the current research and previous research (Louw, 2018), a strong maternal family support is critical in strengthening the coping abilities of children with absent or uninvolved fathers. A specific attention should be especially paid to those who are less educated, financially strained and leading large households as they may be more susceptible to emotional distress which could further compromise their emotional connection with the children (Patel et al., 2017). The nature of this support should be financial, emotional and social so that they can be able to cope with financial, emotional and cultural challenges of raising a child with a disengaged father. There is also a gap for provision of support groups for single mothers or caregivers so that they can collectively share their experiences and draw support from one another. This is

particularly important for those with denied paternity in order to help them to deal with the anger and disappointment associated with this experience.

Furthermore, since the young men in this study raised the issue of the financial constraints of their care givers as a challenge, there is thus a gap for provision of additional financial welfare services that support the care givers who tend to be females. Such services could help to complement the CSG and improve the quality of their lives within the family setting. The quality of such support is key, because according to Granlund and Hochfeld (2019), services such as the CSG help to maximise women's autonomy, choices, dignity and social recognition in the household and community. They also reduce financial worry and stress, thus making mothers more present in their maternal role. This support could make a difference especially among the young mothers who often rely on others for support (Mathews, Jewkes, & Abrahams, 2011).

Regarding the tackling the challenges faced by single mothers, the single mothers in De Goede (2018)'s research made a few recommendations on what these mothers could do to cope with single-parenthood. They advised that they should learn to reach out and seek assistance from family members, community organisation, nurses, and share their experiences with other single mothers. The same recommendation was also made by the elders in this study. They indicated that social fathers are sometimes not at ease about reaching out to single mothers when they seem to be coping. The single mothers in De Goede (2018)'s research also emphasised positive self-talk, self-confidence and the power of positively reframing their predicament, journaling and turning to religion. The act of supporting mothers is a great need because emotionally strained caregivers may resort to punitive parenting, and be less present, and thus worsen the strain of father absence among their children. Furthermore, the provision of support for strained caregivers is a preventative strategy which can act as a protective factor by indirectly benefitting the child since the wellness of the mother plays a huge role in shaping the child's world view and resilience.

Most importantly, while the programmes may prioritise the maternal family due to the role it plays in management of father absence, interventions should be cognisant of the fact that the void of the biological father is not easily filled. Therefore, the interventions provided for grandmothers and mothers should support them to avoid gate-keeping activities and equip them to minimise the gap between the child and the father by encouraging them to play a unifying role (Mbokazi, 2021). Grandmothers in particular are in a position to be a positive influence in this regard because of their

seniority in Xhosa society as they are seen as bearers of wisdom in African families. Lesch and Kelapile (2016) in their study of absent fathers, cautioned that grandmothers' position of authority can be a factor in encouraging paternal disengagement, especially in instances where pregnancy fine was not paid (in the case of unmarried parents). So, there is a gap for interventions that not only support grandmothers in their role of assisting with parenting, but to also encourage them to be the agents for positive change in encouraging father involvement (Mbokazi, 2021). Inasmuch as grandmothers have some form of an influence on paternal disengagement, Makofane (2015) observes that burdening them with parenting related matters would occur less often if fathers took responsibility for their children. So, while exploring other avenues of lessening the strain of paternal disengagement, fathers should not be exempted from their responsibility (East et al., 2006).

Furthermore, since lack of openness about paternal identity affects the Xhosa child's social and cultural wellness, engagement with parents and families should also encourage openness in addition to addressing parenting skills and gender roles. Such openness would make the home environment a safe platform where children with disengaged fathers can share their experiences, questions and concerns without the fear of being misconstrued as ungrateful of the role played by the maternal family. To facilitate openness on this matter, family visits from qualified personnel (e.g. social workers) could equip the families with communication skills to be able to openly address this both with fathers and the children. This approach is appropriate because sometimes the maternal family lacks knowledge and orientation with regards to the right age to initiate such conversations (Manyatshe, 2013; Nduna & Jewkes, 2010). Moreover, each family case would need to be treated individually; firstly, by assessing the family's psycho-social support needs, and then providing family counselling and referrals where necessary.

Participants in this study went on and mentioned infidelity and paternity doubts as one of the factors leading to father absence. So, in instances of paternity doubts or disagreement, parents should seek: (i) baseline programmes including pregnancy support services (antenatal support services for mothers and fathers, including DNA testing), (ii) communication and reconciliatory programmes (to form a link between the maternal and paternal family), and (iii) tertiary programmes to be used as a last resort (child maintenance court). Fathers should not just quietly and individually elect to abandon their children without an intervention.



Some fathers in Mbokazi (2021)'s research, when asked about the reasons for their estrangement, they cited the strained relationship with the mothers as the cause. Therefore, communication building and reconciliatory programmes are a need. A participant in De Goede (2018)'s study advised that on a personal level, mothers should try to be patient and understanding that parenting is a skill that needs lots of honing when it comes to men. She suggested an empathetic stance, words of encouragement and affirmation to support men to do their best. Such patience and willingness to engage, would not only benefit parents, but could also benefit the child because among Xhosa families particularly, there is a failure to include and engage children on challenging paternity dynamics even though they are usually on the receiving end of such discords. Children in this predicament are often left to silently deal with the confusion and questions around paternal identity and disengagement in isolation.

### **5.5.2 The mesosystem**

A child is influenced and shaped by the combination and interaction of different environments that she or he is a part of, such as school, home, neighbourhood and social institutions. It would thus be an oversight to explore and devise interventions that prioritise one environment while neglecting the others (Patel et al., 2017). The interventions in the mesosystem environment need to: (i) create synergy among the different environments that the child exists in, (ii) support maternal families to link young men to social fathers, and (iii) strengthen a pathway between the maternal and paternal family.

This study shows that the phenomenon of father absence or uninvolved remains a neglected phenomenon in society with few interventions directed towards it. The elders in this study highlighted the period of initiation as one of the periods to be targeted as boys are more likely to be emotionally vulnerable at this point. They warned that if neglected, they easily go astray in the absence of paternal support. The findings of this research therefore call for concerted and collective efforts to enable collaboration between social institutions and the wider community to collaborate in providing support for these young men. Formal social institutions such as churches, schools, social services could be ideal for playing that role since they have a direct interaction with the child. They could avail counselling, support groups and mentorship. The mentorship in particular, could be structured in a way that also facilitate family engagement and access to social fathers or other forms of extended support. The young men could also be paired with older peers who successfully overcame the challenge of father absence in their lives.

Additionally, this study reveals that even though women are excluded from the initiation process, they could find ways to actively support their children by linking them with men who could help them. Nevertheless, the elders indicate that single mothers do not usually reach out. The literature also points out that women tend to prefer to seek support from other women than men (Patel et al., 2017). They therefore may find it difficult to identify and approach social fathers. So, there is a need for a safe space for mothers and grandmothers to gain confidence to actively identify and approach social fathers who could mentor the young men in preparation for initiation. This could include approaching street or community leaders to facilitate the links to social fathers (Patel et al., 2017).

Furthermore, as means of increasing support, the father also has the responsibility to facilitate and strengthen the child's maternal and paternal family connections (Mbokazi, 2021). The fathers could play this role while the relationship with the mother is still intact, especially in cases of children born out of wedlock. This paternal family connection not only widens the child's social network, but also provides the child with ancestry link even in the predicament of father absence or uninvolved (Mayekiso, 2017; Mhlawuli, 2016). In addition to strong ties between maternal and paternal families, in consultation with the mother, a child who is in this situation must speak up and pro-actively seek help from the neighbours, trustworthy mentors and also make use of community organisations that offer free counselling and guidance. These children must not suffer in silence, and the young men in this study stressed this. Finally, there is a need for continued interventions that make communities safer. Some single mothers of youth offenders in Duister (2021)'s study lamented that if their children did not live in communities with bad role models, drugs, gangsterism, and alcohol abuse, and loitering, they would not have engaged in delinquency. This means that social fathers for the young men need to be selected carefully.

### **5.5.3 The exosystem**

The current research recognises a gap to utilise the exosystem level to introduce strategies to prevent and manage father absence. According to this research, the exosystem level is crucial since many absent fathers also tend to be non-residential. Therefore, interventions at this level should seek to reach out and to positively affect their social spaces and lifestyles. To attain this, Patrick (2006) recommends that support should be available for disengaged fathers because some are also carrying their own burdens, including paternal abandonment in their own lives. They should also receive counselling in order to help them navigate the challenges brought by the volatility of fatherhood in the

contemporary society. Emotional and social support programmes on child care would help to ensure that these fathers are well equipped with fatherhood skills in order to break the cycle of fatherlessness or intermittent fathering, especially for those who grew up without fathers.

Furthermore, since fathers differ in reasons for their absence, the programmes should prioritise the ‘at risk fathers’ and this would include: (i) those who grew up without fathers, in order to ascertain the gaps that may need to be addressed in their parenting; (ii) those who could not pay the pregnancy fine in order to explore amicable ways for their involvement despite the state of the relationship with the child’s mother; (iii) unemployed fathers so that they can explore alternative ways of involvement, (iv) those no longer in a relationship with the mother so that they can work on amicable parenting relationship for the benefit of the child, and (v) fathers who might be at risk of mental illnesses should be supported more.

For those employed, utilising the workplace environment would be a great start by encouraging fathers to strike a balance between work and family life (Tanquerel & Grau-Grau, 2019). When organisations take this holistic approach, they also benefit because involved fathers tend to report increased job satisfaction and may not contemplate quitting their jobs as frequently as other men (Ladge, Humberd, Watkins, & Harrington, 2018). Fathers should be encouraged to make use of the South African 10 days paternal leave, be actively involved in the antenatal process, including being a part of antenatal visits and getting exposure to childcare. Throughout the process, the mental wellness of fathers needs to be catered for. Support groups and counselling services for expectant fathers or fathers could be availed, especially for the first-time fathers as part of their personal development. They could also be educated about PND in order to contextualise and validate any feelings of inadequacy that they might have and to be offered opportunities to be screened for it where possible (Makusha & Ratele 2021; Pedersen, Maindal, & Ryom, 2021). Fathers are more likely to make use of these opportunities if they are provided by their employers.

However, unemployed fathers too should not be left out. They should be introduced to alternative roles they could play in the absence of money (Mbokazi, 2021). This could help to increase their fatherhood efficacy in the midst of pressure posed by the inability to provide, and they could also be awarded certificates of attendance. Such recognition, in the long run may help their children to see the efforts they have made in becoming better fathers (Mbokazi, 2021). Effectively using the period of their unemployment for fatherhood training is ideal as it can be challenging for employed fathers to

juggle between fatherhood programmes and work when these programmes are not provided by their employers (Payne, 2019). Such programmes have a potential for success if fathers see them as beneficial as time will not be a challenge for the father.

Whether employed or unemployed, the value of fatherhood training programmes was noted in de Wit (2016)'s study. Participants who attended a fatherhood training reported developing a healthy masculinity, becoming involved parents, gaining courage to defy gender stereotypes and getting involved in domestic chores. They also reported sharing the skills learnt to correct the behaviour of their counterparts who did not attend the training. According to Payne (2019) fatherhood trainings also have a positive indirect impact on 'by-stander fathers' who end up noticing the growth and positive changes exhibited by their peers who have attended trainings.

Even though men sometimes show reluctance in taking part in these programmes, in Payne (2019)'s study, fathers expressed the desire to have received parenting support earlier, suggesting how such empowerment would have equipped them to adopt constructive fatherhood: notably being less punitive in child discipline. They reported missed opportunities for scrutinising and changing their lifestyles in order to be more supportive to their partners and establishing open relationships with their children. This shows that even though fathers may not actively seek fatherhood development, but such provision is key.

Furthermore, as seen in this study, and other studies, children value and appreciate fathers who invest time in them more than those who only spend money on them (Helman, 2015; Mbokazi, 2021). So, the proposed fatherhood programmes should encourage fathers to spend quality time with their children, introduce them to their social circles during workplace events, take them to sports games, enrol on new learning programmes and explore new hobbies together. Finally, such fatherhood programmes also need to encourage fathers to see parenting as a partnership in order to avoid overburdening the mother (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). They should help prepare them to be able to overcome gender norms and expectations that prevent them from embracing the practice of egalitarian parenting (Payne, 2019; Van den Berg, 2015).

#### **5.5.4 The macrosystem**

Even though there is an outcry about the growing prevalence of father absence in South Africa (Duister, 2021; Smith et al., 2014; Tau, 2020), there is little that has been done at the macro-level to bring fathers along and make them realise the positive impact of their presence in their children without necessary labelling them (Mbokazi, 2021). When it comes to policies, Patel and Mavungu (2016) caution that the, “social and family policies are silent about the role of men or fathers in a highly feminised, familial and community centred welfare and care regime” (p.9). They argue that currently, family related policies tend to direct care giving to women mostly, and leave the men out. Likewise, the elders in this study spoken vehemently about this. This section suggests interventions that could be devised, implemented and strengthened at macrosystem level in order to remedy. These would entail: (i) encouraging the implementation of the unabridged certificates (a birth certificate with the father’s details), and provision of free accessible DNA services, (ii) reviewing the negative impacts of certain Acts and cultural practices on father absence (iii) empowering fathers and educating them on their paternal rights, (iv) advocacy to create awareness on father absence and its implications, and (v) prioritisation and redirecting of funding for implementation of fatherhood programmes.

Similar to previous research (Manyatshe, 2013; Nduna & Jewkes, 2010), this study shows that some children are not only grappling with the issue of father absence or uninvolved, but also dealing with the issue of not knowing who their fathers are. It was noticeable that those in this predicament were affected the most by father absence. Going forward, it would be beneficial to re-inforce the unabridged certificate programme which was introduced in 2013 as a form of child protection in order to promote child welfare (Makhanya, 2016). Having the father’s details on the certificate would make it easier for the child to locate the father should the need arise, especially in instances where the mother is no longer alive. This would help to avoid some of the instances discovered in this research where some young men did not know who their fathers were and where to start in locating them. The re-enforcement of the use of unabridged certificates would also be beneficial for unmarried fathers who sometimes lack access to their children (Nyathi, 2021) for reasons such as not paying the pregnancy fine, maternal gate-keeping and relocation (Makhanya, 2016). Nevertheless, for this practice to be effective, the issues of paternity doubts would need to be attended to as it is one of the barriers to paternal involvement (Hamer, 1998). When such doubts are present, some fathers abandon their role due to lack of trust, concerns and unanswered questions about paternity (Swartz & Bhana,

2009). There is a need for such provision, because previous research shows that there has been instances where a mother and father have shown interest in taking the test but were prevented by access and affordability (Khunou, 2006b). Fortunately, to close this gap, the South Africa government is in the process of implementing this as of 2022.

Furthermore, since the South African Maintenance Act 99 of 1998 is meant to ensure that the material needs of the child are met, the implementation of this Act tends to mainly focus on the aspect of financial support with less emphasis on promotion of emotional support and a strong father-child relationship. When combined with the practice of pregnancy fines, they both exclude and discriminate against a father who is not able to provide financially but who is willing to be involved and play the nurturer role (Makhanya, 2016). This indeed appears to be in contrast with the Children's Act 38 of 2005 which says, "Every child has a right not to be subjected to social, cultural or religious practices which are detrimental to his or her well-being." (p.23).

On the cultural level, there is a need of evaluating and scrutinising the implementation and the relevance of pregnancy fines in the contemporary society. While in the past its rationale was to reduce pregnancies that occur out of wedlock, nowadays there is birth control and family planning to curb that and some women have no intentions of getting married while they would like to conceive. In some instances, the couple usually makes an agreement to have a child. In Lubbe (2020)'s research, it was revealed that some mothers do not support the pregnancy fine practice due to the belief that unlike in the past, nowadays the father has to be in contact and regularly maintain the child. They thus found it unfair for him to be forced to pay the fine while also expected to maintain the child. Some went on to vocalise that "it takes two to make a child", and grappled to understand why the father has to be forced to pay the fine. These women also complained about the fact that during the pregnancy fine negotiations the woman is not consulted. They criticised the male orientation of this practice. So, there is therefore a gap to create awareness and engage Xhosa traditional leaders and elders on father absence and its implications on the child, the mother and the father as seen that some fathers wish to be involved but fail due to their inability to pay the fines (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016; Madhavan et al., 2008). There must be talks about how the pregnancy fine practice could be reviewed and adapted in a way that does not stand in the way of father presence or involvement.

This study and other studies also note a gap for paternal friendly and accessible government services (Khunou, 2006a). To confidently make use of the government services, fathers must be educated about their paternal rights such as applying for birth certificates and child support grant (Nyathi, 2021) and the right to appear on child's birth certificate. This education should also include provision of clear guidelines on the actions the government would take against mothers who unfairly and unreasonably deny them access to their children. Such provision may play a significant role in empowering the fathers to seek help when necessary. The people who work in government social services need to be trained on how to be more accommodating towards men who seek assistance and to introspect on their gender-biased entrenched attitudes when serving men (Nyathi, 2021). The need for such trainings and introspection was noted in Hammarlund et al. (2015)'s study where the nurses acknowledged being "unsure" of how to involve fathers and assess their health and well-being during the antenatal phase.

Furthermore, as means to ensure the egalitarian approach requested by the men in this study, there must be available education regarding the purpose of intervention meant for women. This would help to prevent men from misconstruing these programmes as a strategy to over-promote women's rights at their expense (Sikweyiya et al., 2016; Van den Berg et al., 2013; Vincent, 2008). This misperception among men is concerning considering that South Africa continues to be plagued by high rates of gender-based violence against women and children. Ideally, future programmes should be holistic and accommodate men so that they can also feel as an integral part of the African family and community (Wessel, 2012). Funding is needed to conceptualise and implement programmes that encourage men to prioritise their families, take on the nurturer role and adopt positive masculinities.

Finally, despite the rampant discussions about absent fathers in the literature and in the society, there is evidence of fathers who beat the odds and play their role effectively (De Goede, 2018; Mbokazi, 2021). The society should not turn a blind eye on them. There must be a presence of media celebration and aired success stories. That is, the media (TV, radio, social media) could promote positive discourse around men and fatherhood. Such publicity could create constructive competition among men and help them aspire to attain healthy masculinities (Prinsloo, 2002).

## 5.6 Implications for research

Previous research reveals that the black South African families are greatly affected by father absence (Franklin et al., 2014; Patel et al., 2017) paternal identity concealment, paternity denial (Manyatshe, 2013). According to East et al. (2006) the implications of father absence on children and families need further research in order to discover strategies that could help manage or prevent it. Likewise, Mbokazi (2021) discovered that in her study, “*although fathers, mothers, children, and extended kin from the same family supported the idea of consistent father–child involvement, each individual family member felt somehow wounded, unsupported or deterred by one other with regard to father–child contact. Consequently, each felt justified in her/ his stance of having given up on taking the initiative to enable regular contact between father and child.*” (p.43). Against this backdrop, this study raises a gap for multiple and multi-levelled implications for research. This necessitates intensified investigations on what could be done within the family setting and at different levels of the society to meet the needs of these subgroups. Irrespective of how this conundrum is solved, the young men in this study were adamant that prioritising this phenomenon is a necessity because father absence is a predicament that could easily lead to mental health problems when unattended to and they saw this research as the first step in uncovering their unique needs as Xhosa young men.

According to East et al. (2006) there is paucity of a multicultural perspective in the area of father absence research. Therefore, research similar to the current study needs to be extended to other groups who also practice cultural initiation such as the Ndebeles, Sothos, Pedis and Tswanas. This would help to ascertain whether the challenges faced by the Xhosa young men with disengaged fathers around initiation are the same cross-culturally. Should that be the case, such studies would focus on finding clear recommendations on specific, measurable and attainable actions the young men can personally take in order to successfully navigate this period. This would then inform the interventions that could be rolled out nationally.

Furthermore, since this study identifies the practice of social fathering as a source of support among Xhosa young men, especially around initiation, it would be helpful to conduct a feasibility study which devises a plan for an effective national social fathering programme. Such research would yield answers on how the programme could be initiated, by who and when, including an evaluation of its impact. This could also include focusing on social fathers who have successfully played the fatherly role to Xhosa boys with absent fathers to explore the feasibility of replicating some of their strategies.



The current research and previous studies (De Goede, 2018; Duister, 2021; Tau, 2020) reveal a pattern of unhealthy relations between men and women with regards to who should or can play the provider role versus the nurturer role and this could be linked to the evolution of the African families and the empowerment of women (Mbokazi, 2021). The economic empowerment of women seems to be sometimes causing men to feel displaced and emasculated to a point of abandoning their parenting responsibility. So, extensive research is needed in order to inform meaningful interventions that seek to uncover and understand the challenges of the African men and to accommodate and embrace them. Such knowledge may help assist and support them to re-invent themselves, embrace the evolution of fatherhood and maybe find it easy to co-exist and co-parent with autonomous and economically empowered women. This means that there is a lot of capacity building needed in this regard (policy makers, intervention providers and the civil society). Understanding the current needs and challenges of absent fathers is crucial in order to create holistic and well-informed interventions that avoid an over-empowerment of one group over the other (Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Such focus may also help to relieve the mothers as they are usually the most targeted group when attempting to solve or make sense of father absence (East, Hammersley, & Hancock, 1998). When it comes to prioritising fathers, Patel and Mavungu (2016) however warns that research endeavours or interventions that require the involvement of men could be sabotaged by their unwillingness to participate. Therefore, while seeking to include them, it is important to be aware that it may take time for them to make use of the opportunities provided for them.

Furthermore, not all is bleak, the recent effort at government level of the 10 days paternity leave which seeks to empower men as valuable family members does not go unnoticed. However, a follow up research is needed to evaluate its use, as well as critically looking at factors that could inhibit or facilitate its use among fathers. Such research should also be accompanied by an investigation of interventions that could cater for the mental wellness of fathers during the antenatal period as men are also prone to PND (Pedersen et al., 2021). Currently, there is little to no knowledge on how they can be screened and supported (Hammarlund et al., 2015).

Finally, past studies have often focused on father absence as a negative influence on children (East et al., 1998; Mbokazi, 2021). However, this is not always the complete picture as some findings refute these claims. For instance, some participants in Tau (2020)'s study pointed out that father absence has not affected them negatively, indicating that they cannot be affected by an absence of someone who

has never been present. They acknowledged that the role played by their mothers and maternal family was adequate for them. So, it would be worthy to investigate the internal and external factors that make some children resilient in the face of father absence.

### **5.7 Limitations of the study**

Several limitations in this study need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, the study sample is from a relatively culturally homogenous urban setting of Khayelitsha. While the findings may be relevant for Xhosa populations in other areas, similar research would be needed in a rural setting in order to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon since the lifestyles and beliefs between these two settings may differ, especially with regards to parenting, social fathering and the processes of initiations.

Secondly, for the sampling of the young men, there was an inclusion criterion of age which was between the ages of 18 to 22. This became a limitation in the course of data collection as financial constraints and lack of support emerged as an issue for the population of young men with absent or uninvolved fathers. This often caused them to attend initiation school later than their counterparts with present or involved fathers. Therefore, some young men who could have qualified were excluded on the basis of attending initiation school much later than the specified age of 18. It is possible that including their experiences and perceptions could have provided an additional rich perspective with regards to the negative social and cultural impact of being 'left behind' by one's counterparts.

Thirdly, another limitation of this study is based on the sensitivity around the topics of cultural initiation and manhood as these topics are usually reserved for discussions among males who have successfully gone through initiation. This was mitigated by sensitively phrasing questions to avoid making participants feel uncomfortable by not requesting information related to the actual initiation rituals and experiences. There was also an availability of a male research assistant who conducted some interviews in order to ascertain if gender was going to be an issue. The use of the vignette even though it helped to avoid directness when asking questions, it is possible that its use may have limited the thinking and the responses of some participants, especially considering the issues of desirability in research.

Finally, in addition to tackling the sensitive topic of initiation, father absence is also a challenging topic since it is usually shunned in Xhosa families, culture and society. Therefore, speaking about it was an unusual experience for many young men; hence some labelled it as a neglected wound or an

invisible scar that is unacknowledged by the society. This may have had some form of influence on reducing their level of expression and the data collected.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

To understand the phenomenon of father absence or uninvolved, this study explored perceptions and experiences of Xhosa young men who culturally transitioned into manhood without the involvement or presence of their fathers in order to understand their lived experience and psychosocial support needs. It contributes to the literature by confirming that father absence is an unacknowledged crisis among Xhosa young men which needs interventions. This study thus warns that when not addressed, father absence could have negative emotional implications such as depression, anger, involvement in crime and substance abuse among young men, especially around the period of initiation.

This study further notes cultural initiation as a crucial time for emotional and cultural growth which contributes to the development of manhood identity among Xhosa young men with absent fathers. It personally and culturally empowers them to assume the fatherly role in a home that previously lacked a father figure. Nevertheless, the patriarchal nature of this ritual is disadvantageous in the absence of the biological father. It could become a source of stress in the midst of unanswered paternal concerns, lack of paternal ancestry connections, paternal support and guidance. It could place these young men at risk of receiving inferior care in the wilderness, including neglect and mistreatment. These challenges thus cause some of them to doubt the benefits of this ritual when conducted in a maternal homestead in the absence of the biological father as the custodian of the ritual.

In the midst of these challenges, mothers were identified as possible sources of support who could assume the facilitator role by linking the young men to positive social fathers during this hierarchical and patriarchal initiation process. Moreover, this assistance was labelled as being absent at this point since the maternal family seems less supportive and less understanding of the emotional burden imposed by father absence, especially when it engages in gate-keeping and paternal identity concealment. Therefore, the experiences of the young men in this study suggest a need to equip the maternal family to be able to support the young men in this situation. This could include a variety of interventions such as family visits by social workers, training on open communication and support groups for single mothers. Most importantly, the young men also need to be pro-active and vocalise their support needs and also reach out to social fathers and community organisations for assistance.

Advocacy is also needed to engender change in the wider society. Increased awareness is needed on the challenges and needs of Xhosa young men with disengaged fathers so that appropriate responses such as mentorship and social fathering can be prioritised. Importantly, such father absence interventions need to be multi-faceted and preventive instead of being reactive, and to also be cognisant of excluding the fathers. Most importantly, since father absence is directly linked to unemployment, it is important to identify and address the socio-economic barriers that seem to prevent fathers from effectively playing their role. Unemployed fathers need to be prioritised, educated and supported in adopting alternative roles such as the nurturer role since they cannot play the provider role.

Fathers who are dealing with unresolved father absence trauma in their own lives need to be emotionally supported through counselling and mentorship, and they also need to be screened for PND. At a governmental level, parenting policies need to be reformed in a way that promotes egalitarian parenting and supports men to effectively play their fatherly role irrespective of their economic circumstances or marital status. Contrary, inasmuch as fathers may perceive themselves as powerless in relation to external factors that influence their disengagement, they have a responsibility and a role to play in securing presence in their children's lives. Yes, they could be supported and encouraged towards strengthening their internal motivation, but the onus is on them. The government, the civil society and the mothers can only offer support to some extent. The fathers must be able to select supportive environments and experiences that help them to hone the quality of their parenting and commit to paternal responsibility.

In closing, it is noteworthy that this research reveals that father absence is a crisis that calls for cultural sensitive and multi-levelled interventions that do not only prioritise the young men, but their mothers, the maternal families and the fathers. Therefore, more research is needed to draw firm conclusions on the collective support needs of each of these groups, because prioritising one group over the other result in one-sided and an over-empowerment which sometimes creates unintended tensions. The concluding remark of this research is that, not all is bleak as the young men in this study showed a desire and determination to change the trajectory of fatherhood by adopting the modern fatherhood role, and thereby make great strides in minimising father absence in South Africa.

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**APPENDIX 1: Screening questionnaire for Xhosa young men**

1. How old are you? **If he is 23 or above, he is ineligible.**

2. How is the relationship with your father? Strong  Poor  non-existent

(This is based on doing or sharing activities such as visiting friends or going out together. Or the nature of his involvement in guiding you or helping you make life important decisions)

**If strong, he is ineligible.**

3. What year did you attend initiation school? 20.....**If it is longer 6 years, he is ineligible**

4. Below, choose the statement(s) relevant to you:

(i) Do you live with your father? Yes  No

(a) If no, do you know his whereabouts? Yes  No

(b) If yes, how often do you see him? 5 or more times a year  2 times a year  Never

(c) How often do you talk (face to face or on the phone) about important matters?

5 or more times a year  2 times a year  Never

(The answers obtained from question 4 will help to get an idea of the relationship, but do not lead to exclusion)

## **APPENDIX 2: Interview schedule for Xhosa young men**

**(Use two audio recorders and have spare batteries or charger, turn the recorders on and state the location of the interview, time and date before the commencement of the interview.)**

A welcome and putting the participant at ease.

### **Introduction and greetings**

Hello, my name is.....This is interview number..... I will be conducting the interview which will be between 40 to 70 minutes. How are you today? I am good as well, and thank you for giving us your time today.

**Give a brief description of the interview's purpose:** This interview is about speaking about the experiences and views of Xhosa young men who enter into manhood through traditional circumcision process without present or involved fathers.

**Explain the meaning of father absence or uninvolved in this study:** An absent father is a father who is absent from his child's life physically, emotionally, financially and socially while an uninvolved father could be physically present but not involved in the child's life emotionally, financially and socially. So, this interview seeks to understand the experiences of Xhosa young men who go through the initiation process and transition from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers in their lives.

**The interview process:** Let me thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. We are interested in your personal views and experiences regarding entering manhood without having a present or involved father. So, there are no right or wrong answers; we are just interested in understanding your views and experiences so that the information could help to influence future efforts to support young people with absent or uninvolved fathers.

**The reasons for recording the interview:** The interview will be recorded using the audio recorder to capture everything shared as it will be difficult to get everything said in writing. The interview is confidential, so the information you share cannot be misused. The information you give will only be shared when reporting on the research in academic work.

**Confidentiality and your safety:** Your real name or any names you mention cannot be mentioned in the research paper or presentations, and the data will be locked away – only I and my research team will have access to it. The transcribers will sign confidentiality agreements and send password protected transcribed Word documents. After 2 years upon completion of the study, the audios will be destroyed. If you are interested, you will be given access to the research findings, either in the form of a written summary written in 'non-technical language' or a meeting at one of the community organisations. There is no known harm or danger as a result of participating in this study and should you feel uncomfortable, you have a right to withdraw at any point.

**Interview duration:** The interview will be between 40 to 70 minutes, where you will be my teacher on the topic. During the interview also feel free to ask me questions should anything be unclear. During the interview, we can take breaks if you see the need - just let me know so that we can pause the recording. Should you be uncomfortable or see the need, you can also skip a question and we will carry on to the next question. At the end of the interview, you will be given a list of community psycho-social support organisations that you can make use of should you need help. Please be advised that during the time of the interview a psycho-social support professional who will be available telephonically to talk and listen to you should you need a professional to talk to after the interview. Do you have any questions?

*Hand out the Consent Information Sheet and Consent Form and explain the contents of the sheets. Give the participant time to read through the sheets (if he can read). Confirm consent: recap that as consented the discussion will be recorded in order to accurately capture the conversation.*

*Ask: Do you have any questions before we start?*

	Tell us about how you got to here – by taxi or you walked?	An opening question to help to find out if it was easy getting to the venue (in case there is a taxi violence or gang violence that makes travelling or walking difficult etc)
	A. Background information – in this section I will just ask a few questions about you.	
1.	Where do you stay?	
2.	With whom do you stay?	
3.	What do you do?	(Probe: Are you studying or do you work? If working, what was the highest grade/level you have passed? What year did you complete that grade/level?)
4.	Do you have a child? If yes, a boy or a girl? Does the child stay with you?	(If yes, ask some questions regarding the child's age, gender, character etc just to get an idea of the relationship with the child. What do you usually do together?)  Ok, thank you!



**Introduce the vignette:** (Now I am going to tell you a story about a boy and his experiences. Then I will ask you a few questions about the story.)

*Ivile's vignette*

Ivile is a 16 year old boy who lives in Zwelitsha township with his mother and his younger sister. Ivile last saw his father when he was 6; he stopped visiting them and they have heard that he is married and has other children in the marriage. Ivile's mother is a domestic worker and most of the time when she is at home, she is tired and cannot spend time with them or attend school meetings. Ivile's mother makes all decisions alone and refuses to involve Ivile in decision-making by saying, "A boy has no say in how a household is run." Ivile is looking forward to attending initiation school in order to be a man so that his voice could be considered in the house, although he is somewhat ambivalent about becoming a man since he is aware of the responsibility that manhood comes with within the Xhosa culture.

Ivile feels lonely and wishes that his father was around and available to guide him about manhood. He sometimes tries to speak to his uncle about manhood, but his uncle is more concerned with his own children. People in Ivile's community say children from single-female headed families have no discipline and morals. Ivile feels like an outcast; he is scared that he does not have enough knowledge about manhood, and he is anxious about going to initiation school and does not know what kind of a man he will become. When he tries to speak to his mother about his fears, his mother says she is a busy single mother and overworked trying to put food on the table, and has nothing to say about manhood as a woman.

A. CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Do you know of someone who has or has had similar experiences to Ivile?
2. What do you think about Ivile's story?
3. Are there any parts of Ivile's story that remind you of your own experiences? (**Elaborate**)
4. Are there any parts of Ivile's story that are different from your experiences? (**Elaborate**)
5. How do you think Ivile's experience will change after coming back as a man? (**On a personal, emotional, home and community level**)
6. What role do you think Ivile's mother could have played before, during and after Ivile's initiation? (**Probe on how and where he positions the mother**)
7. Except his mother and uncle, who else do you think Ivile could have gone to for support?
8. As a man who has been through the initiation process in the absence or involvement of a father, what kind of support could you give to Ivile if he were to ask you for it?

## B. PERSONAL QUESTIONS

9. Tell me about growing up without a present or involved father in your life. **(Prompts: your position in the household and relationships with your peers in the community?)**
10. What were your experiences regarding the process before, during and after initiation school? **(Prompts: who did you get support from and how? Elaborate)**
11. What is the responsibility that comes with being a Xhosa man? **(Probe: did you or do you have anyone whom you could talk to about the meaning of manhood in the Xhosa culture? If so, who - family, friends, community leaders, teachers)?**
12. Tell me about your experiences in your community – have you ever felt that anyone looked down on you or gossiped about you for having an uninvolved or absent father?
13. What kind of support or help would someone like Ivile need before, during and after initiation period? **(Prompts: what about ... money, emotional help, a male role model etc)**
14. What kind of support or help did you have before and during initiation period? What would you like to have received? **(Probe: from who?)**

## C. GENERAL QUESTIONS

15. In South Africa, lots of children have no fathers. We have spoken about boys becoming a man in the Xhosa culture and how a young man might experience this if he doesn't have a present or an involved father. Does this happen a lot in your community? **(Probe: What impact does this have on the person and the community?)**
16. Generally speaking, what role should a father play in a boys' and or young man's life?
17. What factors do you think stop or could stop fathers from being involved in their children's lives?
18. What do you think could be done (parents/families/society/government) to promote father presence and involvement?
19. Compared to many years ago, do you think Xhosa young men's current experiences of father absence or uninvolved differ? Why /Why not? **(Probe: are they better or worse?)**
20. In your community, is there a man or a father you wish to be like when you get old whom you see as a role model? **(Probe: why)**

21. How would you want things to be for your son? (or if you have a son now or one day or in the future)

D. CLOSING QUESTIONS

22. Do you think this topic is worthy to be explored further? Please elaborate.

23. This interview made me feel.....

24. Any thoughts invoked by this topic? (**NB: If you note a discomfort, refer them to the onsite psycho-social supporter** )

25. Do you know of other young men with absent or uninvolved fathers whom you could recommend for the study?

26. This study will also interview male elders in order to get their views on the topic of father absence. Do you have a Xhosa male elder you can recommend to take part in the study?

27. Do you have any comments, suggestions or questions?

28. Ok. If you ever need to talk further about this topic or need someone to talk to, here is a resource list for organizations that offer psycho-social support (Read it out loud): FAMSA

**Thank you for your time**

**APPENDIX 3: Screening questionnaire for Xhosa male elders**

1. How old are you? **If younger than 55, he is ineligible.**

2. For how long have you been married? **If he has been married for less than 10 years, he is ineligible.**

3. How is your relationship with your children? Strong  or  non-existent

**If poor or non-existent, he is ineligible.**

4. What is or what has been your role or involvement in the community?

(The answer(s) obtained from question 4 will help to get an idea of his position of authority or community involvement, but do not lead to exclusion)

**Thank you for your time.**

**APPENDIX 4: Interview schedule for Xhosa male elders**

**(Use two audio recorders and have spare batteries or charger, turn the recorders on and state the location of the interview, time and date before the commencement of the interview.)**

A welcome and putting the participant at ease.

**Introduction and greetings**

Hello, my name is.....This is interview number..... I will be conducting the interview which will be between 40 to 70 minutes. How are you today? I am good as well, and thank you for giving us your time today.

**Give a brief description of the interview’s purpose:** This interview is about speaking about the experiences and views of Xhosa young men who enter into manhood through traditional circumcision processes without present or involved fathers.

**Explain the meaning of father absence or uninvolved in this study:** An absent father is a father who is absent from his child’s life physically, emotionally, financially and socially while an uninvolved father could be physically present but not involved in the child’s life emotionally, financially and socially. So, this interview seeks to understand the experiences and perceptions of Xhosa young men who go through the initiation process and transition from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers in their lives.

**The interview process:** Let me thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. We are interested in your personal views regarding the experiences of boys who enter manhood without having a present or involved father. So, there are no right or wrong answers; we are just interested in understanding your views and experiences so that the information could help to influence future efforts to support young people with absent or uninvolved fathers.

**The reasons for recording the interview:** The interview will be recorded using the audio recorder to capture everything shared as it will be difficult to get everything said in writing. The interview is confidential; so the information you share cannot be misused. The information you gave will only be shared when reporting on the research.

**Confidentiality and your safety:** Your real name or any names you mention cannot be mentioned in the research paper or presentations, and the data will be locked away – only I and my research team will have access to it. The transcribers will sign confidentiality agreements and send password protected transcribed word documents. After 2 years upon completion of the study, the audios will be destroyed. If you are interested, you will be given access to the research findings, either in the form of a written summary written in ‘non-technical language’ or a meeting at one of the community organisations. There is no known harm or danger as a result of participating in this

study and should you feel uncomfortable, you have a right to withdraw at any point. There is no known harm or danger as a result of participating in this study and should you feel uncomfortable, you have a right to withdraw at any point.

**Interview duration:** The interview will be between 40 to 70 minutes, where you will be my teacher on the topic. During the interview also feel free to ask me questions should anything be unclear. During the interview, we can take breaks if you see the need - just let me know so that we can pause the recording. Should you be uncomfortable or see the need, you can also skip a question and we will carry on to the next question. At the end of the interview, you will be given a list of community psychosocial support organisations that you can make use of should you need help. Please be advised that during the time of the interview a psycho-social support professional who will be available telephonically to talk and listen to you should you need a professional to talk to after the interview. Do you have any questions?

*Hand out the Consent Information Sheet and Consent Form and explain the contents of the sheets. Give the participant time to read through the sheets (if he can read). Confirm consent: recap that as consented the discussion will be recorded in order to accurately capture the conversation.*

*Ask: Do you have any questions before we start?*

	Tell us about how you got to here – by taxi or you walked?	An opening question to help to find out if it was easy getting to the venue (in case there is a taxi violence or gang violence that makes travelling or walking difficult etc)
	A. Background information – in this section I will just ask a few questions about you.	
1.	Where do you stay?	
2.	With whom do you stay?	
3.	What do you do? Are you working or you are a pensioner?	(Probe: if no longer working, where were you working?)
4.	Do you have children, if yes how many? Do you have any boys?	(Probe: if yes, ask some questions regarding the age, gender, character etc just to get the idea of the relationship)  Ok, thank you!

**Introduce the vignette:** (Now I am going to tell you a story about a boy and his experiences. Then I will ask you a few questions about the story.)

### *Ivile's vignette*

Ivile is a 16 year old boy who lives in Zwelitsha township with his mother and his younger sister. Ivile last saw his father when he was 6; he stopped visiting them and they have heard that he is married and has other children in the marriage. Ivile's mother is a domestic worker and most of the time when she is at home, she is tired and cannot spend time with them or attend school meetings. Ivile's mother makes all decisions alone and refuses to involve Ivile in decision making by saying, "A boy has no say in how a household is run." Ivile is looking forward to attending initiation school in order to be a man so that his voice could be considered in the house, although he is somewhat ambivalent about becoming a man since he is aware of the responsibility that manhood comes with within the Xhosa culture.

Ivile feels lonely and wishes that his father was around and available to guide him about manhood. He sometimes tries to speak to his uncle about manhood, but his uncle is more concerned with his own children. People in Ivile's community say children from single-female headed families have no discipline and morals. Ivile feels like an outcast; he is scared that he does not have enough knowledge about manhood, and he is anxious about going to initiation school and does not know what kind of a man he will become. When he tries to speak to his mother about his fears, his mother says she is a busy single mother and overworked trying to put food on the table, and has nothing to say about manhood as a woman.

#### A. CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Do you know of someone who has or has had similar experiences to Ivile?
2. Are there any parts of Ivile's story that remind you of a young man you know or have heard of?
3. What do you think about Ivile's story?
4. How do you think Ivile's experience will change after coming back from the mountain as a man? **(On a personal, emotional, home and community level).**
5. What role do you think Ivile's mother could have played before, during and after Ivile's initiation? **(Probe on how and where the mother is positioned).**
6. Except his mother and uncle, who else do you think Ivile could have gone to for support?
7. As an elder, what kind of support could you give to Ivile if he were to ask you for it? **(Probe: have you ever given or been asked to give support to someone like Ivile? If yes, was it before, during or after initiation. If no, would you consider supporting someone like Ivile?)**

## B. PERSONAL QUESTIONS

8. Tell me about your experience growing up as a boy and as a young man, how was life compared to what it is now? **(Probe: was your father present or involved? If yes how? If no, who played his role?)**
9. What role do you think a father should play in his child's life?
10. In your opinion, is father absence or uninvolved an issue in your community? If yes, is it more or less common?

## C. GENERAL QUESTIONS

11. In South Africa lots of children have no fathers. We have spoken about boys becoming a man in the Xhosa culture and how a young man might experience this if he doesn't have a present or an involved father. Does this happen a lot in your community? What impact does this have on the person and the community?
12. Generally speaking, what role should a father play in a boys' and young man's life? **(Probe: what has been your personal role as a father in your boys or children?)**
13. What factors do you think inhibit or could inhibit fathers from being involved in their children's lives?
14. What do you think could be done (parents/families/society/government) to promote father presence and involvement?
15. Compared to many years ago, do you think Xhosa young men's current experiences of father absence or uninvolved differ? Why /Why not? **(Probe: are they better or worse?)**

## D. CLOSING QUESTIONS

16. Do you think this topic is worthy to be explored further? Please elaborate.
17. Any thoughts invoked by this topic?
18. Do you know of other young men with absent or uninvolved fathers whom you could recommend for the study?
19. Do you have any comments, suggestions or questions?

**Thank you for your time.**





**APPENDIX 5: Interview administration form**

Interviewer's name and surname	
Interview's number	
Date of the interview	
Age of the interviewee	
Place of the interview	
The name and surname of the psycho-social professional available for telephonic counselling during the interview	
Consent procedure completed, no why?	
Did the interviewee speak to the psycho-social professional telephonically?	
Did the interviewee recommend participant(s) for the study? If no, why?	
Interview duration	Start time:..... End time.....

**APPENDIX 6: Interviewer's reflection notes**

All relevant interview aspects completed. If not why?	
Number of recordings	
File identification marks	
Files backed up	
<p>Interviewer reflections on the interview. The following ideas can be used to reflect on:</p> <p>Were the responses given in line with research questions?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>How was the rapport with the interviewee?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Was the interviewee open or withheld information?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Any unexpected themes that emerged during the interview?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	

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Was there anything particularly challenging about this interview? Elaborate.

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**APPENDIX 7: A recruitment letter to community-based organisations, leaders and individuals  
University of Cape Town**

**Research Title**

*Indodaiyanyamezela* (a man perseveres): Exploring the perceptions, experiences and the psychological needs of Xhosa young men in the Western Cape, Khayelitsha who have transitioned from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers.

**RECRUITMENT ASSISTANCE REQUIRED FOR A STUDY ON EXPERIENCES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS OF XHOSA YOUNG MEN WHO ENTER MANHOOD WITHOUT PRESENT OR INVOLVED FATHERS**

Thank you for considering assisting us to find potential participants for this study. This research study is conducted by Noma Moshani as the Principal Investigator. I am a Masters student in Public Mental Health at UCT in the Health Sciences Faculty, Department of Psychiatry.

I would therefore like you or your organisation to be of assistance by inviting Xhosa young men with absent or uninvolved fathers between the ages of 18 to 22 to volunteer to participate in an individual face to face interview. The interview will be between 40 to 70 minutes where they will be asked about their views and experiences on entering manhood with absent or uninvolved fathers. The second group of participants of this study will be Xhosa male community elders. Kindly please extend the invite to for them to participate in the study. The interview will be a face to face interview between 40 to 70 minutes where they will be asked about their views on manhood and the role of a present or involved father.

**What is the aim of the study?**

This research aims to find out about the experiences of Xhosa young men in the Western Cape who enter manhood without present or involved fathers as well as the kind of support that might be needed for future interventions such as support groups.

### **Who qualifies to participate in this study?**

This study will have two groups of volunteer participants. The first group will be Xhosa young men:

1. Between the ages of 18 to 22 years
2. Who have attended the initiation school within the last 5 years
3. Who have a father whom they have never known or who is physically present but emotionally or financially absent
4. Who currently have a poor to average father-son relationship (based on the quality of shared activities and father's availability for important events such as ceremonies and rituals involving the son and involvement in decision making for the son) as per participant's assessment.
5. Young men with fathers who have died will be excluded from the study

The second group will be Xhosa community male elders. The inclusion criteria is:

1. A man who is 55 years and older
2. Has a family that he looks after, present and involved in his children's lives and has been married for more than 10 years
3. He is involved with young people and usually voluntarily and willingly coaches and guides them
4. Has a strong understanding of the Xhosa culture and the initiation process
5. He must have some form of leadership at home and in the community and is present and involved in his children's lives
6. He is present and involved in his children's lives
7. He has a reputation of being seen as a value adder, provider and a nurturer both at home and in the community (etc a mentor, coach, traditional leader)

### **What does participation in this study entail?**

Participating in this study is voluntary. Withdrawal at any point of the interview will be permitted should the participant feel uncomfortable. Participation will involve signing a consent form to confirm that the study has been explained to the participant, he understood it and is voluntarily consenting to participate. An audio recorded interview of 40 to 70 minutes will take place at a safe and convenient venue in Khayelitsha. The interviewer will be asking for participant's views around the experiences

of Xhosa young men entering the stage of manhood without a present or involved father. Within that period, the participant will be allowed to take breaks should he see the need, and will also be allowed to ask questions should anything be unclear. After the interview, the participant will get a R100 to cover transport costs.

**Will there be any risks and discomforts?**

There are no known direct risks associated with this research, and in the process of the interview, participants' safety will be assured by scheduling for the interview to be in a safe area and at a convenient time. To ensure participants' comfort, in the middle of the interview, there will be a break should the participant need one and there will also be a verbal confirmation that the participant is still doing well. It is known that some participants may find the topic to be emotionally challenging. So, there are measures in place; should a participant experience any emotional discomfort or disturbances as a result of the discussions or questions raised in the interview, he will be encouraged to speak to the psycho-social support professional who will be available telephonically during the interviews. Secondly, the participants will also be given the referral list below should they need further assistance:

1. Life Line

Telephone        021 361 9197  
Address            CwdCentre,  
                          E505ScottStreet,  
                          Khayelitsha, 7784

2. FAMSA

Telephone:        021 361 9098  
Address:        49 Sikizi Street,  
                          Khayelitsha,  
                          Cape Town, 7784

3. SANCA Telephone:    (021) 364 6131

Address:            1st Floor, Nomenti Gas Supplies  
                          3 Phakamani Road

Khayelitsha, 7783

#### 4. SADAG

Zane Wilson (Founder)

For counselling queries e-mail: [zane@sadag.org](mailto:zane@sadag.org)

To contact a counsellor between 8am-8pm Monday to Sunday,

Call: 011 234 4837 / Fax number: 011 234 8182

For a suicidal Emergency contact us on 0800 567 567

24hr Helpline 0800 456 789

#### **What is the importance of this study as well as the potential benefits?**

This study is important as it could help to minimise the dearth of discussions and literature on the topic of father absence and uninvolved, especially around the experiences of Xhosa young men who go through initiation without present or involved fathers. It is also important as it might help to inform future interventions on this issue.

There are no known direct benefits to the participant as a result of participating in this research. However, he will get an opportunity to express his views and opinions on the needs of Xhosa young men who enter manhood without present or involved fathers. Participants' answers will also help us better understand the experiences of Xhosa young men in the Western Cape who enter manhood without present or involved fathers. The information they share could help to influence future interventions on father-child relationships or maybe a formation of support groups for young people with absent or uninvolved fathers.

#### **Will confidentiality be assured?**

The information shared during the interview will remain confidential and will not be misused. The data will be locked away – only my research team will have access to it. The information kept on the computer, will be password protected. The transcribers will sign confidentiality agreements and send password protected transcribed word documents. After 2 years upon completion of the study, the



audios will be destroyed. Participants' names cannot be mentioned in the research paper. Any identifying information that could reveal their identity will not be used, such as other people's names mentioned during the interview. If interested, they will be given access to the research findings, either in the form of a written summary written in a 'non-technical language' that they will understand or a meeting at one of the community organisations.

**Who to contact for further information?**

To refer potential participants for the study, or if you have any questions or concerns about this study, kindly please contact Noma Moshani studying at University of Cape Town at 073 158 2756 / [mshnom016@uct.ac.za](mailto:mshnom016@uct.ac.za)

Or Dr. Claire van der Westhuizen at 0216504487/ [Claire.vanderWesthuizen@uct.ac.za](mailto:Claire.vanderWesthuizen@uct.ac.za)

The UCT's Faculty of Health Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee can be contacted on 021 406 6338 in case you have any ethical concerns or questions about the rights or welfare of participant in this research study.

**APPENDIX 8: Consent Information Sheet for Xhosa young men  
University of Cape Town**

**Research Title**

*Indodaiyanyamezela* (a man perseveres): Exploring the perceptions, experiences and the psychological needs of Xhosa young men in the Western Cape, Khayelitsha who have transitioned from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers.

Thank you for considering participating in this study. This research study is conducted by Noma Moshani as the Principal Investigator. I am a Masters student in Public Mental Health at UCT in the Health Sciences Faculty, Department of Psychiatry.

**What is the aim of the study?**

This research aims to find out about the experiences of Xhosa young men in the Western Cape who enter manhood without present or involved fathers as well as the kind of support that might be needed for future interventions such as support groups.

**Who qualifies to participate in this study?**

This study will have two groups of volunteer participants. The first group will be Xhosa young men:

1. Between the ages of 18 to 22 years
2. Who have attended the initiation school within the last 5 years
3. Who have a father whom they have never known or who is physically present but emotionally or financially absent
4. Who currently have a poor to average father-son relationship (based on the quality of shared activities and father's availability for important events such as ceremonies and rituals involving the son and involvement in decision making for the son) as per participant's assessment.
5. Young men with fathers who have died will be excluded from the study.

The second group will be Xhosa community male elders. The inclusion criteria is:

1. A man who is 55 years and older
2. Has a family that he looks after, present and involved in his children's lives and has been married for more than 10 years
3. He is involved with young people and usually voluntarily and willingly coaches and guides them
4. Has a strong understanding of the Xhosa culture and the initiation process
5. He must have some form of leadership at home and in the community and is present and involved in his children's lives
6. He is present and involved in his children's lives
7. He has a reputation of being seen as a value adder, provider and a nurturer both at home and in the community (etc a mentor, coach, traditional leader)

### **Do I have to participate in the study?**

Participating in this study is voluntary. Your participation is confidential and your refusal to participate cannot be used against you at any point. Withdrawal at any point of the interview will be permitted should you feel uncomfortable.

### **What will my participation entail?**

The purpose of the study will be explained to you. Your participation will involve signing a consent form to confirm that the study has been explained to you, you understood it and you are voluntarily consenting to participate. An audio recorded interview of 40 to 70 minutes will take place at a safe and convenient venue in Khayelitsha. The interviewer will be asking for your views and experiences around entering the stage of manhood without a present or involved father. Within that period, you will be allowed to take a break should you see the need and you will also be allowed to ask questions should anything be unclear for you. After the interview, you will get a R100 for transport fare.

### **Risks and discomforts**

There are no known direct risks associated with this research, and in the process of the interview, your safety will be assured by scheduling for the interview to be in a safe area and at a convenient time. To ensure your comfort, in the middle of the interview there will be a break should you need one and there will also be a verbal confirmation to confirm that you are still doing well. It is known that some

participants may find the topic to be emotionally challenging. So, there are measures in place; should you participant experience any emotional discomfort or disturbances as a result of the discussions or questions raised in the interview, you will be encouraged to speak to the psycho-social support professional who will be available telephonically during the interviews. Secondly, you will also be given the referral list below should you need further assistance:

1. Life Line

Telephone 021 361 9197  
Address CwdCentre,  
E505ScottStreet,  
Khayelitsha, 7784

2. FAMSA

Telephone: 021 361 9098  
Address: 49 Sikizi Street,  
Khayelitsha,  
Cape Town, 7784

3. SANCA Telephone: (021) 364 6131

Address: 1st Floor, Nomenti Gas Supplies  
3 Phakamani Road  
Khayelitsha, 7783

4. SADAG

Zane Wilson (Founder)

For counselling queries e-mail: [zane@sadag.org](mailto:zane@sadag.org)

To contact a counsellor between 8am-8pm Monday to Sunday,

Call: 011 234 4837 / Fax number: 011 234 8182

For a suicidal Emergency contact us on 0800 567 567

24hr Helpline 0800 456 789

### **The importance of this study as well as the potential benefits**

This study is important as it could help to minimise the dearth of discussions and literature on the topic of father absence and uninvolved, especially around the experiences of Xhosa young men who go through initiation without present or involved fathers. It is also important as it might help to inform future interventions on this issue.

There are no known benefits to you as a result of your participation in this research. However, you will get an opportunity to express your views and opinions on experiences and the needs of Xhosa young men who enter manhood with absent or uninvolved fathers. Your answers will also help us better understand the experiences of Xhosa young men in the Western Cape who enter manhood without present or involved fathers. The information you share could help to influence future efforts to support young people with absent or uninvolved fathers.

### **Confidentiality**

The information you share during the interview will be confidential and not be misused; the data will be locked away – only my research team will have access to it. The information kept on the computer will be password protected. The transcribers will sign confidentiality agreements and send password protected transcribed word documents. After 2 years upon completion of the study, the audios will be destroyed. Your names cannot be mentioned in the research paper. Any identifying information that could reveal your identity will not be used such as other people's names you mention during the interview. If you are interested, you will be given access to the research findings, either in the form of a written summary written in a 'non-technical language' or a meeting at one of the community organisations.

### **Who to contact for further information?**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or to refer potential participants, kindly please contact Noma Moshani studying at University of Cape Town at 073 158 2756 / [mshnom016@uct.ac.za](mailto:mshnom016@uct.ac.za)

Or Dr. Claire van der Westhuizen at 0216504487/ [Claire.vanderWesthuizen@uct.ac.za](mailto:Claire.vanderWesthuizen@uct.ac.za)

The UCT's Faculty of Health Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee can be contacted on 021 406 6338 in case you have any ethical concerns or questions about your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study.

**APPENDIX 9: Consent Information Sheet for the Xhosa male elders  
University of Cape Town**

**Research Title**

*Indodaiyanyamezela* (a man perseveres): Exploring the perceptions, experiences and the psychological needs of Xhosa young men in the Western Cape, Khayelitsha who have transitioned from adolescence to manhood without present or involved fathers.

Thank you for considering participating in this study. This research study is conducted by Noma Moshani as the Principal Investigator. I am a Masters student in Public Mental Health at UCT in the Health Sciences Faculty, Department of Psychiatry.

**What is the aim of the study?**

This research aims to find out about the experiences of Xhosa young men in the Western Cape, Khayelitsha who enter manhood without present or involved fathers as well as the kind of support that might be needed for future interventions such as support groups.

**Who qualifies to participate in this study?**

The study will have two groups of volunteer participants. The first group will be Xhosa young men:

1. Aged between the ages of 18 to 22 years
2. Who have attended the initiation school within the last 5 years
3. Who have a father whom they have never known or who is physically present but emotionally or financially absent
4. Who currently have an average father-son relationship (an average relationship entails an intermittent contact father-son relationship) to a poor relationship (a poor relationship means little to no contact between the father and the son).
5. Young men with fathers who have died will be excluded from the study.

The second group will be Xhosa community male elders. The inclusion criteria is:

1. A man who is 55 years and older

2. Has a family that he looks after, present and involved in his children's lives and has been married for more than 10 years
3. He is involved with young people and usually voluntarily and willingly coaches and guides them
4. Has a strong understanding of the Xhosa culture and the initiation process
5. He must have some form of leadership at home and in the community and is present and involved in his children's lives
6. He is present and involved in his children's lives
7. He has a reputation of being seen as a value adder, provider and a nurturer both at home and in the community (etc a mentor, coach, traditional leader)

### **Do I have to participate in the study?**

Participating in this study is voluntary. Your participation is confidential and your refusal to participate cannot be used against you at any point. Withdrawal at any point of the interview will be permitted should you feel uncomfortable.

### **What will my participation entail?**

The purpose of the research will be explained to you. Your participation will involve signing a consent form to confirm that the study has been explained to you, you understood it and you are voluntarily consenting to participate. An audio recorded interview of 40 to 70 minutes will take place at a safe and convenient venue in Khayelitsha. The interviewer will be asking for your views about the experiences of Xhosa young who enter the stage of manhood without a present or involved father. Within that period, you will be allowed to take a break should you see the need and you will also be allowed to ask questions should anything be unclear for you. After the interview, you will get a R100 for transport fare.

### **Risks and discomforts**

There are no known risks associated with this research, and in the process of the interview, your safety will be assured by scheduling for the interview to be in a safe area and at a convenient time. To ensure your comfort, in the middle of the interview there will be a break and a verbal confirmation to confirm that you are still doing well.



### **The importance of this study as well as the potential benefits**

This study is important as it could help to minimise the dearth of discussions and literature on the topic of father absence and uninvolved, especially around the experiences of Xhosa young men who go through initiation without present or involved fathers. It is also important as it might help to inform future interventions on this issue.

There are no known benefits to you as a result of your participation in this research. However, you will get an opportunity to express your views and opinions on experiences and the needs of Xhosa young men who enter manhood with absent or uninvolved fathers. Your answers will also help us better understand the experiences of Xhosa young men in the Western Cape who enter manhood without present or involved fathers. The information you share could help to influence future support for young people with absent or uninvolved fathers, and the results of the study will be shared with you.

### **Confidentiality**

The information you share during the interview will be confidential and will not be misused; the data will be locked away – only my research team will have access to it. The information kept on the computer will be password protected. The transcribers will sign confidentiality agreements and send password protected transcribed word documents. After 2 years upon completion of the study, the audios will be destroyed. Your names cannot be mentioned in the research paper, and you will be given access to the final paper if you wish. Any identifying information that could reveal your identity will not be used such as other people's names you mention during the interview.

### **Who to contact for further information?**

To refer potential participants for the study, or if you have any questions or concerns about this study, kindly please contact Noma Moshani studying at University of Cape Town at 073 158 2756 / [mshnom016@uct.ac.za](mailto:mshnom016@uct.ac.za)

Or Dr. Claire van der Westhuizen at 0216504487/ [Claire.vanderWesthuizen@uct.ac.za](mailto:Claire.vanderWesthuizen@uct.ac.za)

The UCT's Faculty of Health Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee can be contacted on 021 406 6338 in case you have any ethical concerns or questions about your rights or welfare as a participant on this research study.

**APPENDIX 10: Consent Form**

**Research Topic: Looking into the perceptions and experiences of Xhosa young men who enter manhood with uninvolved or absent fathers in Khayelitsha**

Thank you for considering to participate in this study. Before you sign the consent form, please ensure that the study has been explained to you, you have also read the Consent Information Sheet and understood it. Please let me know if you have any questions. Kindly please sign the Consent Form if you agree to take part, and please be advised that you do not give up any rights by signing the Consent Form. You will also be given your copy of the consent form in order to keep and refer to at any time.

**I declare that:**

**Please tick the boxes**

- I have read or someone has read the Information Sheet and Consent Form to me. Information has been communicated in a language I understand and can speak well.
- I understand what the project is about and also the possible benefits and risks or discomforts for me.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that I can choose to take part in this study or I can choose not to. I have not been pressured to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I also understand that I do not give up any rights by signing below
- I have received an unsigned copy of this Consent Form to keep.

**I understand what the study entails, and I am consenting to:**

Participate in this study

To be audio recorded

Interviewee's signature..... Date.....

Name of the person taking consent.....Place.....

Signature of the person taking consent.....Date.....

Witness's signature (if the participant is illiterate ).....

Date.....

## APPENDIX 11: Study approval letter



**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**  
**Faculty of Health Sciences**  
**Human Research Ethics Committee**



Room E53-46 Old Main Building  
Groota Schuur Hospital  
Observatory 7925  
Telephone [021] 406 6492

Email: [sumayah.ariel@uct.ac.za](mailto:sumayah.ariel@uct.ac.za)

Website: [www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms](http://www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms)

15 May 2019

**HREC REF: 654/2018**

**Dr C van der Westhuizen**  
Division of Public Mental Health  
Alan J Flisher Centre for Public Mental Health  
Building B  
Sawkins Road, Rondebosch

Dear Dr van der Westhuizen

**PROJECT TITLE: INDODA IYANYAMEZELA (A MAN PERSEVERES): EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS AND THE EXPERIENCES OF XHOSA YOUNG MEN IN THE WESTERN CAPE WHO HAVE TRANSITIONED FROM ADOLESCENCE TO MANHOOD WITHOUT PRESENT OR INVOLVED FATHERS (MPHIL Candidate - Ms N Moshani)**

Thank you for your response letter dated 15 March 2019, addressing the issues raised by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

It is a pleasure to inform you that the HREC has **formally approved** the above-mentioned study, including the following documentation: -

1. PI Synopsis;
2. Study protocol, including all consent forms, questionnaires and a budget summary

**Approval is granted for one year until the 30 May 2020.**

Please submit a progress form, using the standardised Annual Report Form if the study continues beyond the approval period. Please submit a Standard Closure form if the study is completed within the approval period.

(Forms can be found on our website: [www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms](http://www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms))

**We acknowledge that the student: Ms Noma-Khawuta Moshani will also be involved in this study.**

**Please quote the HREC REF in all your correspondence.**

Please note that the ongoing ethical conduct of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

Please note that for all studies approved by the HREC, the principal investigator **must** obtain appropriate Institutional approval, where necessary, before the research may occur. 155

Yours sincerely

**PROFESSOR M BLOCKMAN**  
**CHAIRPERSON, FHS HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Federal Wide Assurance Number: FWA00001637.  
Institutional Review Board (IRB) number: IRB00001938  
NHREC-registration number: REC-210208-007