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# Reproductive health and denied paternity : the politics of men's fertility.

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## ABSTRACT

Issues of fertility, population growth and birth control are synonymous with women. Therefore, there is a void of the male perspective on issues pertaining to reproductive health. There is a reproductive health discourse, in which bio-psychosocial service such as family planning is woman-based. Whilst on the other hand statistics on absent fathers and contested pregnancies, are reaching millions and thus the effectiveness of these services are questionable. Therefore, men's health and sexuality requires careful understanding so as to unfold narrations of denied paternity and men's 'assumed' lack of responsibility in questions of contraception. Through in-depth interviews with 14 unmarried men from the townships of Soweto and Kagiso, this research found that contraception is a gendered concept that constructs various experiences for men in how they perceive sexual reproductive health services. It also found that denied paternity and father absences are rooted not only in historical factors but also in feminised conceptions of contraception and how this conception speaks to notions of how responsibility is distributed and withheld.

Furthermore, it acknowledges that there are different conceptions of denied paternity and father absence and thus, shapes men's experiences and expectations of fatherhood. Finally, it argues that masculine sexualities, notions of pleasure and issues of fertility are shaped by sexual socialisation processes; this also links how men transition from boyhood to manhood through circumcision and initiation schools not only as a cultural and religious practice but as a health practice. These narratives were captured through using thematic content analysis in investigating unmarried men's perceptions of contraceptives and ideas of father absence and denied paternity. This research contributes to the existing knowledge on family and children services, with specific attention to family planning and the provision of services to young men and women regarding reproductive rights and responsibilities.



**Key words:** Sexual reproductive health, masculinities, denied paternity