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Experiences of social fathers amongst Black undergraduate students at a university in Johannesburg

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ABSTRACT

The majority of South African children are raised by non-biological fathers. Further, many children are also linked to other men across families and communities such as stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers, brothers, male role models, and so on, who accept the responsibilities and role of becoming a father to their child/ren. This qualitative study aimed to explore Black students' subjective experiences of social fathers and social fatherhood. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with ten Black students from a university in Johannesburg, to explore their understanding and experiences of social fatherhood. Thematic content analysis was used to interpret data and guided the presentation of findings. The study found that social fathers are distinguished from other male figures by their commitment and presence in children's lives. The study also found that social fathers perform essential roles in the lives of Black children, such as caregiving, sense of inclusion and validation, social status and security, and influence and transmission of cultural value. Finally, the study portrayed that Black students perceived and understood social fatherhood as a decision by men to take on the responsibility to father non-biological children, and also a role of kin. In the conclusion of this study, key recommendations including direction for future research on social fatherhood in South Africa are presented.

Keywords*: Black children, Fatherhood, Social father, South Africa, University students.*