

## **ABSTRACT**

Current research on fatherhood in South Africa highlighted a shift in the perceptions of the fathering role entailing an increase in emotional involvement with their children. In addition, existing research on fatherhood indicated ways in which the fathers' experience of emotional support systems influence their fathering roles, in terms of paternal involvement. This research explores young fathers' perceptions of the importance their emotional involvement with their children. In addition, it explores young fathers' experience of emotional support systems. This further highlight how such support influences participants' perceptions of the importance of the father's emotional involvement with his child. The sample for this study consisted of four young fathers between the ages of 18 to 22 years old. With the use of semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection, interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. This study used a social constructionist approach as its theoretical framework.

The findings of this study suggest that these young fathers perceived the importance of the father's emotional involvement and the formation of the bond between father and child as the personal growth that they experienced. Both types of growth resulted in emotional rewards for participants. In addition, the young fathers' constructions of a 'good father' and their constructed understanding of fatherhood as a form of 'ownership', accompanied their strong sense of duty to fulfil these roles. This involved being emotionally invested in their child's lives. For these young fathers their emotional support systems consisted of friends, family members, the mother of their child and the mother of their child's family. This emotional support was in the form of advice and behaviour. This behaviour consisted of their behaviour toward the fathers, such as... In addition, it also included their behaviours as role models, for example these fathers' involvement in their children's lives were actively learnt through the guidance of their support systems. It was found that such support assisted the transition into fatherhood and provided these young fathers with a sense of reassurance of their roles and duties, prompting their emotional involvement with their children.