

# **An exploration of young South African fathers: Their perceptions of paternal involvement and experiences of emotional support**

A Research Report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements toward the degree of Master of Arts in Social and Psychological Research by Coursework and Research Report, University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Humanities, School of Human and Community Development.

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that this research is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other institution.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER: H17/06/44**

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## **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.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION, RATIONALE AND AIMS**

#### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

Research surrounding young fathers understanding of fatherhood, and their fathering practices, have become of interest. Fatherhood concerns the role, duty and position of a male towards his children and family (Makofane, 2015). The notion of ‘young fatherhood’ has been used to refer to adolescent males who are going through the transition to adulthood, and simultaneously transitioning to fatherhood (Lehti et al., 2012; Morrell, 2006). For this study the term ‘young father’ will be used to refer to fathers who are going through physical, psychological, cognitive and social changes which are associated with the transition into adulthood (Monepya, 2017).

Fatherhood is a dynamic social role in accordance with the context in which it occurs (Morrell & Richter, 2006). Thus contextual changes experienced in a country, such as political and socioeconomic changes, may also reflect a shift in perceptions of fatherhood (Morrell & Richter, 2006). A particular socio-historical context strongly influences how fatherhood is understood in South Africa, as well as the fathers’ gender, race and class (Marciz, 2013). Constructions of fatherhood are fluid and always changing. However, due to the limited amount of research on young fathers, young fatherhood needs to be explored further.

There is growing literature on fatherhood in South Africa in which authors are documenting the shift in the ways in which fatherhood is understood (Hunter, 2006; Makusha, Richter, & Bhana, 2012). The understanding of fatherhood has shifted from the role of the provider to the role of the carer, which includes being emotionally involved in the lives of their children (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Makusha et al., 2012). South African research has increasingly focused on fathers’ own perceptions and experiences of fatherhood (Chideya & Williams, 2013; Madiba & Nsiki, 2017; Morrell & Richter, 2006; Van den Berg et al., 2013). Emphasis on the emotional trauma and need for emotional support has occurred in previous literature (Chideya & Williams, 2013; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). However, Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana (2010) highlight the lack of focus on young fathers in developing countries.

## **1.2. RESEARCH RATIONALE**

There was a dearth in research focusing on young fathers in developing countries noted approximately a decade ago by Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana (2010). However, since then there have been an increase in studies focusing on young fatherhood in South Africa. In the literature, the term ‘young father’ is also referred to as ‘teenage fathers’ and ‘adolescent fathers’, which are both defined as fathers who are between the age of 13 and 19 years old (Monepya, 2017). The terms are used interchangeably in this study. This study will look at young fathers, inclusive of teenage fathers. Lehti et al. (2012), through their studies on young fatherhood across the UK and USA, suggest that the age restrictions of studies on young fatherhood should take into consideration the different development trajectories.

In addition, Lehti et al. (2012) suggest that the classification of a young father is culture bound. For example, in South Africa, traditional male circumcision is an initiation ceremony which marks the transition into manhood (Peltzer, 2008). These development trajectories ultimately achieve one goal. This goal was described by Bade (2012) as the achievement of independence and autonomy from their families, as well as the development of personal identity. This is achieved through the process of self-discovery (Bade, 2012). However, this transition does not occur in a linear sequence of set development milestones. The stages of the transition differ from one person to the next.

Martinez et al. (2013) uses the term ‘transition-aged fathers’, to describe young fathers who are between the age of 17 and 25 years old. This study will focus on young fathers who are experiencing this transition. By doing so, he indicates the crucial age within which the transition to adulthood occurs. It is evident that young fathers may consist of fathers in their early twenties due to their specific development trajectories. This study will include both definitions of adolescent and transition-aged fathers to gain a holistic understanding of young fathers’ perceptions of paternal involvement as well as their experience of emotional support.

According to Assini-Meytin, Garza and Green (2018), support from the young

father's family is of importance for the young father because of the stage of life he is in. In addition, Fagan et al. (2007) have discussed that parental support has a positive influence on the involvement of the young father in his child's life. It is important to note that these are international studies. Thus, taking into account the cultural diversity and historical legacy of South Africa, which affects parenting styles, it is of interest to explore this phenomenon in the context of South Africa (Van den Berg et al., 2013).

It has been noted that the negative portrayal of young fathers as absent and irresponsible diverts attention away from their needs (Makusha & Richter, 2015). This study seeks to shed light on their experiences of emotional support. In doing so, discussions around their needs will arise. It is believed that in the South African context, society does not focus as much on the emotional state of young fathers as they do on their masculinity (Chideya & Williams, 2013; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). Through the exploration of emotional support systems this study may offer insight to the emotional state of young fathers. This is because adjustment to fatherhood is often influenced by the perception of support from the young fathers parents (Chideya & Williams, 2013).

According to Mavungu (2013), there is not much information on the way in which men identify with their roles of fatherhood and fatherhood involvement. Bade (2012), highlights the importance of research on young fathers because of the importance of their role in their children's lives. This importance is indicated through the child's success in school, positive behaviour and a better economic situation which all depend on their relationship with their father (Bade, 2012).

Although there is some literature on young fathers, it has been noted that the majority of research on young fatherhood is based on adolescent mothers, as well as adolescent mothers' views of young fathers (Mollborn & Jacobs, 2015). Thus young fatherhood from the perspective of these young men is an under-researched area in South Africa (Mollborn & Jacobs, 2015). A few studies have identified the difficulty in reaching young fathers as one of the reasons for the dearth in literature (Mollborn & Jacobs, 2015; Swartz & Bhana, 2009; Weinman et al., 2002). In contrast to these findings, there has been a previous attempt to explore the perceptions and experiences of adolescent fathers, which has successfully located and recruited ten to twenty-five

participants (Chideya & Williams, 2013; Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). However, these studies have reported the aid that the researchers have received, contributing to the ability to recruit participants from the schools with the help of teachers (Chideya & Williams, 2013; Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). Due to this, both these studies only contain a sample of in-school fathers. There are different circumstances surrounding in-school fathers and young fathers who have completed or dropped out of school, which have been documented in the literature (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). For example, some out-of-school young fathers are employed so they do not have the same financial stress and some may experience less pressure because they do not have to worry about school work, et cetera. The sample for this study includes both young fathers who are in school and those out-of-school, in order gain a holistic understanding of young South African fathers' perceptions of fatherhood. In contrast to the two studies mentioned above, Enderstein and Boonzaier (2015) explored young fatherhood, with a sample of ten participants between the age of 18-23 years old. However, their main focus was on the way in which young fathers redefine masculine identity through fatherhood (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). Therefore, this study not only explores young fathers' perceptions of emotional support but will also explore the young father's perceptions of fatherhood based on their experience thereof.

### **1.3. RESEARCH AIMS & OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to explore the young fathers' perceptions of the father's involvement with his child. It also aims to investigate the way in which the experiences of emotional support shape their perceptions of paternal involvement.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. Explore the young father's perceptions of paternal involvement
2. Explore the young father's experience of emotional support
3. Explore the way in which the young father's experience of support shapes their perceptions of paternal involvement.

### **1.4. OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT**

The current chapter serves as an introduction to the topic of inquiry of this research report. It provides a brief overview of the primary aspects of research done pertaining

to young fathers in South Africa. It also offers a rationale for research contribution to limited existing research on young fathers in South Africa.

Chapter two consists of a review of the existing literature in the domain of fatherhood in South Africa. Due to the dearth in research focusing on adolescent fatherhood, this chapter will engage with existing research on both adult fathers and adolescent fathers. This includes an overview of the fatherhood role, the historical legacy of fatherhood in South Africa, constructions of fatherhood, the roles of the provider, emotional engagement of fathers, the transition from adolescence to adulthood and fatherhood, masculinity and its relationship with fatherhood, the role and representations of young fathers, and the fathers emotional support systems. The theoretical framework guiding this study will be outlined and discussed in conclusion to this chapter.

Chapter three provides a detailed description of the methodological approach, the sample and site of study, the sampling strategy, data collection procedures and the process of data analysis. Steps taken to ensure rigour and credibility, the researcher's reflexivity, as well as ethical considerations guiding this study will be discussed in this chapter.

Findings for this study are presented in Chapter four. These are results based on thematic analysis.

Chapter five comprises the discussion of findings, limitations, considerations for future research and the conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

Using a deductive approach, this literature review will explore fatherhood both internationally and nationally, with a narrower focus on young fatherhood and constructions of fathering roles. In addition, the understanding of fatherhood will be explored using a social constructionist perspective. This perspective holds that the fathers' perceptions and experiences are constructed in their attempt to understand their own worlds and these constructions are influenced by cultural and societal factors (Cronje, 2012). Therefore, the concept of the constructions of gender and masculinity in relation to how fatherhood is understood by participants will also be explored.

#### **2.2. THE FATHERHOOD ROLE**

According to Rabe (2006), there is no universal understanding of fatherhood and each researcher has work which is influenced by their own understanding of this concept. Throughout this literature review different conceptualizations of the fatherhood role will be discussed, as well as the influences of these. The terms father, fatherhood and fathering are all different titles used to describe the role, position and duty of the father in the family (Makofane, 2015). These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, however some researchers believe they constitute different meanings.

Morrell (2006) distinguishes between the term's 'father' and 'fatherhood'. The term 'father' denotes the biological relation to the child (Morrell, 2006). 'Fatherhood' refers to the social relationship with the child and the choice to have a relation with the child (Morrell, 2006). According to Rabe (2018), the term 'fatherhood' can be understood as an abstract concept. Rabe (2012) states there are three types of fathers, namely, the biological father; social father and economic father. The biological father helped procreate his child, the economic father financially provides for the child and the social father is a man that takes care of a child who is not his biological child. However, this definition of the fatherhood roles does not allow for the complexity in

which the term ‘father’ denotes. Day et al. (2005), like many other researchers, deconstruct the fatherhood role. It is believed that the requirement of the biological father to provide care to his child, is essentially a role that has been attached to the biological father by society’s assumption of the fatherhood role and there is no a priori reason to believe so (Lewis & Lamb, 2007).

Day et al. (2005) identify four types of fatherhood, which are characterized by the interplay of their motivations for a social relationship with their child and their biological connection. The four types of fatherhood were, motivated biofather; motivated non-biofather, unmotivated biofather and unmotivated non-biofather (Day et al., 2005). The motivated biofather is characterized by a biological father who has a relationship with his child, for example, the present father (Day et al., 2005). The motivated non-biofather is characterized by a non-biological father who has a relationship with his child, for example, the stepfather who is present in the child’s life (Day et al., 2005). The unmotivated biological father is characterized by biological father who does not have a social relationship with his child, for example, the absent father (Day et al., 2005). The unmotivated non-biological father is a characterized by someone who is not a biological father and does not have a social relationship with the child, for example, a man who is in a relationship with the mother of a child and does not actively play a role in the child’s life (Day et al., 2005)

There are many different fathers that may fit into these four types of fatherhood. Van den Berg and Makusha (2018) provide a list of the different classification of fathers, i.e., fathers who are heterosexual; fathers who are homosexual; young fathers; older fathers. Other classification of fathers found in the literature are grandfathers, foster-fathers, incarcerated fathers, etc. (Martinez et al., 2013). Van den Berg and Makusha (2018) also provide a list of different classifications of fatherhood, such as fatherhood that is self-identified; fatherhood that is ascribed; proximal fatherhood and long-distance fatherhood.

According to Chideya and Williams (2013), there is a continuous change in the definition of fatherhood, expectations and practices. Providing financially and caregiving, such as activities and emotional care, have been identified as two primary paternal roles (Mavungu, 2013). A lot of emphasis is placed on the role of the father

as a financial provider. However, with changing social arrangements there is a growing need for fathers fulfilling an active caregiving role (Ratele, Shefer, & Clowes, 2012). One particular change includes the increase in women entering the labour market (Mavungu, 2013; Spjeldnaes, Moland, Harris, & Sam, 2011). Due to high rates of unemployment, women have begun to seek employment to take care of their family. Thus, in instances where a father is unemployed and a mother is employed, the father is expected to engage in other parental roles for the benefit of their child. Morrell and Jewkes (2011), believe that this is the reason for fathers taking on more caregiving roles as opposed to arguments for gender-equity being a cause.

Bunting and McAuley (2004) indicate that expectations of the roles of fathers, as well as the level of involvement, are different for the mother and the father. They also found that these expectations may be culturally shaped and are gender based. They also found that financial and emotional support forms an important role in father involvement, with the fathers having a strong sense of connection to their child (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). As discussed in Ratele et al. (2012), there has been a substantial amount of research on fathers providing financial support, whereas research focusing on the father's emotional involvement in the child's life is lacking (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012; Morrell & Richter, 2006).

According to Marcisz (2013), research has identified intimate and emotional involvement of fathering, but simultaneously the predominance of father absence has been raised internationally. These contradictory findings have also been found in South African studies on fatherhood in a post-apartheid context (Marcisz, 2013; Mavungu, 2013). Due to limited research on young fathers, it is difficult to understand how these influences have affected their fathering and if they mirror those of older adult men in terms of the findings on fathering roles. It also fails to reflect how these influences impact their perceptions of their roles as a father. In addition to this, it is of interest to explore the additional influences, if any, that young fathers experience as opposed to fathers older than 25 years of age.

According to Lewis and Lamb (2007), motivation for paternal involvement is not easy to investigate. Motivation is shaped by various factors, which create the complexity of

studying fatherhood. Some of the factors that affect paternal involvement are, biological; motivation, cultural, economic, historical, legal, social policy and the relationship with the child's mother (Lewis & Lamb, 2007). In addition, the result of the interaction between these factors also influence paternal involvement (Lewis & Lamb, 2007). According to Day et al. (2005), in order to critically engage in the discourse of fatherhood, one needs to be aware of these factors. Most of these factors will be further explored through the review of previous studies.

## **2.3. FATHERHOOD IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### **2.3.1 HISTORY AND CONTEXT**

As previously discussed in the first chapter, the history of fatherhood in South Africa has been moulded and shaped by a multitude of influences (Marcisz, 2013). These influences affect the research on fatherhood and as a result there has been contradictory findings nationally. The discriminating effects of apartheid have been found to be a huge factor that has shaped the fatherhood role in South Africa (Makusha et al., 2012). However, it has not just been apartheid that has shaped fatherhood, but colonization as well. According to Townsend, Madhavan and Garey (2006), throughout the history of South Africa, from colonization to apartheid, there has been a continuous reshaping of the Black family. Even though both regimes differed to some degree, the Black family still experienced racial segregation and the men were subjected to labour migration to the mines, factories, or commercial farms (Townsend et al., 2006). The importance of fatherhood, in the pre-colonial and the early colonial period, rested on the reproduction of children in order to maintain the existence of the homestead (Hunter, 2006). Emphasis was placed on sons to continue the male lineage (Hunter, 2006). The father served as the protector and leader of his homestead and was responsible for overseeing his daughters' marriages and paying '*ilobola*' (marital payment), or '*inhlawulo*' (damages for impregnating a girl out of wedlock), for his sons (Hunter, 2006).

During the early twentieth century, African men were forced to participate in the colonial labour market due to the changes that were occurring in the country (Hunter, 2006). Beside the takeover of land, in this period of time South Africa experienced the implementation of government taxes and the mining of gold and diamonds which

forced Black men to serve as mine workers (Hunter, 2006). This work was far from their homes and it required them to relocate for long periods of time (Hunter, 2006). Because of this, the value of the social role of fatherhood as the protector diminished and shifted to the role of the financial provider (Hunter, 2006). Fatherhood was transformed by the absence of men and men gained powers in the form of financial wealth (Hunter, 2006). This change in the fatherhood role led to the reconstruction of masculinity and what it means to be a man.

Ratele et al. (2012) believe that the forced migration labour practiced during apartheid is the reason that father absence is still a challenge that South Africa faces. In other words, fatherhood patterns post-apartheid is linked to the circumstances that they were subjected to during the apartheid era (Makusha & Richter, 2015; Ratele et al., 2012; Van den Berg et al., 2013). During apartheid, the labour migration policy forced Black men to move to the cities to work as mine labourers far from the rural areas where their families were left behind (Madhavan & Brooks, 2015). In support of this Clark et al. (2015) reported that 60% of men between the ages of 35-54 are temporary migrants in the rural areas of South Africa. Even after the fall of Apartheid, Black South African families still experience the difficulty of family members, especially fathers, moving away from home to look for work (Townsend et al., 2006). Thus the family dynamic today is still moulded by the historical changes that the family had to adapt to and the traditions of the population (Townsend et al., 2006).

Within the literature, there is tension surrounding the dynamic of the family unit and family structure. Raniga and Mthembu (2016) highlight the idealisation of the 'nuclear family' and discuss the traditional African family system. The nuclear family consists of a residential unit occupied by a husband with his wife and dependent children (Raniga & Mthembu, 2016). On the other hand, an African family system includes immediate and extended family members as well as the polygamous marital institution (Raniga & Mthembu, 2016). The idealization of the nuclear family creates tension taking into consideration the historical and cultural context of South Africa that has shaped the African family system.

The child, within the context of South Africa, is most often raised by a single mother, referred to as a single-parent household (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Statistics South

Africa (2012) state that 42,5% of young children resides only with their biological mother. The percentage of children, ages 0-4 years old, living with only their biological mother is as follows: Black African, 45.6%, Coloured, 38.3%; White, 10.1%; Indian/Asian, 9.1% (Statistics South Africa, 2012). According to Holborn and Eddy (2011), the percentage of children with absent fathers who are still alive, from 1996 to 2009, rose from 42% to 48%. This percentage encompasses all races. Holborn and Eddy (2011) also reported the rise in absent fathers who are still alive, from 1996 to 2009, of children under the age of 15 years old in Black (45% to 52%), Coloured (34% to 41%) and White (13% to 15%) population groups. However, they indicated a decrease of this percentage in the Indian population group from 17% to 12% (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Morrell (2006) provides the following as reasons for the absence of fathers: divorce, work, domestic instability and social dislocations. It is assumed that fathers who do not reside with their children do not support them however, Madhavan, Townsend and Garey (2008) emphasize that the fathers' residency and financial support are two separate phenomena that do not necessarily occur together. Clark et al. (2015) believe that although these fathers are absent, many are still involved in their child's lives. It is possible for a father to be physically absent yet emotionally present, and physically present yet emotionally supportive (Mavungu, 2013; Morrell, 2006).

The value of fatherhood by South African men has increasingly been viewed in a new light (Morrell & Richter, 2006; Van den Berg, 2013). This value is evident within the fight for fathering rights and the consideration of the importance of the father figure for the child (Morrell & Richter, 2006; Van den Berg, 2013). In South Africa, not all men have the ability, of middle-class men, to be both a financial provider and a caregiver (Morrell, 2006). Many working-class men and unemployed fathers experience financial strain (Morrell, 2006; Mazembo et al., 2013). Many fathers in South Africa have to find work far away to support their child and at the same time sacrifice the opportunity to spend time with their children. Currently, with the extensive unemployment rates and changing constructs of masculinity, with the movement to more involved fathering practices, Black fathers are still subjected to negotiate between their cultural ideals and western ideals (Marcisz, 2013).

### **2.3.2 CONSTRUCTIONS OF FATHERHOOD**

Existing research on young fathers emphasize the relationship between masculinity and fatherhood (Bhana & Nkani, 2004; Hendricks et al., 2010). According to Morrell (2006), masculinity is the gender identity of men. Masculinity is a polymorphic and dynamic, socially constructed identity (Morrell, 2006). According to Mazembo, de-Boor and Mahaka (2013), the financial provider is the expression of masculinity and the fatherhood role. Bhana and Nkani (2014) suggest that masculinity is in essence male power. They believe that fatherhood is a way of expressing one's masculinity (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). Literature explores two types of masculinity, provider masculinity as well as hegemonic masculinity. According to Bhana and Nkani (2014), provider masculinity, in the context of contemporary South African townships, is linked to the fathers' ability to provide financially and their disposable income (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). Hegemonic masculinity is a dominant form of masculinity that consists of the cultural expectations of a 'real man' (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). According to Cronje (2012), hegemonic masculinity maintains its dominance by adapting to new context and cultural changes in retaining male power. Hegemonic masculinity consists of overt actions, which form the gender order (Cronje, 2012).

Amongst different contexts are different types of masculinities that are viewed as hegemonic to that specific context (Cronje, 2012). Ratele et al. (2012) discuss findings that men are under pressure to fulfil the role of the provider and to reclaim their masculinity after the oppression faced during colonization and the apartheid regime. This pressure that men are currently under is manifested in fatherhood discourses that display gender power, masculine control and violence, whereby these frequently overlap with their conceptualization of masculinity (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Ratele et al., 2012). One may assume that due to historical oppression of Black people and the societal expectations that are tied to masculinity, men often use violence in order to gain status (Helman & Ratele, 2016). According to Hendricks et al. (2010), the perceptions of fatherhood as evidence of fertility and masculinity belonged to young men who were strongly instilled with traditional and cultural values. In the study by Bhana and Nkani (2014), the young fathers from poor townships in Africa failed to achieve the status of hegemonic provider. This highlights the fact that in Africa, the father as the economic provider is the idealized version of manhood. It is found that within Africa, provider masculinity is

hegemonically expressed (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). This indicates that cultural expectations of fathers are skewed in such a way that the role of fatherhood is seen as primarily a financial provider and little more.

In contrast to these findings, studies on new generation Black South African fathers found that fathers are taking on a role of fatherhood that incorporates more westernized values that is characterized by emotional involvement and individuality (Marcisz, 2013; Ratele et al., 2012). By doing, so they are also reconstructing the traditional notion of masculinity that has been dominant in society (Marcisz, 2013; Ratele et al., 2012). However, the findings of Marcisz (2013), indicated discrepancies in which the fathers expressed the large influence that their own fathers had on their fathering and sometimes identified with them but at the same time they disassociated from their fathers. This contradiction may highlight the complex and difficult position the new generation Black fathers had in reconstructing their fatherhood role and deviating from the norm.

### **2.3.3. THE ROLE OF THE FATHER AS PROVIDER**

Empirical studies on men and young men have found that the role as head of the household and financial provider is the hallmark of masculinity (Ratele et al., 2012). According to Ratele et al. (2012), this emphasizes the importance of the paternal role in a family; the paternal role should be the head of the home and economic provider. If this role is not fulfilled, the individual will not be seen as a man (Ratele et al., 2012). It has been found that many men understand their fatherhood role as the financial provider (Mavungu, 2013; Van den Berg et al., 2013). Mavungu (2013) conducted research to understand how the conceptions of fatherhood of men influence their involvement in their child's lives. The results of this study indicated that in addition to the role of financial provider, fathers were also viewed as employed individuals (Mavungu, 2013). Given their being in their school attending ages, this has serious consequences for the teenage father.

According to Clark et al. (2015), approximately 40% of young men between the ages of 16-24 are unemployed. One possibility is the result of rejection of the young father who cannot provide financially (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Mazembo et al., 2013).

Mazembo et al. (2013) highlight that this rejection, caused by the overemphasis of the fathering role as financial provider, could lead to a missed opportunity for a child to have an emotionally involved and caring father. There has also been evidence showing that Black South African men experience damage to their confidence, identity, self-esteem and masculinity when they cannot fulfil this role (Makusha & Richter, 2015; Mavungu, 2013). Evidently, an increase in perceptions of emasculation was reported in instances where young fathers were unable to meet the expectation of being a provider (Bhana & Nkani, 2014, Hendricks et al., 2010).

Other aspects of fatherhood, including the father's physical and emotional involvement in their child's life, are overshadowed by the young fathers' inability to meet cultural expectations as the role of provider (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). These cultural expectations include providing the child with basic needs such as food and clothes, paying for the child's school fees, and providing access to health care services (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012). A consequence of this cultural expectation is the emphasis that research places on the role of the young father as the financial provider and the possible neglect of the other aspects and roles of fatherhood. It is of interest to look at other roles of young fathers, in particular their emotional involvement in their child's life. This pressure on young fathers caused by cultural expectations of their role as providers have been found to have adverse effects on these teenage fathers (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). Bhana and Nkani (2014) believe that young fathers could raise their child in ways other than only providing financially. This highlights the fact that there are other roles to fathers that do not include being a financial provider. Bunting and McAuley (2004) found that many young fathers only focused on strategies to increase the chance of employment for their fatherhood role. This suggested that the role of financial provider was of primary importance to how young fathers perceived fatherhood.

It is believed that the inability to fulfil the role of the financial provider might lead to a loss of interest in their child's life and a lack of involvement in other aspects of fatherhood (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). Makusha and Richter (2015) found that some Black South African fathers distance themselves from their children to avoid the criticism of not being able to provide financially. However, as seen above, this belief could be due to the feelings of rejection or emasculation that followed the inability to

provide. The view of the role of the financial provider being of sole importance is culturally constructed based on adherence to patriarchal hegemonic notions of masculinity (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). It is possible that the neglect in cultural expectations of the other fatherhood roles, and the strong emphasis of the role of the father as the financial provider, may shape the young father's expectations of his own role as a father (Ratele et al., 2012). It is of interest to explore the young men's subjective perceptions of their own expectations of fatherhood beyond being a financial provider.

#### **2.3.4. FATHERS' EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN**

In the study on men's constructions and experiences of fatherhood and fatherlessness, Ratele et al. (2012) stated that existing evidence from historical records show that African men engaged in various nurturing acts and support even during Apartheid. There have also been current studies that have found similar findings. Marcisz (2013) conducted a study on new generation Black fathers. These fathers expressed that the fathering role has shifted from that of a financial provider to more intimate and emotionally involved fathering (Marcisz, 2013). The fathers in this study also discussed the differences between themselves and the older generation fathers who were too authoritarian and emotionally distant (Marcisz, 2013). This is in contrast to the studies by Mavungu (2013) and Mazembo et al. (2013) who found that caregiving activities were identified by majority of the fathers as the role of their female partners, as a part of sexual division of labour. Clearly, there are discrepancies within research findings on fatherhood in South Africa.

In the study conducted by Ratele et al. (2012) on fatherhood and fatherlessness post-apartheid, the fathers identified two types of experiences encountered by fathers, which they referred to as 'being there' and 'talking fathers'. The fatherhood experience of 'being there' refers to the quality of the relationship between the father and his child (Ratele et al., 2012). 'Talking fathers' is another form of care that is nurturing and non-violent that opposes the traditional authoritative role of the father (Ratele et al., 2012). Some studies indicated that the younger participants in their study were emotionally committed to becoming fathers who were good, caring and loving towards their child (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Langa & Smith, 2012). This is

regardless of the fact that they could not provide their children's material needs (Langa & Smith, 2012). These participants also communicated their view of the importance of their children's emotional needs. They emphasized that just being there for their children will meet these emotional needs (Langa & Smith, 2012). This notion of 'being there' for their children was identified as a recurrent theme in the literature. The notion of 'being there' was used, by the participants in the study by Bunting and McAuley (2004), in the context of their active involvement in their child's life or their presence at the birth of their child.

A study on fathers' own accounts of their involvement discussed both traditional and non-traditional roles, some of which are intimate physical care and emotional engagement (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012). Bunting and McAuley (2004) discuss the importance that young fathers attached to being involved in pleasurable activities with their child. This indicates that young fathers identify their fatherhood role as more than just a financial provider and that they want to engage in the other fatherhood roles. However, in contrast to these findings, Madiba and Nsiki (2017) researched the experiences and perceptions of in-school fathers and found that most of young fathers did not take part in nurturing activities with their child even though they were still together with their child's mother. However, this could be due to their belief that a good father is a financial provider and possibly because they did not reside with their child (Madiba & Nsiki, 2017).

There are two widely recognized definitions of a 'good father' within the literature (Morrell, 2006). The first definition is a man who makes time to spend with his child (from the day they were born) and prioritizes his child (Morrell, 2006). The second definition places emphasis on the father as the financial provider, it is defined as a man who takes responsibility for his child, supports his child and is a good role model (Morrell, 2006). The young fathers in the study by Madiba and Nsiki (2017) believed that a good father is one that can financially support their children. In Swartz and Bhana (2009), the young fathers expressed that employment made a father a good one. In Madiba and Nsiki (2017), this provision was of more importance than emotional or physical fathering. However, there was more to being a good father than either emotional support or financial support. In the study by Swartz and Bhana (2009), these fathers described a good father as someone who supports their child and

is present in their lives regardless of their relationship with their child's mother. This indicates that young fathers believe that a good father is one that puts their child's needs first regardless of the situation. These fathers also reported 'being there' for their child as a marker of a good father which is consistent with the findings above that discuss their perceptions of their role as fathers (Swartz & Bhana, 2009).

The idea that a good father is one that is 'there' for their child could be a reason why fathers wish to be more emotionally involved in their child's life. In addition to these, the results of Swartz and Bhana (2009) indicated that young fathers discussed characteristics within their own fathers (or characteristics they wished their father had) they felt characterized a good father. These included emotionally involved activities such as caring, play, and participation in daily activities (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). However, it is important to note that these findings are affected by the socioeconomic status of the young fathers. If they are able to provide for their child, they will comfortably be able to take on other fathering roles (Marcisz, 2013). However, if they are not in a position where they can easily provide then that will be their main concern.

Bunting and McAuley (2004) report obstacles encountered by young fathers that prevent their contact and involvement in their child's life. These include lack of financial resources, as well as problematic relationships with the mother of their child and the mother's parents (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Van den Berg et al., 2013). The young fathers in the study by Swartz and Bhana (2009) identify the mother's male family members as factors that prevent them from fulfilling their role as a father. This is due to the problems that they give these fathers. For example, without paying for damages, permission to see the child was often not granted. In addition to these, research on in-school fathers by Madiba and Nsiki (2017) found that schoolwork was also a barrier to young father's involvement in their child's lives.

Madhavan, Richter, Norris and Hosegood (2014) maintain that other roles of fatherhood such as the provision of moral guidance and affection occur through various types of interaction. For example, play, communication and being a role model were affected by the father's inability to provide financial support. However, Mavungu (2013) found that the promotion and development of other fatherhood roles

is stunted by the overemphasis on the fathers' financial provision. Young fathers identify maternal resistance as a barrier to their involvement in child rearing (Weinman et al., 2002). Weinman et al. (2002) note that the lack of financial support may be equated with disinterest of the fathers as reported by the mothers. This may be due to the belief that financial provision indicates that a father cares for his child (Morrell & Jewkes, 2011). However, Weinman et al. (2002) discussed that unemployed fathers wanted to provide tangible items such as food, diapers and clothing instead of money. This shows that they do have an interest in their child's life even though they are unable to assume the role of financial provider. It also indicates effort to avoid possible rejection or from being denied contact with the child.

Another obstacle in the way of father involvement is when a former partner enters into a new relationship (Madhavan, Richter, & Norris, 2014; Mazembo et al., 2013). According to Madhavan, Richter et al. (2014), it is possible that a father's willingness to provide for his child may be affected by the mother finding a new partner. However, in contrast to this, Madhavan, Richter and Gross (2015) state that most fathers believe that their involvement in their child's life will continue despite the mother finding a new partner. In addition, it was found that when the father enters a new relationship with someone, who has their own children prior to their union or when the father has children with their new partner, he might stop supporting his current child (Madhavan, Richter et al., 2014).

Another factor that may inhibit the paternal involvement of young men is the process called 'gatekeeping' (Clark et al., 2015; Herzog, Umana-Taylor, Madden-Derich, & Leonard, 2007; Makusha & Richter, 2016). This involves the mother's attempts to control the opportunities available to the father for involvement in the child's life, which includes care for the child (Herzog et al., 2007). According to Kalil, Ziol-Guest and Coley (2005), the process of gatekeeping has also been linked to the maternal grandmother, who acts as a gatekeeper to inhibit the father's involvement. This link could be due to the fact that many children live with their mother's family and in many instances are taken care of by their maternal grandmother (Madhavan & Roy, 2012).

According to Madhavan, Richter et al. (2014), previous research has focused on the role of kin as an inhibitor of the fathers' role. Women who are supported by their kin are often reluctant to gain child support from the father (Madhavan, Richter et al., 2014). Swartz and Bhana (2009) reported that there has been a decrease in father involvement over the course of his child's life in instances where the maternal grandmother is too involved in her child's life. The maternal grandmother usually restricts the involvement of the father in contexts of poverty, high unemployment and limited resources (Madhavan, Richter et al., 2014). The fear of limited resources depleting is one reason why the kin discourages the access in which the father has to his child (Madhavan, Richter et al., 2014).

It has been found that mothers are less likely to support the father's involvement in their child's life if they cannot provide economically (Herzog et al., 2007; Mavungu, 2013). This is interpreted as a reflection of their commitment to fatherhood (Herzog et al., 2007). This lack of support may be influenced by their kin, especially if they are experiencing financial strain. Clark et al. (2015) also found that if payments for damages and bridal price were not provided to the mother she would act as a gatekeeper to inhibit the father's access to the child. Two possible responses of the father in the event of kin gatekeeping have been found. One in which the father responds by providing financial support in order to secure a place in their child's life and the other response involves the withdrawal of financial support (Madhavan et al., 2015).

Hertzog et al. (2007) suggests that maternal reports of fathers' participation are affected by their perceptions of the fathers, parenting styles and how much they want the father to be involved. Thus, research consisting of young father participants is required to contribute to the body of knowledge about young fathers (Hertzog et al., 2007). The difference in the amount of literature available on young fathers' involvement in their child's life from the mothers' perspective versus the amount of literature available on teenage father's involvement in their child's life from the father's perspective needs to be taken into account. This difference may account for the ways in which young fathers are stereotyped. More research needs to be focused on young fathers' perceptions of their involvement and what this should entail (Chideya & Williams, 2013). It is also worthy to note that the discrepancies in

reporting, for example between mothers and fathers, may likely be caused by the different expectations of the fatherhood role due to the different gender's constructions of parenting (Madhavan et al., 2015). This may also affect the reporting of unemployed young fathers. Madhavan et al. (2015) emphasize that in South Africa fathers' reports on their contributions to their child's lives may be understated as an effect of the mothers' negative attitude of the fathers' inability to provide financially.

## **2.4. THE YOUNG FATHER**

### **2.4.1. THE TRANSITION FROM ADOLESCENCE TO FATHERHOOD**

According to Morrell (2006), it is expected that when a boy becomes a man he is able to take on the role as a father. There are multiple beliefs of how manhood, a desired stage of one's life, is reached (Bade, 2012; Lehti et al., 2012; Morrell, 2006). Manhood is often understood as a stage in life where males are granted rights and they are in a position of respect (Monepya, 2012; Morrell, 2006). It is commonly marked by the social acceptance of other adult males (Morrell, 2006). Some males believe that one possible entrance into the world of manhood is through fathering a child, and this is because it represents physical maturity (Hendricks et al., 2010; Morrell, 2006). However, there is more to it than just physical maturity as it also involves social skills to achieve intimacy (Hendricks et al., 2010; Morrell, 2006).

It has been found that in South Africa young men desire to reach the status of manhood earlier than older generations of men (Morrell, 2006). Because young men are so eager to claim this status, one way of claiming manhood involves fathering a child. Engaging in sexual activity, which may lead to conceiving a child, serves as a possible reason for many adolescents becoming fathers (Morrell, 2006). With regard to young fathers, the timing of the transition into fatherhood is at a stage where young males are forming an identity and that makes this transition difficult (Chideya & Williams, 2013). Research by Spjeldnaes et al. (2011) aimed to explore the understanding of fatherhood of schoolboys from a semi-urban area in South Africa. The results of this study indicated that the schoolboys perceived their fathers as very emotionally closed off men who did not guide or support them in their transition to manhood. They expressed this guidance and support as an important aspect of fatherhood (Spjeldnaes et al., 2011).

The participants in the study on teenage fathers conducted by Madiba and Nsiki (2017) expressed the transition into fatherhood as a change in their lifestyle and it improved the young father's behaviour. Most of the fathers in this study expressed fear of becoming a father especially having to tell their parents about it (Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). In addition, Swartz and Bhana (2009) found that the young fathers experienced a high level of stress and fear in having to tell their parents about the pregnancy. This included the fathers who were in their late teenage years (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Due to the in-school father's perceptions and measure of a good father, most of these fathers were anxious about being unemployed and going to school instead of working to provide for their child (Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). It has also been found that fatherhood adversely affects the young father's performance at school (Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). However, in some instances the drop in school performance only occurs initially and the fathers start improving their school performance in order to create a better life to support their child (Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). Swartz and Bhana (2009) found that young fathers stay in school, as it will help them provide a better future for their children.

#### **2.4.2. CONSTRUCTIONS OF YOUNG FATHERS**

As seen above young fathers are portrayed in a negative light. Some literature indicates that young fathers are viewed as irresponsible (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). Bhana and Nkani (2014) believe that one of the reasons in which fathers are viewed as irresponsible is their inability to pay '*Inhlawulo*' or damages for impregnating his partner out of wedlock. This is a fine for disrespecting the mother of the child's family (Mazembo et al., 2013). If the father cannot pay this, along with the payment of '*ilobola*' or dowry for the bride negotiated by both families, which is required for the father to have access to his child born out of wedlock, he will not be recognized as the child's father (Makusha & Richter, 2015; Mazembo et al., 2013). The inability to pay *ilobola* is viewed as a social weakness as the father has failed to build a homestead, which is of importance to the status of a man (Hunter, 2006). According to Weinman et al. (2002), employment was viewed as enabling these fathers to assume the role of provider and access to seeing their children. It is emphasized that without resources fathers may be denied access to their children (Weinman et al., 2002). It is clear that the role of the father is primarily viewed as a financial provider.

In this case, society pressurizes fathers to provide financially and emotional involvement is often overlooked.

The absence of the young father in his child's life may portray him as uncaring (Makusha et al., 2012). Cronje (2012) discusses the stereotypical view of fathers, in general, being uninterested in their child's life and the generalization of fathers not being suited for a parenting role. In contrast to this, Clark et al. (2015) state that most men do not fit into this stereotypical view. Some studies based on young fathers in South Africa indicate that young fathers yearn to be an active parent in their child's life and have a vast perception of responsibility (Bhana & Nkani, 2014, Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Mazembo et al., 2013). This sense of responsibility and desire to be an active parent in their child's life has been found to be strong irrespective of the barriers they face in terms of unemployment and cultural expectations, as well as the relationship with the mother of their child (Bhana & Nkani, 2014).

In addition, Mazembo et al. (2013) explored how fathers perceived the consequences of the absence of the paternal role. It was found that the participants expressed concern that their children would grow up to be ill-mannered and disrespectful towards their elders due to the lack of paternal guidance (Mazembo et al., 2013). They are concerned about their children experiencing a decline in cultural identity as well as a disconnection from their ancestors that would lead to misfortune (Mazembo et al., 2013). This is because married Black fathers pass on a family or clan name to their child (Makusha & Richter, 2015). This name holds with it a group of ancestral traditions and status that provide them with access to certain resources and links to certain people in their communities (Makusha & Richter, 2015). They also worried that due to their absence their children would engage in alcohol and substance abuse, as well as crime. These fathers expressed the feeling of failure, especially due to their inability to fulfil the role of financial provider, was a consequence of their absence (Mazembo et al., 2013). Mazembo et al. (2013) conclude by stating that due to these findings men cannot be painted as disinterested or negligent for their absence. Van den Berg et al. (2013), emphasize that literature in South Africa shows that masculinities are starting to shift and allow men to take on positive and caring paternal roles. The static portrayal of fathers being distant, uncaring and uninvolved is becoming less frequent (Van den Berg et al., 2013).

## **2.5. YOUNG FATHERS' EMOTIONAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

A considerable amount of literature focusing on the emotional support systems of young fathers, and the influences of these on their paternal involvement, are international studies. There are not many South African studies focusing on this aspect pertaining young fathers. However, even the international research has been described as increasing in size, yet still small (Hunt, 2016). Emotional support experienced by fathers is important to explore because of prior findings that suggest that it may influence the father's involvement in their child's lives. Fagan et al. (2007), noted that parental figures influence parenting behaviours. For young fathers, emotional support has been found to be important for their personality adjustments, their adjustments to fatherhood and it has been shown to influence their involvement in their child's lives (Chideya & Williams, 2013). The influence of emotional support on paternal involvement is complex. Due to the many external factors that affect an individual's life and shape their circumstances, the influence of emotional support on paternal involvement is not easily understood. Henceforth, research pertaining to young father's emotional support systems, and its link to their role as fathers, is important. However, Hunt (2016) highlights that it is under-researched and research in this area is still expanding. Hunt (2016), emphasizes that emotional support received by the young fathers during their transition into fatherhood needs to be explored as it is not fully understood.

It has been found that young fathers play an important supportive role in the lives of the young mother and child (Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007). Ratele et al. (2012) highlight the importance of the father's involvement in the child's life. It is reported that fathers with effective parenting skills can influence the cognitive and personal development of their child (Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Weinman, Smith, & Buzi, 2002). Holborn and Eddy (2011) note that international research highlights the importance of fathers by discussing the contributions of the presence of the father. These include an increase in school achievement and cognitive functioning. In addition, their absence may lead to their child experiencing depression and other forms of emotional distress (Holborn & Eddy, 2011).

The role of the kin is of importance when exploring fatherhood in South Africa. This is because in many low-socioeconomic communities the paternal kin play a crucial

role in supporting fatherhood as they aid in caregiving (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). The role of the kin is culturally determined (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). Both immediate and extended family forms the kin group (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). They help raise the children either financially, if they are employed, or physically in the form of caretaking activities (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). Even though the support from kin may be needed in these young father's lives, it may also negatively affect these young men's role as fathers. It was found that while many young fathers appreciated the financial support provided to them from their parents, it also made them feel inadequate as a father (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). In addition, the over-involvement of young father's mothers in their lives may discourage them from being involved (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Many of these young men look for part-time work in order to contribute and minimize the feeling of inadequacy (Swartz & Bhana, 2009).

Other roles in which the kin partake in is payment of bridal wealth and damages (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). In this case the father's family are more likely to be involved in the child's life after these payments have been made (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). The involvement of the kin is important to the child's kin identity however, it shifts the role of fathering to a more communal type of fathering (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). This is where the concept of the 'flexible father' emerges. The flexible father is a man who takes on the fathering role for many children within the kin, including those that are not biologically his own (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). Hegemonic masculine measures of fathers are not applicable with the involvement of the kin in childrearing (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). This is because young men are not emotionally or financially ready to take on the role of fatherhood (Madhavan and Roy, 2012). It is with the support of their family, as well as the mother of their child's family, that they take on the fatherhood role (Madhavan & Roy, 2012).

According to Bunting and McAuley (2004), family support, especially emotional support from the young father's mother, is linked to a higher rate of paternal involvement. This is because young fathers highly regard their mother's opinion and guidance (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). The young father's mothers provide them with financial support and emotional support; she fulfills the role of mediator, protector, counselor and teacher for her son (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). However, Swartz and Bhana (2009) point out that many fathers do not discuss other types of support that

their mothers provide them, beside emotional and financial support. Clark et al. (2015) report that young fathers express being better fathers due to the help of their mothers who encourage them to stay in a relationship with the mother of their child and to continue their schooling for better job prospects.

Male role models, as well as their own fathers, were also found to mediate the young father's involvement with their child (Marcisz, 2013; Weinman et al., 2002). Some fathers tried to model their own fathers in their fathering patterns (Marcisz, 2013). According to Marcisz (2013), this is referred to as the modeling hypothesis. It has been found that young fathers make reference to their own fathers absence, while growing up, as a motivation to be actively involved and present in their child's life (Cronje, 2012; Langa & Smith, 2012; Ratele et al., 2012). According to Chideya and Williams (2013), adolescent boys were not close to their fathers, physically or emotionally. In addition to this, many fathers' own fathers formed part of their reason to accept paternity and the responsibilities that come with it (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). In the research on young fathers conducted by Swartz and Bhana (2009), young fathers expressed that their own fathers' denial of paternity was the reason for them accepting it. Swartz and Bhana (2009) highlight the importance of the paternal parent in a young father's life. This is because within their findings the paternal parent was frequently discussed without any direct interview questions about their fathers (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Muvungu (2013) identifies a vicious cycle that results from fatherhood absence and highlights the importance of the fatherhood role to serve as a role model. This is due to the findings that indicate that because of the absence of their own fathers, the adult fathers did not know how to behave toward their own children (Mavungu, 2013).

It is clear that both the maternal and paternal parent impact the young men's role as a father. Fagan et al. (2007) also found a link between parental support and the young father's involvement with his child. However, the number of social supports did not have a big impact on fathers' involvement (Fagan et al., 2007). This indicates that it is not a matter of how much support the young father gets that determines involvement but from whom the support arises. Another study that focused on family relationships and role expectations found that the teenage father's feelings towards their own families influenced their involvement as a father. In addition, a link between the

teenage father's perceptions of his mother's attitude towards his parenting and his parental behaviour was found (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). This supports the view that the father's emotional support system impacts on his involvement in his child's life (Bunting & McAuley, 2004).

In previous research on fathers in general, mothers' support of fathers' parenting is the most common factor linked to paternal involvement (Herzog et al., 2007; Kalil et al., 2005; Makusha & Richter, 2016). If fathers feel that their role is not supported, there is a decline in their involvement with their child (Herzog et al., 2007). It was found that the co-parenting relationship has an influence on both the young parents' lives, as well as sharing a similar emotional attachment to parenting (Mollborn & Jacobs, 2015). This could also be linked to findings suggesting that historical commitment to their role as a father leads to stronger bonds with their children, which may also increase the chances of long-term involvement (Herzog et al., 2007). Historical commitment refers to the support given to the mother during pregnancy and delivery (Herzog et al., 2007). Consequently, either the mother's support impacts the father's involvement in the child's life or, because of the support he provided her, she allows him access and contact with the child and does not inhibit involvement (Herzog et al., 2007).

According to Hollborn & Eddy (2011), in certain instances the marital status impacts whether or not the father will be absent or present. This is because migration for labour could impact it (Ratele et al., 2012). The issue with this is that low rates of marriage is sometimes due to the fact that the father cannot afford to pay lobola, which is a price to pay in order to marry a women in traditional African cultures (Clark et al., 2015; Madhavan et al., 2014; Makusha & Richter, 2015; Makusha et al., 2012; Mazembo et al., 2013; Townsend et al., 2006). For the purpose of this study, the concept of emotional support system will consist of the father's family, friends, partners or partner's family who are involved in his life. This type of involvement stems beyond their financial assistance.

According to Fagan et al. (2007), Herzog et al., (2007), and Hollborn and Eddy (2011), many young fathers' involvement in their child's life decreases with time. Mollborn and Jacobs (2015) report that there is a decline in the long-term child-

involvement and co-residence of single adolescent parents. In instances where the maternal grandmother does not support the co-parenting of the young parents, there is a decline in the long-term paternal involvement (Mollborn & Jacobs, 2015). Mollborn and Jacobs (2015) brought to attention that in a South African context, it is not uncommon for young mothers to reside with at least one grandparent. This emphasizes a need for paternal support by maternal kin.

In contrast to the finding that father involvement decreases over time, some studies found that the levels of involvement of fathers were clustered across multiple dimensions (Kalil et al., 2005). Kalil et al. (2005) performed a study based on the longitudinal patterns of father involvement. In this study, levels of father involvement of one-year-old children were found to be high in comparison to levels of father involvement when the child was a few months younger. Kalil et al. (2005) provided evidence of clustering in which higher levels of father involvement were found during the child's preschool year and lower levels of involvement were found at the time of birth. This indicates that the level of fatherhood involvement changes in relations to a child's age. Whilst it mostly decreases, it also increases in some cases. Kalil et al. (2005) suggest that the reason for the increase in involvement in the child's life is caused by the adjustment of young fathers to their new role and parental relationship, as well as the decision-making process regarding their involvement in their child's life.

In contrast to these findings, Madhavan, Richter et al. (2014) researched financial support of children from low-income fathers residing in an urban Black community in South Africa. Within this study, their results indicated that from birth to eighteen years of age, a high proportion of children received either continuous or interrupted financial support from their fathers (Madhavan, Richter et al., 2014). However, there was evidence of an increase in interrupted child support as the age of the child increased (Madhavan, Richter et al., 2014). One may assume that it could have been influenced by the fathers' employment status, the relationship between the father and mother or the expenses that increase with the age of the child, such as the addition of school fees (Madhavan, Richter et al., 2014).

## **2.6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A social constructionist approach will be used to guide inquiry in this study. The social constructionist approach seeks to understand the way people understand their worlds through language (Gergen, 1985). According to Gergen (1985), an individual's understanding and experience of the world is subjective. The social constructionist perspective states that one cannot gain access to an objective reality however, one constructs a shared reality (Galbin, 2014). It is deemed appropriate to this study because it holds the belief that perceptions formed by the participants are actively constructed by them as well as through the researchers' attempt to understand their worlds; this construction is shaped by the individual's interaction with their social context and cultural background (Cronje, 2012). Perceptions of fatherhood and the meanings of being a father, held by individuals, are shaped by the media as well as the individuals' culture, beliefs, traditions and religious affiliations (Cronje, 2012). In addition, the individual's identity is constructed by the above factors, which are equally shaped by their own experience in life, their interaction with others and their language usage (Cronje, 2012).

According to Helman and Ratele (2016), a child's earliest exposure to the concept of gender occurs within the family unit where the constructions and enactments of gender take place throughout everyday life. This is important in research on fathers and fatherhood practices because this, as well as the constructions of fathering, is influenced by the gender norms in parenting (Madhavan et al., 2015). As discussed previously, the construction of fatherhood is understood through gender identity, also known as masculinity (Morrell, 2006). The way in which men construct masculinity has an impact on the amount of responsibility they take as fathers and how caring they are (Morrell, 2006). This construction of masculinity is shaped by the context in which the men live. For example, in contexts where men are financially secure, they are more likely to actively participate in engaging activities with their child whereas in contexts that are poverty-stricken fatherhood is more likely to include the roles of financial provider and protector (Morrell, 2006). Due to the belief that 'care' equates financial provision and protection from the father, it is assumed that if the definition of care is altered to incorporate emotional involvement there could possibly be a shift in the concept of masculine identity (Morrell & Jewkes, 2011).

## **2.7. CONCLUSION**

This literature review explored fatherhood in South Africa with a particular focus on young fatherhood. This review highlights the differences in the influences that affect young fathers as opposed to adult fathers. For example, age, schooling and parental influence as they may still be a minor or dependent on them et cetera. However, in some cases both the adult fathers and young fathers face the same circumstances. For example, unemployment, financial strain, and problems with the child's mother and her family. Within this literature review, it is evident that fathers see their role as both as an emotional and financial support however, the emphasis on one or the other is usually circumstantial. It is also evident that young father's emotional support systems impact their fathering roles. However, this needs to be further explored. In addition, the relationship between the emotional support and the impact on fatherhood needs to be further explored.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHOD**

#### **3.1. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

This study used a qualitative methodological approach to explore how young fathers perceive the importance of the father's emotional involvement with his child. The study also explored to what extent the young father's constructed experience of an emotional support system influence his own perceptions of his emotional involvement with his child. The term 'constructed experience' is used because the researcher acknowledges the fact that one cannot gain access to the actual experience that was once lived thus the researcher has to look at an individual's reconstruction of that experience (Davies & Davies, 2007).

A qualitative approach is characterized by reporting in-depth information about phenomena, as well as participants' subjective understanding in a rich detailed account (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). This is a suitable approach as the focus will be on participants' perceptions and constructions of their subjective experiences, as well as their understanding of emotional support. Bunting and McAuley (2004) found that many previous studies portray a negative image of the involvement of young fathers whilst other studies highlight how young fathers desire involvement and input in their child's life. In addition, it was found that young fathers would have more contact with their child if they were supported and provided with the opportunity (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). Thus, the use of a qualitative approach is suitable because it adopts a more in-depth approach to exploring the father's own understanding and experience.

According to Vaismoradi et al. (2013), in qualitative methodologies research approaches are the tools used to design the particular study as well as collect and analyse the data. This study used a social constructionist approach as the theoretical framework. The social constructionist approach maintains that all social phenomena are created through social interactions of people, thus all knowledge is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1991; Gergen, 1985). Berger and Luckman (1991) identifies three conditions of social constructionism, namely, contingency, specificity and the fact that neither of these two occur independently of an individual's thought

process. Specificity entails the content of thoughts and the way that thoughts are dissected by the human mind, these are influenced by social practices and institutions (Berger & Luckman, 1991). Contingency holds that the production of different thoughts and social pressures are a result of historical factors, these lead to particular beliefs, attitudes and self-perceptions (Berger & Luckman, 1991). According to Galbin (2014), the social constructionist approach adopts an understanding that a complete objective reality is impossible. What is believed to be objective reality is the shared knowledge of reality, which has been constructed through history, societal and cultural factors, and political and economic influences (Sahin, 2006). Thereafter, it becomes an institutionalised ideology and so comes to be what is believed to be an objectively shared reality (Sahin, 2006). From this basis people constantly reconstruct this reality through experience, which is created through language, thus it is fluid and dynamic and therefore always changing.

Knowledge of reality is subjectively constructed through language to make sense of this world (Galbin, 2014). This is because one shares their experiences with others through language. From this social interaction, comprised of shared experiences, reality is produced (Sahin, 2006). According to Sahin (2006), an individual's perceptions, beliefs and thoughts are through which reality comes to be understood. The way in which one experiences and perceives the world is understood through these subjective constructions (Galbin, 2014). Everything exists through language; in other words, reality is constructed through the usage of language. Our understandings of ourselves and other individuals are developed through narratives of language to describe experience (Galbin, 2014).

Friedman (2011), highlights the importance of perceptions in the social constructionist approach. According to Friedman (2011), within the social constructions of reality, perception as one of its dimensions holds power. The lack of research pertaining to this dimension has been noted (Friedman, 2011). While pointing out the essential role that perceptions play in conversation and the exchange in language, Friedman (2011) notes that perceptions are often unacknowledged in the social construction of reality. There are many forms of the social constructionist approach (Galbin, 2014). Some movements are essentially social constructionists; however, do not label them as such (Galbin, 2014). Friedman (2011) noted that the

social constructionist approach concerning perceptions was implicitly discussed in previous literature on the theoretical approach. According to Payne (1997), an individual's ability to construct their perceptions of reality is permitted from their experiences of reality.

In recognition of the constructive role of language, the interview data are treated as narratives, however the data is not analysed in narrative form. This is because constructions of experiences and perceptions are developed through language as narratives, thus narratives as a vehicle of language are considered central to the social constructionist approach (Galbin, 2014). Frenwin (2007), believe that all narratives are social constructions as narratives are also subjective and concern language. There is a slight difference between narratives and stories however they are both intertwined (Fiese & Spagnola, 2005). A personal experience is usually told in the form of a story and it is viewed as the content and structure; the narrative is the process of attributing meaning to the story, which usually occurs within the story telling (Fiese & Spagnola, 2005). It is assumed that individuals make use of narrative structures, such as the form and content of a story, to construct their world and at the same time attribute meaning to it (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007). Thus, this study will focus on the way in which the young fathers make use of narrative structures to construct their worlds, in order to explore their perceptions of paternal involvement and how their constructed experiences of emotional support shape their perceptions of paternal involvement.

### **3.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How do young fathers perceive the importance of the father's emotional involvement with his child?
2. How does the young father's constructed experience of an emotional support system influence his own perceptions of the father's emotional involvement with his child?

### **3.3. SAMPLING**

In the literature, the difficulty of obtaining the sample of young fathers has been highlighted numerous times (Chideya & Williams, 2013; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). For this study the researcher strategised a new way of

recruiting participants, which has not used before in previous studies on young fatherhood conducted in South Africa. Initially the primary method of data collection was proposed, as recruiting participants from a support group that was supposed to be held in the specific community and facilitated by a registered counsellor. This facilitator had previously hosted support groups for women in the community with a large success rate. The facilitator had agreed to host an inaugural support group for young fathers in the community. It was arranged that the researcher would present the present study to an audience of young fathers, and the fathers who were interested in participating could voluntarily contact the researcher after the support group. The researcher was not acquainted with any of these potential voluntary participants. However, the facilitator was unavailable to host a support group due to unforeseen reasons. The researcher decided to continue the collection of data using the secondary strategy proposed which was word-of-mouth and social media platforms. According to Clyne, Pezaro, Deeny and Kneafsey (2018), online recruitment through social media platforms has been used to reach hard-to-reach groups. Since, young fathers form part of the vulnerable population groups, the researcher decided to use this method of recruitment for data collection. In addition, the researcher approached community members who are involved in community development projects amongst young people. This change diminished the possibility of a resulting effect of bias of the support group on the way in which young fathers may be coerced into a specific understanding of fathering. This factor has been identified as a potential limitation and its influence has been minimized in relation to findings for this study. This has also been noted at the end of the report under 'Limitations'.

As with other studies on young fathers (Chideya & William, 2013; Madiba & Nsiki, 2017) the researcher experienced significant challenges in obtaining a suitable sample of voluntary participants for the present study. Due to the challenges experienced, for example participants withdrawing and not attending the interviews, there have been some adjustments to obtaining a voluntary sample.

Another adjustment that was made was the change in the age ranges of the fathers, the ages of their children and the broadening of the sample site. The age ranges of the young fathers were first 14-19 years old; this was changed to 14-24 years old. The ages of the young fathers' children initially had to be at least 12 months old but this

was changed to the children being at least 6 months old. In addition, the first suburb was broadened to rest of the city and then the wider Johannesburg metropolitan area. All of these adjustments were as a result of the difficulty of locating and retaining of young fathers in the sample. The difficulty of locating young fathers has been highlighted in previous research (Chideya & Williams, 2013) and it was also experienced within the data collection process as with this study. A major concern for the researcher within this process was the disinterest of the potential participants and some participants within the study. Nine potential participants declined to participate in this study. One of these potential participants agreed to participate and then withdrew just before the interview. The reason for his withdrawal was that his parents and partner advised him against participating because he was completing his matric year and he has preliminary and final examinations to focus on. However, he chose not to participate even after the completion of his examinations.

Another potential participant chose not to participate due to the poor health of his child. He did not trust that this study was confidential and thought that his family would find out that his child's health issues was due to the mother of his child's substance abuse during pregnancy. Seven out of nine potential participants chose not to provide any reason for declining to participate and one did not arrive for the pre-arranged interview as agreed with the researcher beforehand. The researcher was assured an interview with the potential voluntary participant and upon arriving at the venue the participant did not arrive, and the researcher was unable to attain any contact with him thereafter. Within the original sample, only one participant showed interest in the research itself. He asked many questions concerning the research process, with a particular interest in the data analysis, and seemed eager to read the results of this study once it has been examined. When the researcher told the participant that the results of the study will be provided to him after examination, the participant giggled and declined the offer. This highlights the difficulty of focusing on this age group.

It is important to note that at the time of the interview, one participant was a student, and two participants were former students; at a school where a relative of the researcher was employed. However, this relative was not teaching any potential voluntary participants who were learners in that school at the time of the interview.

None of the participants knew of the researcher's relation to the said relative at the time of the interview. The researcher obtained the contact details of the participant who was a current learner at the school from the said relative, but participants remained unaware of this relation. It is important to note that the researcher and her relative do not share the same surname, thus there was no way in which the participants would know of their relation. Two more participants were approached by the researcher and they were informed that their former teacher referred them to the researcher, however they remained unaware of the researcher's relation to their former teacher throughout the research process.

As previously stated, the difficulties in obtaining a sample of young fathers have been noted in previous literature. Chideya and Williams (2013) and Enderstein and Boonzaier (2015) conducted research on young fathers in South Africa. They managed to obtain 10 and 6 participants respectively. However, Chideya and Williams (2013) highlight the difficulty that they experienced in obtaining their sample, emphasising the aid they received from organisations and schools that worked with adolescents, to help them find participants, such as the present study. There are many reasons, which they believe, are the causes of this difficulty, some of which are adolescent fathers fearing the possibility of prosecution for not paying maintenance, and some were embarrassed to admit to being a young father (Chideya & Williams, 2013). Most recent research on young fathers in South Africa obtained a sample of 25 participants (Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). However, Madiba and Nsiki (2017) also used the school setting to research young fathers with the help of the school's life orientation teacher.

This study attempted to use the same approach as the studies referred to in order to recruit participants. As previously discussed, the initial strategy was to recruit participants from what would have been a newly established support group. However, that did not succeed, and another sampling strategy had to be employed.

### **3.4. SAMPLE AND SITE**

The inclusion criteria for participation in this study comprised the following: young fathers must be between the ages of 14 to 24 years old, their child must be at least six

months old but not older than 17. As interviews were conducted in English, participants must be able to speak English. In addition, they had to reside in the Johannesburg metropolitan area.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2012), adolescent youth is defined as from the ages of 15 to 24 years old. The reason for the age of the child is due to research by Kalil et al. (2005) who suggest that during the first few months of the child's life, both the young parents undergo a decision-making process, which accompanies their adjustment to their role as a parent and the formation of a relationship with their child. The age of the child was initially proposed as at least one year old. However, due to the difficulty of recruiting young fathers the researcher decided to alter the age criterion in order to include voluntary participants with children older than six months of age. Individual interviews were conducted in English. The selection criteria did not extend to include race, employment status, or relationship status in order to widen potential sampling. The exclusion criteria for this sample were fathers below the age of 14 and above the age of 24, if their children were below six months of age, if they could not speak English, and if they resided outside of Johannesburg.

Initially, the sample site was limited to one suburb however this was broadened to the rest of the city due to the difficulty in locating and retaining participants. The sample site was thus extended to include the whole of the Johannesburg metropolitan area. The sample site was originally focused on the on the main suburb because the registered counsellor with whom it was arranged and agreed to facilitate the support group for young fathers, as initially proposed, worked in the community. The sample was drawn from two suburbs of a city which is on the East Rand of the Johannesburg metropolitan area, Gauteng, South Africa. Prior to 1994, during Apartheid, both these suburbs were designated for non-white settlement. They are situated adjacent to each other. During this period, the majority of people residing in the first suburb, in which the sample was drawn from, were from Indian, Coloured and Chinese population groups, which has remained largely unchanged. The second suburb was an area designated for Black people during apartheid. This community has also remained largely unchanged with a majority of the residents being Black South Africans. Post-1994, there has been a gradual increase in socio-economic challenges, such as

substance abuse, poverty and unemployment experienced within the first suburb. Post-apartheid research has highlighted the fact that poverty is still widespread, and is increasing, in most South African communities (Naidoo, 2010).

The sample in this study consisted of four young fathers, aged between 18 to 22 years old. All participants had one child at the time of data collection. The duration of fatherhood ranged from 6 months to four years old. Two of the participants were Black and the other two were Indian. Within this study, three participants resided in the same suburb and one participant resided in another suburb. All participants resided with their parents or guardians and were unmarried. Two participants were still in a romantic relationship with the mother of their child. Three participants had matriculated and of these three participants, two were employed full time. One participant was in grade 11 and unemployed. Thus, two participants were employed and the other two were unemployed. Although these groups of fathers make up only two of South Africa's many population groups, they each emanate from diverse circumstances.

### **3.5. SAMPLE DESCRIPTION**

This section summarizes the participants' biographical information; a summarized tabulation of this information is placed as *Appendix A*. Throughout this report, the participants are referred to by a pseudonym.

#### **Participant 1: Thabo**

Thabo is an 18-year-old father who was in grade 11 at the time of data collection and is thus unemployed. He resided with his grandmother in the second suburb and grew up without his biological parents. His grandmother raised him. Thabo had a son who was one year of age at the time of the interview. Thabo is the only parent involved in his child's life. When his son was 2 months old, the mother of his child left him with Thabo and ended their relationship, thus Thabo had to take on the role of primary caregiver. Thabo uses his time at school to gamble in order to financially support his child.

**Participant 2: Abdul**

Abdul is a 21-year-old father who lives with his parents in the first suburb. His son was six months old at the time of the interview. Abdul finished his schooling and interrupted his tertiary studies after one and a half years. He is unemployed and relies on his parents to provide financial support for him and his son. Abdul is still in a romantic relationship with the mother of his son, however, they do not co-reside. They do share the same residence during the weekends. Abdul does not see his child every day. He sees his child every weekend and a few weekdays.

**Participant 3: Gavin**

Gavin is a 22-year-old father who lives with his grandmother in the first suburb in the Johannesburg metropolitan area. His son was eighteen months old at the time of data collection. Gavin completed grade 12 schooling. His girlfriend became pregnant six months after he had completed grade 12. Gavin is employed full time and is no longer in a romantic relationship with the mother of his child. His son does not reside with him, but with the mother of the child. They experienced a mediated separation accompanied by a family plan. Gavin reported that he grew up without his biological father and was very close to his extended family. His mother is present in his life however; he does not reside with her.

**Participant 4: Zinhle**

Zinhle is a 21-year-old father who lives with his mother and grandmother in the first suburb. His son was four years old at the time of the interview and attended a crèche during the day. At the time of the interview, Zinhle was full time employed. Zinhle was turning 17 when he became a father and he was still in school. He finished his schooling. Zinhle is still in a romantic relationship with the mother of his child. Zinhle does not co-reside with his child or the mother of his child. However, they live in the same apartment building and he sees his child daily.

**3.6. SAMPLING STRATEGY**

The sampling strategy used was purposive, snowball sampling (Willig, 2013). Purposive sampling involves the process of choosing participants according to

specific criteria that is suitable for the research question of the study (Willig, 2013). This leads to a more homogenous sample of participants that share a common experience, which the research is focusing on (Willig, 2013). Snowball sampling is a non-probability strategy that entails the researcher recruiting potential volunteers through participant referral as well as from interested individuals who volunteer for participation subsequent to seeing a public notice or hearing about it from others (Suri, 2011). Social media, specifically Facebook, was also used as a platform to inform potentially interested individuals of this study. Invitations for participation were posted in various Facebook groups allocated to residents of the sample site. Participant information sheets with details of the focus of the study and what would be required for participation were provided to individuals who may have access to potential participants (*Appendix C*).

### **3.7. DATA COLLECTION**

Invitations for participation were placed on social media and word-of-mouth, through community members who may encounter potential participants. Such interested individuals provided their contact details to such community members to be given to the researcher. Other interested individuals contacted the researcher by email and short messaging service (SMS). The researcher contacted these potential participants telephonically and explained what the study entailed. After providing the participant information letter such interested individuals were invited to participate in the study. Once the participants had provided formal written informed consent (*Appendix D*), the researcher negotiated a time and venue for interviewing which was safe and suitable for both parties.

The study used individual semi-structured interviews. It has been found that interview narratives produce detailed accounts of personal (constructed) experiences (Fiese & Spagnola, 2005; Green et al., 2007). Semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to ask follow-up questions and thus explore the interviewee's experiences in more depth (Green et al., 2007). It also provides guidance in the form of prompts and rules, which is beneficial in expanding the meaning of a narrative (Fiese & Spagnola, 2005). According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2005), the interview in qualitative research enables the researcher to probe for greater understanding of the

meanings in a narrative during the process. This allows for a focus on the participants' subjective experiences in a more direct manner (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005).

One interview was conducted per participant. The interviews were conducted at a public venue close to where each participant resided, which ensured convenience for the participants. The venues included the boardroom of a primary school in one of the suburbs and in a quiet coffee shop. Two of the interviews were conducted at the primary school and the other two were conducted at the coffee shop. The length of the interviews ranged from 18 minutes to 35 minutes long. Although the duration of the interviews were intended to be longer, participants were reluctant to elaborate the articulation of their experiences in spite of additional probing from the interviewer during the interview. Three of the participants became resistant to articulating their feelings when becoming emotional and abruptly ended that part of the discussion, continuing with another aspect of their narrative. Participants chose not to discuss certain aspects of their lives and if they would they would address it only briefly. All interviews were conducted in the afternoon to accommodate participants who were attending school.

The interview schedule focused on the young fathers' understanding of their experience of paternity and their emotional support systems (*Appendix B*). The interview schedule included questions pertaining to the aims and focus of the study. Questions asked explored the young father's role in his child's life, his feelings about being a father, the fathering activities that he participated in, the father's relationship with the mother of the child and her family, the type of support he has received, and his perception of what a father is. In addition, participants were asked if there was anything else they wished to discuss or add. This gave them the opportunity to discuss anything that was valuable to them which was not asked or told while responding to the interview questions. This assisted in ensuring that participants were not left with a sense of incompleteness, dis-ease or confusion before parting from the interview. Questions pertaining to demographic and contextual information formed part of the introduction of the interview. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The researcher conducted all the interviews personally. It is considered beneficial for the researcher to assume the role of the interviewer for the study, as the understanding

and interpretation of data is a process co-created meaning through reconstructed subjective experience supports and adds depth to the analysis of raw data (Green et al., 2007). The researcher thus has thorough knowledge of the data, which leads to a more informed analysis (Green et al., 2007). Thorough acquaintance with the data results from the interviewer's awareness of nonverbal aspects gathered during the interview process, such as, facial expressions and a change in the interviewee's tone of voice when narrating certain experiences or emotions (Green et al., 2007). This enables the researcher to have a more holistic understanding of the data beyond the transcribed interviews and assists in the process of becoming immersed in the data (Green et al., 2007).

### **3.8. DATA ANALYSIS**

This study used a thematic analysis to analyse the data collected. This type of analysis is applicable to a social constructionist approach that was adopted for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a systematic method for identification and analysis of the classifications and themes of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). A high level of accuracy and intricacy is expected when conducting a thematic analysis because the researcher uses the whole content of data as a reference to the analysis of the frequency of a theme; which in turn enhances the meaning (Ibrahim, 2012).

According to Ibrahim (2012), thematic analysis is capable of identifying factors that influence an issue that is discussed during the interview process by the participant (Ibrahim, 2012). Thematic analysis is suitable for studies that have research questions focusing on the experiences of the participants as well as their constructions of certain phenomena (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This was suitable for this study based on the research questions. In addition, Clarke and Braun (2013) state that thematic analysis can be analysed for interview transcripts; it can be used to analyse smaller data sets and produce data-driven analyses. These are also reasons that add to its suitability for this study.

Due to the flexibility of thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish a list of properties that may alter the form of thematic analysis that one may use. They suggest that the researcher clarify these properties that inform the thematic analysis in

order for the reader to understand how the analysis was conducted and examine whether it is appropriate to the objectives of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this way, one may compare the results of this research to previous research accurately because they will understand how the analysis was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With regard to the themes in the thematic analysis, emphasis was placed on the importance of the information in relation to the research questions. The researcher codes the important information into themes that capture them. The prevalence of these themes is of secondary importance to the researcher.

The thematic analysis is used in this study, as it is also a data-driven enquiry. This is because the researcher found themes within the data set to answer specific research questions. In addition, there was no pre-existing framework of codes used in the analysis. Thus, the themes are identified using an inductive approach. The phases of analysis also indicate an inductive approach.

The themes within this analysis are latent themes. This means that thematic analysis scrutinises the data to find underlying meanings through implicit assumptions and ideas that inform the semantic themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This particular analysis is used to focus on constructions, this entails that an individual's experiences are both produced and reproduced socially, in addition they are shaped by the socio-cultural context (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This study followed the six phases of thematic analysis put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006). However, it is important to note that there is no linear sequence of order with these steps and the researcher has gone back and forth throughout these steps during the process of analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). Phase one of the thematic analysis involves the familiarisation with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher became familiar with the data through the process of reading and re-reading. The researcher was in an advantaged position by conducting the interviews and transcribing them. This is because familiarisation of the data occurs earlier in the research process through these two particular stages. The researcher also made notes while reading through the data of any particular information found.

Phase two involved the generation of initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the researcher was confident with her familiarisation with the data, the researcher went through the data once more and identified aspects of the data that were of interest. The researcher then focused on the prevalence of this information across the data set. These aspects were accumulated and given initial codes. Phase three involved the search for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase, the researcher sorted the codes to form specific themes. In other words, certain codes were grouped together to form themes. The researcher used a mind map in order to aid the process of forming themes from the codes.

Phase four involved the review of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher reviewed the themes in order to refine them based on many factors. This involved making sure that the themes did not overlap; if there was found to be strong convergence, such subthemes were combined into one theme. In some instances, a theme had to be separated to form another. In addition, the identified themes had to accurately represent the data set. The final stage of data analysis involved the naming of themes and the writing up of thematic findings and discussion thereof.

It is important to note that written interview transcripts were closely examined during the initial stage of analysis of data immersion by the researcher. Data immersion is a process of reading and re-reading through interview transcripts in order to fully familiarize oneself with the data (Green et al., 2007). Immersion is an important part of the process of data analysis because it contributes to attaining a deeper understanding of the topic being examined by connecting any elements that were initially identified as being related (Green et al., 2007).

### **3.9. RIGOUR AND CREDIBILITY**

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), the lens researchers use to validate the assumptions of the research paradigms determine the validity procedures used in a study. Validity is viewed as the accuracy of the account represented by the participant of their constructed experience and perceptions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). There are six types of validity procedures used in this study, namely, triangulation; researcher reflexivity; member checking; peer debriefing; the audit trail; and thick, rich

description (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation refers to the process of finding themes amongst common occurring information across multiple data sources (participants) and methods (interviews and observations) (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher engaged with this process through conducting the thematic analysis. Themes were found amongst each interview transcript from each participant. Researcher reflexivity ensures that biases are raised to the researcher's awareness, so that the data and interpretations of the data are not affected by it (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The researcher made use of a reflexive journal throughout the research process, a detailed discussion of the researcher's reflexivity may be found in the section below. Member checking is the process through which participants are asked if their narrative account was accurately recorded (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher contacted participants after the interview was conducted to ensure that the researcher understood all information correctly. Peer debriefing is the process in which someone with sufficient knowledge in the particular area of research reviews the research and data collection process and provide critical feedback in support of the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher's supervisor offered support during the research process, which included reviewing the research components. The audit trail entails the review of the research by an external reader (Creswell & Miller, 2000). At least two external examiners will review this report. Lastly, thick, rich description refers to the description of the setting, participants and the themes; this will ensure a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher has provided a detailed description of each component of the research process.

### **3.10. REFLEXIVITY**

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is important for the researcher to be aware of one's own theoretical position and values with regard to the research. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), researcher reflexivity involves the researcher sharing his/her own beliefs and biases held upon entering the study. This allows the researcher's position to be understood and ensures that these biases are minimized throughout the research process to strengthen the validity of the findings. This is

necessary in order for the unit of analysis to match the theoretical framework and methods used in the study. These need to be acknowledged and recognized by the researcher as one's own decision in order for the researcher to reduce biases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis requires much decision that is not explicit such as the decision to extract themes based on the occurrence of certain information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to aid the process of reflexivity, a reflexive journal should be used by the researcher and needs to be an active component of the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Due to the flexibility of a thematic analysis, the researcher had to create a guideline describing how the process of analysis would be approached to ensure that it is consistent throughout and it aligns with the objectives of the research and the theoretical framework. Braun and Clarke (2006) offered a description of various properties that shape the form of thematic analysis that could possibly be used. The researcher had to consider these possible properties and decipher which properties to include in the thematic analysis used in this study. This is important for the analysis to be reliable and suitable for the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout the process of analysing the data, the researcher constantly reflected on these issues in order to maintain a consistent and precise analysis that generates trustworthy results. These properties are further discussed in the data analysis section of this report. Prior to data analysis, the researcher carefully considered these properties and made an informed decision guiding analysis. Throughout the process of analysis, with the aid of a reflexivity journal, the researcher went back and forth to ensure that this guide matched the process of analysis.

The researcher is an adult Indian female, who has never had children, and interviewed young men who are fathers. The researcher's age, race and gender may affect the responses of the young fathers during the interview process. The researcher is not much older than the participant's ages. This may possibly aid the participants' responses because they may feel as though the researcher could understand their circumstance without feeling judged by an authority figure. The difference in the level of education may hinder their responses. This may be viewed as the power asymmetry in the interview process (Kvale, 2006). In addition, because the interviewer sets the scripts to conform to the research interest, it creates a conversation that is hierarchical

and instrumental (Kvale, 2006). Henceforth, the interviewees may feel as though the researcher is approaching them from an educational stance, which induces a power dynamic in the interview process. The reasoning behind this understanding is due to the following response the researcher received when one of the participants were asked if he would like to tell the researcher anything else. Thabo: *“I would love to talk about that but you have to ask me questions in your point of view not in the book”*.

The only item the researcher had in front of her was the interview schedule and through his gesture it was clear that he was not referring to it. The participant also had access to the interview schedule. Due to the difference in gender between the researcher and the participants, the participants may not respond in the same way as they would if the researcher was male (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). In circumstances where the father is experiencing custodial problems with the mother of his child, he may feel as though the researcher would side with the mother of the child due to their shared gender. In Swartz and Bhana (2009), it was reported that males were more successful than females at recruiting young males to participate in their study on young fathers.

The researcher’s racial group could be viewed as a hindrance to the participants’ response during the interview (West & Blom, 2017). There was no significant difference in the responses from the different racial groups of participants. However, the participants who were of the same race as the interviewer seemed to have warmed up faster toward the researcher during the interview process. Participants who shared the same racial group as the researcher appeared more relaxed and less guarded during the interview. This indicated a level of comfort. They also used the phrase ‘you know’ in their discussion whereas the other participants did not. This is reflective of the assumption of shared knowledge. Gavin, for example, an Indian participant, discussed problems that he had with regard to his child’s mother denying him access to his child, and made a joke about Indian people: *“I don’t know why Indian people are like that”*.

This indicates a level of comfort with the interviewer; it reflected his assumption that the interviewer understood what he meant. The researcher probed throughout all the

interviews for direct clarification and explanations from the participants. This was to ensure that information was interpreted correctly. The researcher's race did aid in her interpretations with the participants of the same race. However, probing was still used to improve accuracy.

The researcher lived in the main suburb (sample site) until she was three years of age, and it was a community in which her parents grew up. The researcher also has extended family members who still reside in the community. This may influence the interpretations made by the researcher due to her familiarity of the community and how people have adapted to their surroundings. Many people in the main suburb still have the value of community in the sense where they look after each other. Thus, the researcher has a deeper understanding of the participants' lifestyles, which aided in data analysis.

### **3.11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand was obtained. Data collection only commenced after this. After ethical clearance was obtained, participation information letters were provided to the potential participants in explanation of the aims and focus of this study. The participation information letter provided a thorough explanation of the purpose of the study as well as the researcher's contact details (*Appendix C*).

Written informed consent was obtained prior to the interview (*Appendix D*). Both the participant and the researcher signed the informed consent form before the interview began. The form was for the consent to participate in the study, which includes and interview that is audio-recorded. It also included, the consent to the use of direct quotations in the reporting of the findings. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and the data was kept on a computer in password-protected files. Participants received a written copy of their interview transcript and will be able to access the results of the study after the thesis has been examined.

According to Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden (2000), ethical issues arise from all types of research. The main concern of ethics is to critically engage in the possible issues

which may arise from the specific research project, in order to avoid harm and do good (Orb et al., 2000). The information in the informed consent sheet was collated through the researcher's interrogation of potential ethical issues arising from qualitative research, with the intention to minimize them as much as possible. According to Orb et al. (2000), the participant has the right to be informed of the details of the study, the right to decide whether they want to participate and the right to withdraw at any time. The participants in this study were provided with a participant information sheet which contains information on the study and participation in this study was voluntary.

The researcher acknowledged unequal power relations occurring in the exchange during data collection. This was identified by Jelsma and Clow (2005) as a force which prevents the participants to withdraw from participation. Participants were allowed stop the interview at any time and withdraw from participating at any time prior to the write up of the final report without any negative consequences. In addition, the possibility for participants to choose not to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable was indicated in the informed consent sheet. According to Orb et al. (2000), a non-skewed relationship between the researcher and participant, in terms of power, will increase trust, the amount of information discussed, the type of information discussed and the increase awareness of possible ethical issues.

It is important for participants to be protected from any potential harm (Orb et al., 2000). According to Jelsma and Clow (2005), it is possible for an individual who is knowledgeable of the sample site in which the research occurs, to identify the participant based on information discussed, such as the participants' experiences and circumstances. The researcher ensured that participant information that could identify them was not included in the research report thus confidentiality was ensured. Thus, the names of the sample site were not revealed in the written report, and participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identity. Only the researcher and her supervisor had access to the interview transcripts

According to Jelsma and Clow (2005), if a circumstance arises where a particular type of support and services is needed, it is the researcher's responsibility to refer the

participants to organisations and institutions which offer these services free of charge. In the event of emotional distress arising as a result of participation, participants were provided with access to free counselling information provided in the letter and the interview. Following the interview participants were informed of various organisations that offer free counselling although only one organisation was indicated on the original participant information sheet. At the end of the interview and informal discussion on the participant's access to various support services, such as school guidance counsellors and church/religious facilities that offer support were discussed with the participants. This discussion was tailored to their experiences. For example, the researcher spoke to the participants who described themselves as religious about the support that churches offer. The researcher asked the participants if they ever spoke to their church leaders and if they identify the church as a place that they could go to. The researcher was reassured by the participant's discussions of the places they would choose to go to for support if they felt the need.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

A thematic analysis was conducted in order to investigate the following research questions: 1) how young fathers perceived the importance of the father's emotional involvement with his child; 2) how does the young father's constructed experience of an emotional support system influence his own perceptions of the father's emotional involvement with his child. The aims of this study guided the analysis, in order to report on the findings, which answer the specific research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic findings will be presented in this chapter.

Thematic findings consisted of three main themes. These were 'constructed experiences of young fathers', 'constructions of fatherhood', and 'the role of emotional support'. The themes 'constructions of fatherhood' and 'the role of emotional support' consisted of subthemes.

'Constructions of fatherhood' had two subthemes, namely, 'the good father' as and 'fatherhood as 'ownership''. The theme 'The role of emotional support' also had two subthemes, namely, 'the role of emotional support in the transition into fatherhood' and 'the role of emotional support in enabling father-child contact'.

In addition to this, the subtheme 'the role of support in father-child contact' was further divided into the themes, 'father's parenting practices' and 'constructions of paternal involvement through experiences of parental absence'.

#### **4.2. CONSTRUCTED EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG FATHERS**

This theme captures the significant effects and constructed experiences of the participants' role as young fathers. Every participant reported experiencing personal growth. Thabo said, "*It gave me the opportunity to experience life in a different way*" and Zinhle said, "*I started seeing life differently*". All the participants described the emotional growth they experienced when they became a father, and also expressed their newfound love for children by describing caregiving activities pertaining to their

own children. Zinhle described these activities as, “*look after him, love him, take care of him*”.

In addition to these activities with their own children, some participants also described caregiving activities with regard to other children in their community. Zinhle described his emotional growth as being able to love all children since becoming a father: “*It’s like even to other children I treat them like my own, I have that love for children now*”. Zinhle said, “*I did like children but I never used to play with them and all that so he gave me that thing of loving children.*”

All the participants expanded on their discussion of growth by discussing responsibility. However, their discussion of responsibility differed according to their unique circumstances. Abdul summed up his experience of fatherhood as: “*It’s a good experience, something to change you...make you more responsible and see life how it is...that there is a responsibility that comes with it*”. In the excerpt below, Abdul notes that being a financial provider is important, but because he cannot assume that role, he provides emotional support: “*Yes it is important unless if you can’t like, as in me if I don’t support the child financially then how will I support him, I have to, you know... It’s not that I have to it’s that I want to look after him. It’s my own child I would want to grow him up not other people growing him up and stuff, you know*”. It is clear that he could not provide financial support

Gavin stated that he has matured emotionally and become more responsible because of fatherhood and that he experienced emotional growth as his son developed: “*I might even have another child but for now he’s my ever ending...It’s unexplainable ‘cause seeing him from day one coming into this world and then each day as he grows...it impacted me quite a bit ‘cause it made me more mature, my understanding is much deeper...I think ultimately maturity and responsibility, gotta think about him first before myself...Put him first, as long as he’s good I’m good*”

In addition to the emotional development, two of the fathers discussed the excitement they feel about their children achieving developmental milestones. Gavin and Zinhle expressed excitement for the milestones that their children have yet to achieve. Gavin said, “*I think that also, his first steps, he’s mumbling now. I don’t know what he’s*

*trying to say but I'm sure he'll start talking soon. I can't wait for that, so that will be an addition."* Zinhle discussed his son's graduation that will be held in the following year. He described feeling proud of it. He furthered this by providing an explanation for feeling proud: *"'Cause he's growing the right way, he's graduating ready to go to school and he's getting big now"*.

All of the participants highlighted the bond that they have with their children. Abdul expressed the experience of a strong emotional bond with his child while describing experiences that stood out for him. These were medical experiences; one was his son's circumcision and the other is when his son gets injections: *"I couldn't watch, I had to go out...he was crying, my heart was just broken. That's what I won't forget... and every Monday they have to go for injections and the nurse will tell us this injection is painful and you know you'll feel it... because it's your son you'll feel it"*. The emotions felt by Abdul when describing his emotional care for his child is indicative of the father's perception of the bond that they share. Gavin described his connection with his child: *"There's like a connection that I feel with him...that I know he's my son and he knows that I'm his dad. It's not all about, being there financially ...Spending time with him, growing a bond you know, ultimately trying to maintain that happiness in the family as a whole also"*.

### **4.3. CONSTRUCTIONS OF FATHERHOOD**

This theme captures the fathers' perceptions of fatherhood. There are two subthemes, namely, 'Perceptions of the 'good father' as emotionally present' and 'Perceptions of fatherhood as 'ownership'.

#### **4.3.1 THE GOOD FATHER**

Within the data, all the participants described the role of a 'good father'. Thabo provided two descriptions of a good father *"someone who can look after their baby, someone who can spend time with his boy or girl...that makes a good father"* and *"...going out, getting the chance to know him and what he loves"*. Abdul described a good father as someone who is there for his child: *"Just always being there for him...trying not to miss anything"*. Zinhle described a good father as *"being there for his child, loving his child, taking care of his child, and spending time with him"*.

Gavin's description of a good father: *"A good father is a father that decides to be there for his child... from day one."* Three of the participants included financial provision in their description of a good father, however they emphasized that it was not the only important aspect of fatherhood. Some expressed financial support as less important. Within Gavin's discussion, he highlighted, *"I mean obviously a good father has to make sure that the baby's needs are taken care of but it's not all about financial support, you need to give them emotional support"*. To emphasize his belief that emotional support is of greater importance than financial support, Zinhle used the example of his experience from being a school-going father to being employed, *"There's no difference, I always did what I did, just now that I work I do for him more"*.

To his description of a good father, Gavin added the following: *"It's being responsible, mature about everything. Always putting him first in whatever I do."* Gavin further added that that was the type of father his child needs, *"He also needs that. So my role is like, I have to be there and I have to just make sure everything gets done for him"*. Thabo described his fatherhood role as a responsibility, he said, *"We were not together but she told me she was pregnant so for me to deny the child would be like running from a responsibility"*. Some of the participants described their roles as a father, which parallel their descriptions of a good father. Zinhle described his role: *"To look after him, love him, take care of him."* He added to this by expressing that part of his role is to be there: *"By doing anything and everything for him and being there for him, supporting him"*. Gavin also expressed: *"Always putting him first in whatever I do"*.

Both Gavin and Abdul expressed their desire to be there. Abdul described his desire as voluntary: *"Going to visit him, wanting to be there...not just going because I have to...going because you want to"*. However, in order to 'be there' for their children, some participants had to overcome obstacles or make some compromises in their lives in order to fulfil the role of a 'good father'. Gavin discussed being denied access to his child: *"I want to be there for him and I want to do a lot more for him. So, it was heart-breaking, that's why I decided there and then that I'm not going to lose him, so I took it to court and I won"*. He furthered this: *"Also because I mean I support him I want to be there. In certain cases some fathers don't want anything to have to do with"*

*their children, they'll just make as if they don't have children". Zinhle described compromise as a greater sense of responsibility to care for his child, "I had to start thinking for my child so that's how my life had to change. Less partying, just to be there for my child". Zinhle described that time in his life as: "It's a bit of pressure for me 'cause I had to see to my girlfriend, schoolwork, baby and all that so it was hard".*

Participants also voiced their desire to spend time with their children. Gavin said, *"If I had my way I'd be like, he'd be with me always...I don't think I'd ever go anywhere without him...Just be there twenty-four seven with him."* All of the participants discussed adjustments in their lives in order to spend time with, and be there for their children. Abdul reported that he spent less time socializing with friends than he usually would prior to becoming a father: *"I've become more responsible. Like before, most weekends I would go out with my friends and come home morning hours. Now most of the time, I'm at home with my girlfriend with the baby we will go out together. So it changed me like becoming more close with her...grow fonder of each other"*.

Thabo discussed his experience of spending time with his child: *"We love spending time together, I love spending time with my child and I don't have time for a girlfriend and stuff 'cause most of the time I'm with my child"*. Thabo explicitly stated that spending time with his son was emotionally rewarding because it made him happy: *"I feel happy 'cause most of the time I spend time with my child so I like, I feel happy"*. Zinhle described the day his child started walking: *"I was happy; I was there on the first day when he started walking"*. This confirms his perception of the importance of spending time with his child. Another emotional reward that accompanies spending time with their children is the feeling of completion. Gavin said: *"Most people say life's a journey, I feel like my journey is complete just by having him around. He's like the sparkle, his smile his ways, even though he fights with me. There's no words that honestly I'd say can describe how I feel especially from a father towards him, he's my ever ending"*.

#### 4.3.2 FATHERHOOD AS “OWNERSHIP”

All the participants in this study expressed ownership within their discussions of their fatherhood role. All the participants expressed positive emotions attached to having a child, and their responses to becoming a father displayed a sense of ownership. Zinhle said, *“I felt happy knowing that I would have another me”*. Not only did Zinhle feel happy, he also felt proud when asked how he feels about having another him; his one word response is *“proud”*. This represents pride in the continuity of lineage. Although it is not explicitly stated, there is a sense of ownership expressed in this excerpt. Abdul said, *“I was excited ‘cause to have something of your own is different you know”*. Thabo said: *“Everyone deserves a chance in life and I gave my child I gave my child a chance in life to come in this world.”* Gavin said, *“As her tummy started to get bigger I was kinda looking forward to having him.”*

Most of the participants in this study described the way in which they raise their child as “the right way”. Zinhle described his fatherhood role in raising his son as, *“showing him the right way”*. These involved morals, values, religion, and the importance of education. Zinhle described what he teaches his child: *“Not to swear...how to talk to people, greet elderly people. Treat people with respect”*. Abdul said, *“So you must just grow the child up right, teach him manners you know, not to be rude”*. In the excerpt below, Gavin discussed his attempt to parent his son in a similar way to how he was raised: *“I think it all depends on family morals and values, I try my best to continue growing him up the way that I was brought up. Having respect you know table manners whatever. I instil some of my values that I’ve grown up with and I’m sure ‘cause he’s most of the time with his, as I said she doesn’t work so she’s with him during the week”*.

In addition, Gavin discussed the importance of religion, values and morals when he described his child’s baptism: *“I think I was his age when I was baptized...It’s a religious thing...I felt that religion is very important in life you have to follow something. You know, prayer is good. That’s a start for him religion wise that’s why it makes me proud...he’ll know one day, learn why did we do it for him, of what importance it was to us and to him also...to have guidance and ultimately his values and morals”*.

#### **4.4. THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**

This theme captures the way in which the role of emotional support affects the participant's transition into fatherhood, as well as their role of support in father-child contact. These two categories form the subthemes. The subtheme, 'the role of emotional support in enabling father-child contact' is further divided and categorized into 'the fathers' parenting practices' and 'constructions of paternal involvement through experiences of parental absence'.

##### **4.4.1 THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN THE TRANSITION INTO FATHERHOOD**

This theme captures the role of support on participants and the participants' transition into fatherhood. Within their discussions, all the participants in this study made reference to fatherhood being another stage in one's life; Abdul said, *"I have to grow up sometime in my life"*. Zinhle explained his nervousness of becoming a father, *"Because I'm still young, didn't know anything about fatherhood."* However, they all expressed the way in which the transition into this next stage of their lives was aided by their emotional support systems. Gavin said, *"emotional support and being a father has taught me a lot more than I thought I knew about myself also in a way, like I mean it's deep...it's very vast coz you learn a lot of new things if it's your first...he's my first child I didn't really know what to expect and what to do... I take it day by day if I do need advice from family I always ask my mom"*. When describing the support from his grandmother, Thabo said, *"I won't say it changed me but it made me a better person 'cause it gave me that responsibility"*.

Emotional support consists of advice received by the participants from their family, friends and the mother of the child's family, as well as their behaviour towards the participant. Gavin explained this in his discussion of his experience of emotional support: *"I mean their feelings towards me, their emotions, the way they see me not only as a father, as still a nephew as a son. I feel it's as if they don't only see me as a father they haven't forgot that I am still a son to them. With them it's two different types of advice it's fatherly advice and then there's like normal everyday life advice like normal, do this do that and I must stop this most of the time"*. Gavin confirmed that the support he received affected his role as a father. Gavin explained how it

affected him, *“In a way it ties up, the two types of advice that I get helps me be better towards him, it helps me to remain calm in situations, if I’m stressed”*.

Participants expressed the reassurance that they received from their support systems’ acceptance of their fatherhood role. Zinhle described the way in which both the families reacted to the news of the pregnancy, *“it was a big fight”*. Zinhle said, *“It broke me at times, it felt like I didn’t want to be a father but then they made peace with it I was ok”*. Two participants described the reassurance received from their friends. Abdul explained that his friends reassured him that it is normal to care for his son: *“It shows me that there is other people that care...it’s not something that is new to care for someone, you must, it’s your own blood, flesh”*. Zinhle described this when he described their reaction to the pregnancy, *“They were encouraging”*. Gavin discussed how his cousin provided him with reassurance, *“...being a first time father I didn’t know what to expect and how to deal... I have an older cousin so I used to talk to him about...he doesn’t have a child so it was more for emotional support and some advice. I was a bit nervous...I didn’t know whether I wanted to be a father or not but as I said after time went it became less stressful”*.

One of the participants also experienced support from the mother of his child’s family when he was denied access to see his son on multiple occasions. Gavin stated: *“...I approached her family about it...Apparently her mom did the same to her dad when she was small so I’m not sure was it the mom telling her to do this also...So her uncle advised me, he said go to court, apply for visitation rights. So I went, I left it for about a month and then it happened again that she denied me access to him so then I said I’m tired and I’m not going to sit back and take this lightly”*.

#### **4.4.2 THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN ENABLING FATHER-CHILD CONTACT**

This theme encapsulates the ways in which the father’s experience of emotional support in both their childhood and youth affect their fathering roles. It is further divided into ‘the role of support in father’s parenting practices’ and ‘the role of own experience of being raised with parental absence on perceptions of paternal involvement’.

#### 4.4.2.1 THE FATHERS' PARENTING PRACTICES

All of the participants described how their support systems influenced their parenting practices by providing them with knowledge, which they learnt and understood. All of the participants discussed actively learning from the advice that they received from their family. Zinhle and Gavin provided explanations for how this learnt information is used. Zinhle discussed the advice that he received from his family by imitating the type of lectures they gave him: *"You shouldn't do this with your child you should do that, you shouldn't be more with your friends you should be there with your child, like that"*. He explained that the advice he received in the form of lectures influenced his role as a father: *"Like if they stop encouraging me, being there for me and showing me the right way that would impact me"*.

Gavin discussed the advice that he received from his mom, uncle and aunties. Within his discussion, Gavin also included the impact of their behaviour towards him: *"Their emotions and their words towards me it's not always you know the one's you'd love to hear everyday. It's harsh at times but it's good it's motivating it's inspiring also, and at the end of the day when things do happen it's the advice that that seeps in you and makes you understand things a little more clearly"*. In contrast to the participants learning from advice given to them, Abdul described being taught certain possible aspects of fatherhood through observing the emotional involvement of other fathers in their child's lives: *"I see with him what he does with his children, you know he takes them for swimming. I think of that as my son will grow up obviously, I'll want to also take him there. So seeing other people with their children, what they do, you also want that for your child"*.

In addition to observing his friends, he also reflected on his childhood, Abdul said: *"Grow him up the right way, you don't spoil him too much otherwise you know once you spoil them too much they get out of hand and whatever. Like see me, I won't lie I'm very spoilt at home that's why I don't even work or anything coz they spoil me."*

#### **4.4.2.2 CONSTRUCTIONS OF PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT THROUGH EXPERIENCES OF PARENTAL ABSENCE**

Thabo and Gavin experienced growing up without a parent. Thabo discussed not having a mother and a father at the very beginning when he was asked how he felt about being a father, *“I did not feel good ‘cause I’m a teenager and for me growing up without a mother and father it’s difficult for me ‘cause my grandmother is old”*. This was not the first time that Thabo discussed the difficulties of being a young father without parental support: *“First of all growing up for me without a parent, it was difficult. For me to have a child like it’s difficult coz when time goes by I have to look at other people and see what they do and then from there take it up to me and show my child love and for my granny to show me that love it’s a great thing”*.

Gavin grew up without a father: *“My mom was obviously the first to know, I don’t have a dad so my uncle was the first fatherly figure that I spoke to and he took it in a way that was kinda unexpected because he’s like the matriarch of the family and everyone looks up to him. I was nervous I was scared out of my boots, after we spoke about it he was cool, he just told me that things are going to change and I have to act the part now and be more responsible and it was quite shocking but they were very supportive”*.

Thabo discussed playing soccer with his son as one of the activities that he and his son enjoyed doing together: *“I feel happy ‘cause I did not get that opportunity to play ball with my dad”*. In addition, he furthered his discussion on the way in which growing up without a father motivated him to be emotionally involved in his child’s life. Thabo stated: *“Yes it does ‘cause for me many things I did not do with my dad so like I tell myself that this is not the fault of my child, it’s the fault of my dad so for me I want to do everything for my child, not being able to grow up without a father I want him to feel loved and to know that his dad loved him and made everything that he could”*.

In this excerpt, the concept of love is discussed again; this indicates that the father’s role involves showing his child love. When asked to explain what he meant by saying it is not the fault of his child it is the fault of his father, he responded: *“I mean I should not blame my child, the person that I should blame is my dad, so I would not*

*do what my dad did to me. I want to become a better person and give my child a different way, that I didn't have as I grew up without a father". Gavin understood the importance of the parental role in a child's life: "I was gonna actually file for sole custody over him but I realized that he needs his mom as much as she hurts me".*

#### **4.5. CONCLUSION**

This chapter discussed the results from the thematic analysis used to analyse the data. The researcher identified three primary themes within the data, namely; constructed experiences of young fathers; constructions of fatherhood; and the role of emotional support. In addition, all the subthemes were also discussed. The young fathers in this study described the personal growth they experienced from their emotional involvement in their children's lives, as well as the formation of the bond between them and their children. They also discussed the emotional rewards that accompanied their bond with their children and their development as fathers. The participants constructed understanding of a 'good father' as emotionally present, and of fatherhood as 'ownership' were emphasized, which accompanied the ingrained duty to fulfil these roles. Emotional support systems were reported as an influence to their involvement in their children's lives through their advice and behaviour. They soothed the transition into fatherhood and provided these young fathers with reassurance of their roles and duties. These fathers' involvement in their children's lives were actively learnt through the guidance of their support systems. In addition, the fathers' constructed experiences of their own parental absence while growing up, influenced their roles as fathers.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a summary of the findings presented in the preceding chapter. In addition, it integrates literature on existing studies, in order to indicate how the findings of this study relate to them. This study aimed to examine young fathers' constructed understanding of the importance of their emotional involvement with their children. It also aimed to explore whether young fathers might be more involved in fathering their children if these fathers had a stronger emotional support system behind them. This study included two research questions, namely: How do young fathers perceive the importance of the father's emotional involvement with his child? How does the young father's constructed experience of an emotional support system influence his own perceptions of the importance of the father's emotional involvement with his child? The second research question informs the first research question to a certain extent. This will also be discussed in this chapter. Three main themes were identified. These were: constructed experiences of young fathers, constructions of fatherhood, and the role of support.

Constructed experiences of young fathers captured the effects of the experiences of fatherhood on these young fathers' lives. The young fathers in this study constructed their experience of personal growth, and growth in the formation of a bond between them and their children. This was found to be emotionally rewarding for these fathers.

The themes 'constructions of fatherhood' and 'the role of emotional support' consisted of subthemes. 'Constructions of fatherhood' had two subthemes, namely, 'the good father' and 'fatherhood as 'ownership''. Constructions of fatherhood captured the ways in which the young fathers perceived the fatherhood roles. The fathers described the role of a good father as being emotionally present, and within their discussions, expressed their feelings of ownership. Both constructions influenced how the fathers behaved toward their children. This behaviour was perceived as an ingrained duty.

The theme ‘the role of emotional support’ also had two subthemes, namely; ‘the role of emotional support in the transition into fatherhood’ and ‘the role of emotional support in enabling father-child contact’. The role of support captured the ways in which the fathers’ emotional support systems influenced their transition into fatherhood, and their contact with their children, through the advice they provided them with and their behaviour towards them. It also included the effect of parental absence in these young fathers’ childhoods on their constructions of their fatherhood role. Hence, the subtheme ‘the role of emotional support in enabling father-child contact’ was further divided into the themes, ‘the father’s parenting practices’ and ‘constructions of paternal involvement through experiences of parental absence’.

This chapter will discuss these themes and provide an explanation of where the findings are situated within existing literature on young fathers. This chapter will compare its findings to previous literature, which focused on adult fathers and young fathers. It is important to note that the researcher’s connection to this community may have had an impact on the data analysis. This has been discussed in chapter three (method) of this report as part of the section on reflexivity. However, none of the participants have any knowledge of this information, therefore it could not have affected their responses during the interview.

## **5.2. CONSTRUCTED EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG FATHERS**

The ‘constructed experiences of young fathers’ is a theme that captures the experiences of fatherhood and how they affect the young fathers’ lives. Emotional involvement in their children’s lives has resulted in the young fathers in this study feeling a sense of personal growth. In previous literature, there have been different beliefs of the way in which manhood is reached with regard to fatherhood and young fathers (Bade 2012; Lehti et al., 2012; Morrell, 2006). Growth has been documented as being part of a young father’s transition into fatherhood, which was sometimes viewed as a pathway to manhood (Hendricks et al., 2010; Morrell, 2006). Although this growth was termed as more of a physical maturity, Morrell (2006) and Hendricks et al. (2010) noted that it also entails the development of social skills in order to achieve intimacy. The young fathers in this study have expressed growth as the difference in the way they see life after becoming a father. They expressed this

growth as occurring after becoming a father and being emotionally involved in their children's lives, as opposed to existing literature which captures fatherhood as a means to develop into a man (Hendricks et al. 2010; Morrell, 2006). Personal growth encompassed various types, one being maturity and responsibility, and the other being emotional growth.

The participants have expressed an increase in maturity and responsibility since becoming fathers. This is in contrast to another belief described in Morrell (2006), in which the expectations of manhood were to be able to take on the role of the father, because these fathers placed emphasis on their emotional involvement leading to their growth. They described being a father as a way of maturing emotionally and psychologically, and referred to this growth as a result of being an emotionally involved father in their children's lives. According to Madiba and Nsiki (2017), improved behaviour has been documented as a result of becoming a father. The young fathers in this study expressed responsible fathering as a product of their emotional and psychological development. It is important to note that the participants in this study described emotional involvement as a responsibility, which is consistent with existing literature in which young fathers expressed their responsibility to be an active parent in their child's life (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Mazembo et al., 2013). However, the fathers also described their children's growth as leading to their own growth. At the same time as assuming this responsibility, they expressed how they developed into mature and responsible fathers. Thus, emotional involvement serves as a catalyst to becoming a responsible father and is also a product of responsibility. This is also a contrast to the perception of younger fathers as irresponsible (Bhana & Nkani, 2014).

In addition, these fathers described their emotional development since becoming a father. The fathers in this study also expressed that their emotional growth involved the expansion of their biological fatherhood role into the social fatherhood role. According to Morrell (2006) and Rabe (2012), a social father is someone who takes care of a child who is not biologically his. Activities such as playing with, and emotions such as loving other children, indicated that these fathers have taken on a social fathering role as well. Mavungu (2013), found that caregiving activities were identified as a role of the father's female partners. However in this study, the fathers

identified with the fatherhood role of caregiving, and emphasized that it is extended to all children in their communities, in addition to their own children. This also indicates that the social fatherhood role emerges from the emotional development of the father. They take on the role of ‘Talking Fathers’, which was named by Ratele et al. (2012), as a form of care that was nurturing. Personal growth in itself has been viewed as rewarding to these fathers. The young fathers perceived the importance of their emotional involvement in their children’s lives as not only beneficial for their children, but for them as fathers as well (Richter, 2006).

In addition, both their emotional growth and their children’s growth led to positive feelings. For example, Gavin highlighted the fact that *“his journey is complete”* after becoming a father and discussed how both his emotional growth and his child’s development has led to this feeling of contentment. This finding is consistent with the suggestion that the father’s emotional involvement in their child’s life, such as caregiving activities, may result in their own personal growth, which leads to feelings of happiness and gratification (Richter, 2006). The fact that Gavin mentioned wanting to have another child also indicates how emotionally rewarding being emotionally involved in his current child’s life is. The fathers in this study expressed positive feelings associated with their children’s milestones. This finding disproves the stereotypical view in which fathers are perceived as uninterested in their children’s lives, as discussed in Cronje (2012). The fathers in this study have expressed pride in the milestones that their children have achieved, and most participants expressed excitement for the milestones that their children have yet to achieve. Excitement is a sign of enjoyment; it gives the fathers something to look forward to in their lives. In addition, contentment was expressed in the fathers’ discussions of both their and their children’s development. This adds to the argument in Clark et al. (2015), which states that most men do not fit into the stereotype of an uninterested father, including young fathers.

Whilst discussing their personal growth, participants have also discussed the growth of the bond between them and their children that has resulted from being emotionally involved in their children’s lives. Thus, in addition to growing individually, the young father and child grow closer, which strengthens the bond between them. This bond occurs at birth and strengthens as the father and child develop simultaneously. It is

also described as an intrinsic form of identification between them and their child. Within the literature, the child's identity was described as stemming from cultural roots (Mazembo et al., 2013). For example, the fathers in the study by Mazembo et al. (2013), feared that their absence would lead to a decline in their children's cultural identity. Within this study the quote, *"There's like a connection that I feel with him...that I know he's my son and he knows that I'm his dad"*, refers to a more personal form of identification between father and child. The strength of this bond is apparent in the example of the father 'feeling for his child'. For instance, Gavin said, *"as long as he's good I'm good"*. This signifies the bond that they share; it is as if the father begins to feel the child's emotions, which encourages him to make sure his child is okay. This notion of 'feeling for one's son' is consistent with previous literature. In Morrell (2006), it was noted that fatherhood entails the notion that the child forms part of the father's identity.

It is important to note that all the participants experienced strong emotional bonds with their children, in spite of non-residential status or age. They all described a "connection" with their children, as a form of identification whereby they both know who the other is, even if they did not see each other everyday. This is consistent with literature which states that even though fathers do not live with their children, i.e. physically absent; they are still emotionally involved in their children's lives (Clark et al., 2015; Mavungu, 2013; Morrell, 2006).

In addition, this bond has shown to be emotionally rewarding. With this form of identification, they expressed a sense of belonging, which they received from the bond that they share. It is clear that the emotional involvement with one's child brings about a connection between the father and his child through the bond that is formed, giving them a sense of belonging. In the literature, the father's presence in his child's life is important for the child to experience a cultural identity and connection with their ancestors, which is essentially a sense of belonging (Mazembo et al., 2013). However in this study, the fathers described how their presence formed a bond between them and their children, which lead to their own sense of belonging.

Participants also described contentment and happiness as a result of this bond between them and their children. An interesting finding is that the participants placed

emphasis on the way in which a bond with their children will maintain the happiness in their family. According to Ratele et al. (2012), the role of the father is of importance because he is the head of the home. The fathers in this study indicated their role as the head of their homes by describing the ways in which they take the initiative to shape their homes, as well as the influence that they have on their homes. Participants have described trying to maintain happiness within their homes. It is clear that this is viewed as their role, which is evidence of the shift in the father's role within in the homestead to taking care of their family's emotional wellbeing. Many shifts in the fathers' roles within the homestead have been documented throughout time (Hunter, 2006). These have been caused by contextual changes affecting the fathers' construction of masculinity, and in turn their fatherhood roles (Hunter, 2006).

### **5.3 CONSTRUCTIONS OF FATHERHOOD**

There is an ingrained fatherhood duty that stems from the perceptions of fatherhood in which the young fathers have constructed. In other words, how they perceive fatherhood affects their fatherhood behaviours. According to Cronje (2012), the way in which the fathers' perceptions are constructed, is in their strive to understand their own worlds. It is important to note that these constructions are also culturally shaped (Cronje, 2012). The subthemes in this section are: 'the good father' and 'fatherhood as 'ownership''. Within these subthemes, the fathers indicate how their behaviour attempts to parallel their constructed understanding of the fathering role.

#### **5.3.1 THE GOOD FATHER**

The young fathers in this study discussed their perceptions of the role of a 'good father'. According to Cronje (2012) an individual's perception of the good father, is shaped by the media, their cultural beliefs, traditions and religious affiliations. Although most of the young fathers included financial provision as a characteristic, they placed more emphasis on the role of a good father as being emotionally involved in their children's lives. This is in contrast to literature that noted that the role of the father is widely understood by men as solely a financial provider (Mavungu, 2013; Van den Berg et al., 2013). Bhana and Nkani (2014) described how the perception of the father as a financial provider is culturally constructed, according to the existing notions of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the young fathers' perceptions of paternal

involvement, including emotional involvement in their children's lives, indicate a shift in cultural expectations and therefore in the notions of hegemonic masculinity. The young fathers highlighted how it is not the most important role of fatherhood by attributing financial provision as something that is a norm. For example, Gavin made this clear in his discussion, "*It's not all about financial support you need to give them emotional support*". Within this quote, he highlights the fact that emotional support is important. He also says, "*I mean obviously a good father has to make sure that the baby's needs are taken care of.*" The ability to take care of a child's basic survival needs is ascribed to the parental figures, usually the paternal parent. This is what is expressed in the quote. Within the literature, a cultural expectation of the fatherhood role is the provision of the child's basic needs, such as food, clothes, schooling, health care, et cetera (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012). However by saying 'obviously,' the participant is acknowledging this cultural expectation, while at the same time implying that emotional involvement is not one. It is thus deduced that the 'good father' as emotionally present, is emphasized more by these participants than the 'good father' as a financial provider.

Moreover, the quote: "*There's no difference, I always did what I did, just now that I work I do for him more*", highlighted the lack of importance of financial provision attributed by Zinhle to his fatherhood role in discussing the difference in his fatherhood role since being out of school. This implies that not being able to provide constant financial support did not affect his role as a father. This is in contrast to literature which found that in-school fathers perceived financial provision as the sole attribute of a good father, and thus experienced anxiety because they were unemployed (Madiba & Nsiski, 2017). In addition, the findings in this study are similar to those of Langa and Smith (2012). In this study, the young fathers were committed to the fatherhood role even when they experienced financial constraints. The young fathers in this study placed very little emphasis on the father's role as a provider, and highlighted the fact that emotional support is of greater importance. Furthermore, while not all of the young fathers listed financial provision as a characteristic of a good father, all listed emotional involvement as one. All the fathers in this study emphasized their understanding of the 'good father' as someone who is emotionally present. This is consistent with the teenage fathers in Swartz and Bhana (2009), who perceived emotional involvement as a characteristic of a good father.

This perception of a good father also manifested a sense of ingrained duty to fulfil the role. The young fathers described their fatherhood behaviours that matched their descriptions of a good father. The strength of fathers' perceptions of 'the good father' has been consistently documented in literature, however it has mostly been associated with financial provision (Mazembo et al., 2013). This is through the indication of the negative effects that the fathers experience when they cannot fulfil that role, such as emasculation, damage to self-esteem and confidence and so forth (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Hendricks et al., 2010; Makusha & Richter, 2015; Mavungu, 2013). Within this study, the fathers expressed and placed emphasis on the expectations of a 'good father' as emotionally present, thus their attempt to parallel this expectation of a good father leads to their ingrained duty to fulfil the role, and avoid the possible negative effects of not being able to do so. This is emphasized in the obstacles they encountered, and the adjustments and compromises that they have made in their lifestyles in order to fulfil this role. This has illustrated the importance that the young fathers placed on emotional involvement. Within their discussions, the participants also expressed positive feelings associated with fulfilling these roles.

One of the most prominent characteristics of a good father listed is "*being there.*" The fathers in this study provided the act of 'being there' as a characteristic of a good father. 'Being there' has been reported as an act of a good father by the teenage fathers in Swartz and Bhana (2009). The concept of 'being there' has been identified by Bunting and McAuley (2004) as a recurrent theme within the literature on fatherhood, including young fathers. According to Ratele et al. (2012), it is a fatherhood experience and refers to the relationship quality of the father and his child. In this study, one of the traits of a 'good father' is someone who was there for their child since the day they were born. Another trait of a 'good father' is someone who spends time with his child. In existing literature, one of the primary definitions of a 'good father' is someone who spends time with their child from the time the child is born and prioritizes their child's emotional interests (Morrell, 2006). The young fathers in this study provided a reiteration of this primary definition.

Additionally, the fathers in this study described the 'good father' as someone who engages in emotional care. These descriptions consisted of phrases such as, "*looking*

*after*”, “*taking care of*” and “*loving his child*”. Some previous studies have reported that adolescent fathers expressed emotional commitment to becoming fathers who were good, caring and loving towards their child (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Langa & Smith, 2012). This is consistent with this study, in these fathers’ descriptions of a good father and their means to parallel the role of a good father. In addition the quote, “*getting the chance to know him and what he loves*”, by Thabo provides an indication of emotional care. These fathers also expressed that it was a priority. This is consistent with the definition of a ‘good father’ in Morrell (2006), as it states that a good father prioritizes their child’s emotional interests.

Emotional care forms part of the father’s perception of ‘the good father’. This contributes to the report by Van den Berg et al., (2013), which states that masculinities in South Africa are starting to shift, thus men are taking on more positive and caring paternal roles. The fathers in this study perceived these roles as characteristics of a good father. For example, the quote, “*It’s being responsible, mature about everything. Always putting him first in whatever I do*”, indicates that emotional care forms part of their role as a responsible father, which is a characteristic of a good father. Existing literature highlights the common perception of young fathers’ belief in taking responsibility for their children (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Mazembo et al., 2013; Swartz and Bhana, 2009). This is also consistent with Mavungu (2013) in which the term paternal responsibility referred to the duties performed in order to uphold the child’s wellbeing. For example, Gavin said, “*He also needs that. So my role is like, I have to be there and I have to just make sure everything gets done for him*”. In the excerpts above, “*I have to be there*”, the phrase ‘be there’ was listed as a characteristic of a good father. This implies that a child needs a good father, so it is his ingrained duty to fulfil that role. In addition to providing the definition of a good father, the young fathers in this study discussed the ways in which their behaviours parallel their descriptions of a good father. Additional examples were evident within their discussions of the obstacles they encountered and overcame, and the compromises they made as a father, in order to pursue this role.

Within their discussions, their strong desire to ‘be there’ for their children became apparent. This is in contrast to the findings of Marcisz (2013), in which the fathers

described having to 'be there' for their children as a responsibility, rather than a desire. These young fathers described the obstacles that they had to face in order to be part of their children's lives and fulfil the role of a 'good father'. One of the obstacles encountered by these fathers was the denial of access to see their child, by the child's mother. However, only one of the young fathers in this study encountered this. For instance, Gavin experienced this after his relationship with his child's mother ended. He described it as heart-breaking. This finding has been discussed in previous literature, where it stated that it usually occurs when men are unemployed and lack resources (Weinman et al., 2002). However, this finding challenges the literature because Gavin was employed and financially supporting his child. This finding thus also creates questions surrounding the obstacle of gatekeeping, in terms of other reasons that could result in fathers being denied access to their children.

The young fathers expressed how important it was for them and how much they wanted to 'be there' for their children, *"Also because I mean I support him I want to be there. In certain cases some fathers don't want anything to have to do with their children, they'll just make as if they don't have children."* This quote indicates the choice that men have, to take on the fathering role. Thus although being a biological father is not optional, the choice to take on the fathering role, in the form of emotional involvement, is voluntary. This is consistent with literature, which states that young fathers desire to be an active parent in their children's lives, irrespective of the barriers they face (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). In Swartz and Bhana (2009), the young fathers in the study add to the definition of a good father by emphasizing that this role of a 'good father' is persistent, regardless of their relationship with their child's mother. This notion of a 'good father' emphasized by young fathers in other literature, is consistent among the young fathers in this study.

The finding discussed above, in which the fathers desired to be involved in their children's lives and the expression of emotional involvement as voluntary, is consistent with existing literature on young fathers which found that they yearn to be an active parent in their children's lives (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Bunting & McAuley, 2004). In addition, the fathers in this study described the compromises they have made in order to 'be there' for their children. In the studies by Marcisz (2013) and Van den Berg et al. (2013), the adult fathers also described compromise as one of the

changes they experienced since becoming a father. In this study, one type of compromise was that of freedom. The young fathers expressed that they had to start thinking for their children, thus their lives had to change. For example, they had to stop socializing on weekends in order to ‘be there’ for their children. In Madiba and Nsiki (2017), the young fathers discussed lifestyle changes, including changes in their behaviour, as a result of becoming a father. Although they did not discuss it as a sacrifice, they described it as being forced to change. This is the opposite of how the participants in the current study described the sacrifices they make for their children. In addition, the sacrifices that fathers made for their children were mostly reported in existing literature, as sacrifices in order to provide financial support for their children. For example, one of the participants in Marcisz (2013) described sacrificing his dream to further his education, in order to work to provide for his child. In this study, the fathers described sacrifices in order to be emotionally involved in their children’s lives.

The participants in this study described this compromise as a result of “thinking for their children”. Thinking for one’s child is indicative of emotional care. It results in them being there for their child. In this case it is clear that ‘being there’ refers to the quality of their relationship (Ratele et al., 2012). This is because if these fathers stopped engaging in their social lives, they would have more time for their relationship with their children, and thus ‘be there’ for them. Emotional care therefore strengthens the quality of their relationship. Another type of compromise discussed by the young fathers were with regard to certain aspects of their lives, such as having a girlfriend and activities they used to enjoy, in order to spend time with their child. In existing literature, fathers reported the sacrifice of spending time with their child in order to have to work or for other reasons (Morrell, 2006). The importance that these fathers place on emotional involvement is thus evident.

This type of compromise is something they have chosen because they enjoy spending time with their children. This is consistent with findings in previous literature such as Bhana and Nkani (2014) and Bunting and McAuley (2004). The young fathers in this study expressed that it is their desire to spend time with their children often. This is indicated by quotes such as the following, “*If I had my way I’d be like, he’d be with me always*”. It is important to note that the participants did not describe this

compromise in a negative way. The fathers have emphasized the importance of and their desire for spending time with their children. Bunting and McAuley (2004) reported the importance that the fathers placed on spending time with their children. Within these fathers' discussions, they also described how emotionally rewarding spending time with their children is. The participants furthermore described the happiness that they experienced when they were present for their children's development milestones. This happiness served as a motivation for them to spend more time with their children. In addition, the young fathers felt content when they spent time with their children. The strengthening of their emotional support systems resulted from the compromise of their social lives in order to spend time with their children.

### **5.3.2 FATHERHOOD AS 'OWNERSHIP'**

Within this study, the fathers discussed their responses to fatherhood. Along with nervousness, emotions such as happiness, excitement and pride were expressed when they described the ways in which they found out they were going to be fathers. This is in contrast to Madiba and Nsiki (2017) in which the young fathers expressed fear of becoming fathers. Although some expressed it more implicitly, all the young fathers expressed a sense of ownership in their discussions of their response to fatherhood, as well as their descriptions of fatherhood in general. Excitement to have something of one's own represents a form of power for these fathers. This is also evident in their expressed pride in responses to having a child. It is reported that these fathers' status improved upon having children, due to ownership as well as the continuity of lineage (Morrell, 2006). According to Morrell (2006), manhood is a stage in one's life marked by respect and rights, thus one way to claim manhood is to father a child. Morrell (2006) noted that teenage fathers believed that fatherhood is one way of entering the life stage of manhood. This is evident in this study by their expressions of pride. In addition, Gibbs et al. (2017) argue that paternal involvement and presence may just be motivated by the increase in status of the young father within the public sphere. These multiple suggestions concerning the reason for fatherhood involvement creates a need for the investigation of the young father's perceptions of paternal involvement.

The young fathers' constructed understanding of fatherhood as 'ownership' manifested a sense of ingrained duty, due to the position of status and power within which they are placed. Within the literature, throughout all the documented shifts in the fatherhood role, it has always been described with the connotation of power. Hunter (2006) described the different forms of power attributed to fatherhood in different periods of time. For example, during the pre-colonial period, the father was described as the protector and leader of the homestead; thereafter when men were forced to work, the form of power attributed to the fatherhood role shifted to financial provision (Hunter, 2006). It is thus clear that the fatherhood role has always had some form of power attached to it. The fathers in this study described how the community's view of them played a role in their status, which resulted in power.

All the participants in this study expressed their ingrained duty to raise their children the right way. The right way involved actively instilling the children with values, morals, religion and education. This essentially formed the practice of teaching their children pro-social skills. For example in the following excerpt, Zinhle described what he teaches his child in the process of rearing him: *"Not to swear and respect, how to talk to people, greet elderly people. Treat people with respect"*. Fathers studied by Mazembo et al. (2013) expressed concern about their children growing up without paternal guidance. One of these concerns was that their children would become ill-mannered and disrespectful toward elders (Mazembo et al., 2013). In existing literature, ethical and moral guidance is usually something the paternal parent provides for their child (Madhavan, Richter et al., 2014; Mavungu, 2013; Spjeldnaes, 2011; Van den Berg, 2013). This finding is also consistent with young fathers in the study by Clark et al. (2015). This indicates that these young fathers shared the same concerns. In addition, these worries indicate the ingrained duty that both young and adult fathers identify as part of their fatherhood role.

The ingrained duty to teach their children these pro-social skills is a form of emotional involvement, because it is a way of prioritizing their child's wellbeing (Morrell, 2006). The young fathers in this study referred to certain cultural and traditional rituals, or parenting decisions they made. For example, Gavin used the example of his child's baptism when describing his duty to raise his child. He also expressed the importance of religion and described raising his child in a similar way

to which he was raised with regard to values and morals. He highlighted the fact that he was baptized at the same age as his child. This was important to him. This comparison serves as an indication that the fathers are instilled with cultural and traditional values, and want to instil the same values in their children. According to Hendricks et al. (2010), young men who were instilled with traditional and cultural values, perceived fatherhood as evidence of masculinity and fertility. The young fathers in this study all possess strong traditional and cultural values. They described feeling proud that their children were growing up the right way. These fathers perceive their masculine duty to raise their children in a certain way. It has also been found that cultural expectations within communities still affect how men perceive their fatherhood role through construction of masculinity (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). This indicates the power that the community has in influencing an individual's behaviour. The community's perception of the children's behaviour reflects their fatherhood role, which in turn affects the fathers' social status and power within their communities. The young fathers are aware of this, and thus perceived it as their ingrained duty, due to ownership, to ensure that their children have respect, manners and values.

This ingrained duty is a result of cultural expectations attached to the constructions of masculinity, and how manhood is understood. The link between fatherhood and masculinity has been documented in previous literature (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Hendricks et al., 2010). Masculinity has been described as a performed behaviour (Morrell, 2006). Helman and Ratele (2016) described the link between societal expectations and masculinity in which the father's behaviour is shaped by these factors. Gender power and masculine control have also been noted as societal and cultural expectations of a man (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Ratele et al., 2012). According to Morrell (2006), the amount of responsibility that the father assumes, and how caring the fathers are toward their children, are determinant on the way in which they construct their masculinity. Fatherhood behaviour is thus shaped by their masculine identity, which is formed by cultural expectations. This is the reason why the fathers in this study use the community's approval of the way they parent their children as a marker of power and status. In addition, ingrained duty comes with the emotional reward in the form of increased power and status, especially if the community positively views their child's rearing. This is emphasized throughout the interviews by the participants' desire to raise their children the right way.

#### **5.4. THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**

Emotional support systems were found to consist of the young fathers' family, friends, the mother of the child, and the mother of child's family. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of the emotional support systems' influence on the young fathers' emotional involvement in their children's lives. Many studies have discussed the increase in paternal emotional involvement in their child's life, due to the emotional support received from the young father's mother (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Clark et al., 2015; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Emotional support from the father's own father has also been discussed as positively influencing the father's emotional involvement in their child's life (Marcisz, 2013; Weinman et al., 2002). All the participants in the study by Spjeldnaes et al. (2011) study, including young fathers' experiences and expectations of fatherhood, did not have an emotionally supportive father or fatherly figure present in their lives. These young fathers viewed emotional support and guidance as the most important fatherhood responsibility (Spjeldnaes et al., 2011). The absence of a father's father has also been found to affect the father's emotional involvement in his child's life (Cronje, 2012; Mavungu, 2013). This is consistent with the findings of the study on young fathers where their father's absence affects their emotional involvement with their child (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). The findings of this study contribute to such findings in other studies by extending knowledge of fatherhood for young fathers. This study focused on the way in which the young father's experience of an emotional support system influenced his own perceptions of the role of paternal involvement.

In this study, there were two different ways in which the participants experienced support from the members of their emotional support systems, namely, the role of support in their transition into fatherhood, and the role of support in father-child contact. Participants highlighted that emotional support experienced before being a father, and since becoming a father, influenced their fathering role. The emotional support experienced during the process of entering fatherhood was discussed throughout the interviews. The young fathers' experiences of emotional support provided them with the reassurance, and an understanding of their paternal expectations, through their own childhood experiences and the observation of other fathers' experiences. All of which influenced their perceptions of the importance of the father's emotional involvement with his child.

#### **5.4.1 THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN THE TRANSITION INTO FATHERHOOD**

Emotional support systems facilitated the young fathers' transition into fatherhood and assumptions of their role as fathers. Within the literature, the difficulty experienced in the transition to fatherhood by younger men has been noted (Chideya & Williams, 2013). In addition, it was found that a key factor of the young father's role of fatherhood was the support of their family and the family of their child's mother (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). This is because young men are neither emotionally, nor financially ready, for this new role (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). All the fathers in this study received advice as one of the primary sources of emotional support from their friends and family. The type of advice that they received as fathers ranged from how to physically care for their children, in terms caregiving activities such as feeding and bathing, to their emotional involvement with their children. Madhavan and Roy (2012) identified the father's kin as supporting the father by physically raising his child through caregiving activities. However in this study, the fathers were guided on how to care for their children.

The young fathers in this study perceived fatherhood as the next stage in one's life. This stage is marked by maturity, the quote, *"I have to grow up sometime in my life"*, is indicative of this. This is consistent with the findings by Morrell (2006) and Hendricks et al. (2010), which stated that some males believe that fatherhood represents physical maturity, thus it is one way to become a man. However, the young fathers in this study recognized that their support systems helped soothe this transition. They perceived this support as beneficial to their transition into fatherhood, as it aided the self-enlightenment that also accompanied this next stage of their lives. This is evident in the quote by Gavin, *"emotional support and being a father has taught me a lot more than I thought I knew about myself also in a way."* Gavin was a twenty-two year old father at the time of the interview, in his quote above by saying, *"taught me a lot more than I thought I knew about myself"*, it is clear that he had already formed an identity since adolescence. However, it also indicates that fatherhood is an additional change to one's self-identity and their support systems help with this. According to Chideya and Williams (2013), the transition into fatherhood by young males is difficult because it is at a stage in their lives where they

are forming their own identities. Masculinity is the gender identity of males (Morrell, 2006). Masculinity is socially constructed (Morrell, 2006).

Due to the young fathers' ages, it is crucial for their families to help them shape their identities. A change in lifestyle is a drastic change to one's life, especially at the point in time when one is forming an identity. Young fathers have to form a new identity as an adult, and simultaneously fulfil the role of a father. Thus, the fathers in this study highlighted the ways in which their families aided this transition by reminding them of who they are. This suggests that they are cognizant and affected by the significant shift in their lives that comes with fatherhood. Thus by providing them with the support that a guardian would provide to their adolescent or young adult child, their emotional support systems comfort them during this change in their lives.

The majority of the participants were over eighteen years old. Thabo was the only participant who was still an adolescent. There was a noteworthy difference between the way in which Thabo and the other participants described the way in which their emotional support systems aided in their transition into fatherhood with regard to self-identity. For example, the older participants described it as adding to what they already thought they knew about themselves, whilst Thabo described it as contributing to becoming more responsible. Thabo described how the support from his grandmother did not change him, but helped make him more responsible, which in turn made him a better person. By saying that it did not change him, he is referring to his identity. Thus, his grandmother contributed to his transition into fatherhood by helping him form his identity as a responsible father, which he indicated as a positive change. In the literature, the young fathers reported that their mothers helped them to be better fathers by encouraging them (Clark et al., 2015). Although Thabo did not have a mother, his grandmother assumed the role as a mother in his life. As mentioned previously, teenage fathers are viewed as irresponsible (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). However in this study, the fathers' families helped them to become more responsible fathers. These fathers previously described responsibility as a characteristic of a good father and they expressed how their support systems helped them to become responsible. This is indicative of the different circumstantial stages of life that these fathers are in, which is due to their age differences. This finding serves

as an example of the factor of age in the transition into fatherhood, which has been noted by Chideya and Williams (2013).

All the young fathers discussed how the female guardian or maternal parent assisted with their transition into fatherhood. This is consistent with findings by Swartz and Bhana (2009), who state that young fathers highly regard their mother's opinion. The young father's mother acts as their counselor, teacher, mediator and protector (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). This is consistent with the findings in this study. In this study the young fathers' mothers served as a strong influence to their fathering role. For example, Gavin referred to his mother as his "rock." The fathers described the strong maternal role in their transition into fatherhood as keeping them grounded. Some of the young fathers discussed a male guardian or the paternal parent in their transition. This is in contrast to Spjeldnaes et al. (2011), who reported that the in-school fathers in their study did not receive guidance or support from their fathers, and perceived their fathers as emotionally unavailable. They also highlighted the importance of a father's guidance and support towards his son's transition into fatherhood (Spjeldnaes et al., 2011).

Moreover, this is evident in the participants' discussions on how important it was for their emotional support systems to still provide the advice that the participants received before they became fathers, in addition to the new advice they receive as fathers. These young fathers have expressed that when their support systems continued to treat them the same way in which they treated them before becoming a father, it positively affected their role as a father. The treatment that they referred to was the advice and the emotions that their support systems provided. This is because it kept them grounded in their own identities, thus the transition into fatherhood did not result in an identity crisis. This contributes to the examples of how the young fathers' lives changed in previous literature, by indicating the possible negative effects of a lifestyle change. In the study on young fathers by Madiba and Nsiki (2017), the participants described their transition into fatherhood as a change in lifestyle. The fathers in this study described the negative effect of a lifestyle change as an identity crisis, by describing the way that their emotional support systems could mitigate this through different types of advice, which would keep them grounded.

This advice also helped to minimize stress and thus improved their ability to remain calm in situations, in order to make the best decisions for their children. In Swartz and Bhana (2009), the young fathers discussed being stressed about telling their parents about becoming a father. In this study, the young fathers described how the fatherhood role itself was stressful. This indicates that the stress of becoming a father begins during the pregnancy, and for these young fathers, continues throughout the transition into their new roles. Therefore, this finding indicates that emotional support may improve the young fathers' abilities to take on the role of a good father, which they previously described as prioritizing their children's best interests, by minimizing stress.

In this study, emotional support systems facilitated the young fathers' transitions into fatherhood by providing them with reassurance in various ways. The young fathers experienced reassurance from their family and friends when they had faith in their ability to be a father. It has been found that family support of the young man's fatherhood role, especially from his mother, is linked to a higher rate of paternal involvement (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). This made them feel secure about their roles as fathers. This was evident in this study. Some of the young fathers expressed apprehension to becoming a father, which was caused by their families' reactions and lack of support. For example, Zinhle expressed that his initial reaction to becoming a father was happiness. However, he began to feel nervous after his family reacted negatively to the news. Zinhle described his family's disappointment when they found out that he was going to be a father. Their negative reaction was due to the fact that they did not believe he was capable of being a father because of his young age and lack of knowledge. He reported that it caused him to feel as though he did not want to become a father. Thus lack of faith from emotional support systems reinforced the young fathers' own insecurities of becoming a father. The participants in Madiba and Nsiki (2017) also experienced anxiety caused by insecurity. However, they were insecure about their capabilities to provide for their children, as a result of their young ages.

With regard to Zinhle's experience, he explained that when his family eventually accepted it, had the confidence to take on the role. This indicates that a father's emotional support system provides them with reassurance by having faith in them and

trusting their ability to be a father. In turn, this support gives them the confidence to take on the role of a father. Within the literature, it was found that young fathers experienced an excessive amount of stress and fear when telling their parents about the pregnancy (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). This emotion is an indication of their lack of confidence in their new role. The young fathers in this study expressed this through their insecurities after their families reacted negatively. It is evident that reassurance from the participants' emotional support systems plays a significant role in their perceptions of fatherhood.

In addition to reassurance aiding feelings of security in taking on the fatherhood role, these fathers were also reassured that it is normal to care for their children. Van den Berg et al. (2013) highlighted that evidence of the shift in masculinities that accept caring paternal roles are becoming more prominently documented in South African literature on fatherhood. This finding has thus contributed as supporting evidence of this shift in masculinities that accept caring paternal roles. The transition into fatherhood has been described as confusing by the young fathers in this study. However, emotional support systems help to ease this confusion. The young fathers in this study reported experiencing confusion during the early stages of their fatherhood role, with regard to being emotionally involved in their children's lives. When the fathers' emotional support systems showed that they cared about the father's child, they felt as though it is acceptable to care for their children too. This promotes the emotional involvement in their children's lives. Their emotional support systems made them feel comfortable with their own emotional involvement in their children's lives, as well as accepting this role.

This indicated that young fathers might still be unsure about their role in terms of emotional involvement in their children's lives. In addition, it is clear that the fathers in this study had emotional support systems that perceived the role of the father to care for his child. In the literature, Morrell (2006) discussed the societal expectations that when a boy becomes a man, he is able to take on the role of a father. Furthermore, in Bhana and Nkani (2014) young fathers believed that fatherhood is a way in which one expressed their masculinity. In the literature, the young fathers' expectations of fatherhood and their fathering role, has been found to be shaped by cultural expectations and hegemonic masculinity (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Ratele et al.,

2012). Thus the fathers' emotional support systems shaped the fatherhood role through their expectations, informed by society, which in turn shaped the fathers' masculine identities.

Participants found reassurance in their role as a father when their emotional support systems supported their fight to be a father, and made them feel like they have a place in their children's lives. Within the literature, the value placed on fatherhood is noted as expanding in society (Morrell & Richter, 2006). This is evident in the importance that society is now placing on the paternal role, as well as the fight for paternal rights (Morrell & Richter, 2006). In this study, the findings indicate that the fathers' emotional support systems understood the importance of their paternal role and paternal expectations. For example, Gavin was denied access to his child by the mother of his child. Her uncle provided Gavin with advice to go to court and apply for visitation rights. This reassured him that he has a place in his child's life. He also expressed that the mother of his child made him feel as though he is not the father that his son needs. Her family members however reassured him of his role in his child's life. The fact that her family offered him advice and gave him guidance about obtaining visitation rights, regardless of his poor relationship with her, reassured him of the importance of his role. The obstacles that the young fathers encountered were prominently featured within the literature on fatherhood. The problematic relationship with the mother of the child and her parents is one of the obstacles encountered by young fathers, which prevented their access to and contact with their child (Bunting & MacAuley, 2004; Makusha & Richter, 2016; Van den Berg et al., 2013). In addition, these studies list the inability to provide financial support as another reason for the mother to deny the father access to see their children. This is a common phenomenon in existing literature, Herzog et al. (2007) and Mavungu (2013) also reported that mothers were less likely to support the father's involvement in their child's life when the fathers could not provide financially. However, in contrast to this and as discussed previously, Gavin was employed and financially supporting his child, but was still denied access to see his child.

Interestingly, Gavin discussed having a feeling that his child's grandmother was influencing her daughter to deny him access to see his son. He felt this way because her mother denied her father access to seeing her when she was young. The denial of

access that Gavin describes in the interview is known as gatekeeping (Clark et al., 2015; Herzog et al., 2007; Makusha & Richter, 2016). According to Herzog et al. (2007), this involves the mother's attempt to control the amount of involvement the father has in his child's life. The circumstance described by Gavin is consistent with research that identified the maternal grandmother as the gatekeeper (Kalil et al., 2005). However, some aspects of this circumstance contrast with findings from other studies. In previous literature, the mother of the child's male family members was usually identified as a factor that prevented young fathers from being involved in their children's lives (Swartz & Bhana, 2009).

#### **5.4.2 THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN ENABLING FATHER-CHILD CONTACT**

This theme captures the participants' experience of their emotional support systems with regard to the way in which these systems of support influence their emotional involvement with their children. The subthemes are 'the role of emotional support in father's parenting practices' and 'constructions of paternal involvement through experiences of paternal absence'. The subthemes indicate how the acquisition of knowledge from support systems has an effect on paternal involvement. Participants' emotional support systems serve as a tool that provides them with knowledge in the form of advice, and participants also gain knowledge from observing their friends' and family's behaviour. Their emotional support systems' behaviour toward them while growing up and since becoming a father was also a means by which to obtain knowledge about the fatherhood role. Behaviour is discussed as the ways in which their families behaved toward them during their upbringing, thus they discussed how their own childhood experiences influenced their roles as fathers, and as young fathers. Within the literature, the kin's support of the fathers' fathering role is described in an active and direct sense toward their children (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). For example, Madhavan and Roy (2012), describe the kin's role as providing financially for the child, or directly caring for the child. The fathers in this study described the behaviour of the kin towards them, which is understood as the role that the kin play in influencing their emotional involvement with their children. Thus, in this way, their kin indirectly support their children.

The knowledge, gained from their support systems' advice and behaviour, influences their role as a father because it provides them with guidance on how to be emotionally involved with their children. This knowledge thus influences their perceptions of the importance of emotional involvement in their children's lives. This knowledge was gained through two different means, namely, active learning and emotional understanding. These means differ as knowledge from active learning was acquired through listening to advice about their role as a father and observing their friends' behaviour with their own children. Emotional understanding was acquired through their childhood experiences with regard to their parents' participation in their lives, or lack thereof. This is consistent with the literature, in which the young fathers' parents have been found to affect the way in which the father is involved in his child's life (Swartz & Bhana, 2009; Weinman et al., 2002).

#### **5.4.2.1 THE FATHERS' PARENTING PRACTICES**

The young fathers in this study actively learned from their emotional support systems and it thus influenced their emotional involvement with their children. There were various types of advice that the participants received, ranging from specific ways to care for their children, to general advice. However, the ways in which these fathers explained the effect of the advice differed. The fathers provided contrasting descriptions of the advice they received. Some participants described the advice as being needed consistently, whereas the others described it as becoming a permanent source of knowledge that they could always refer back to if needed. The knowledge that was transferred to the participant influenced how the participant perceived the importance of spending time with his child.

The young fathers in this study highlighted the power that their families' advice had in impacting their role as fathers. In addition, they indicated how it influenced their perceptions of the importance of emotional involvement in their children's lives. They actively learnt how to be a father from their families. The participants believed that their families' advice taught them what was right, and acknowledged the impact it has on their role as a father. Some of them however described how it would have affected them if their family were to stop encouraging them and teaching them how to father correctly. This implies that they need constant guidance and support from their

family, which is an indication of their dependence on this advice. All the participants experienced encouragement and guidance from their families and friends. However, some of them expressed needing it constantly while others did not. Within the literature, encouragement was reported as a means to guide the young fathers (Clark et al., 2015). Some participants in Mavungu (2013) also described the encouragement they received to engage in caregiving activities and be emotionally present in their children's lives. This finding is consistent with literature from Morrell and Richter (2006), which discusses the need of encouragement of fathers, in order to be more involved in their children's lives. Encouragement of fathers to be emotionally involved in their children's lives seems to be increasing throughout the literature with time.

The other way in which some of the fathers in this study experienced the guidance from their support systems' advice and behaviour was clearly explained by Gavin. In this instance, the young fathers described the knowledge gained from the advice they received, as well as how people behaved toward them, as becoming a permanent source of knowledge that they can always refer back to if needed. Gavin described his emotional support as the emotions that they expressed toward him, and the advice they gave him. The emotions that he described are expressed through their behaviour. In the literature, Bunting and McAuley (2004) found a link between the father's perceptions of their mother's attitude towards his parenting and behaviour as a father. He highlighted that his family provided him with 'tough love.' In his description, it is clear that the emotional support he received from his family was experienced as a form of knowledge with the intent to guide him. He discussed how he actively learned from their advice and their behaviour toward him. He furthered this explanation by discussing the uptake of this support as a parallel to how one learns information. The process of learning is usually described as information that seeps or gets absorbed into your brain in the form of knowledge, available for retrieval whenever one needs it. This implies that the advice becomes permanent knowledge. This process parallels that of learning, in which information is absorbed and stored in the mind, and becomes available upon retrieval. Thus, support systems' attitude and emotions shape paternal involvement. This is one of the examples of how the participants understood the effect of the support they received. It also indicates that their support systems' advice is another form of knowledge from which they actively learn, and is

sustainable. Another way in which the fathers gained knowledge about their fathering role was through observing how their friends and family members who have children behaved towards their children. It also motivated them to behave in the same way with their own children.

It was also found that parents who are overly involved in these young fathers' lives in terms of emotional support, might negatively affect these young men's transitions into fatherhood. Only one of the participants in this study experienced this. Abdul grew up with parents who were overly involved in his life and spoiled him too much. He described this as affecting his role as a father because he did not take on all his fatherhood responsibilities. Identifying his parents' mistakes in raising him, has influenced how he chose to raise his child. This participant wanted to be involved in his child's life to ensure that his child does not grow up being too spoiled, which may lead to him becoming irresponsible. As previously discussed, young fathers are commonly viewed as irresponsible (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). Abdul highlighted his inadequacy as a father when he mentioned not working. Makusha and Richter (2015), found that men distance themselves from their children when they cannot provide financially, which is in contrast to this finding where the young father is still emotionally involved in his child's life. However, he is trying to prevent his child from becoming irresponsible.

It is clear that the feeling of inadequacy stemmed from how his parents raised him, and the extent to which they are involved in his life. This is consistent with the findings of Mavungu (2013) in which feelings of emasculation occurred when fathers could not take on all fatherhood roles due to unemployment. In Swartz and Bhana (2009), it was also found that young fathers felt inadequate because their parents were financially supporting them and their children. This could also decrease their emotional involvement in their children's lives, as they are not encouraged to take on responsibility, and the importance of their involvement in their children's lives is not emphasized (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). The over-involvement of parental figures clearly has an effect on how the father feels. In this case, it affected how the young father would like to be emotionally involved in his child's life in order to prevent his child from becoming too spoiled and turning out the way he did. He understood that he has the ability to raise his child in a way that will one day benefit his child.

#### **5.4.2.2 CONSTRUCTIONS OF PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT THROUGH EXPERIENCES OF PARENTAL ABSENCE**

According to Mavungu (2013), paternal perceptions of the importance of their emotional involvement in their children's lives stems from their own early experiences with their own families. This is consistent with the findings in this study. The young fathers who grew up without parents understood the importance of the parents' role in a child's life, with particular emphasis on the importance of the fathering role. This is consistent with a study discussed in Fagan et al (2007), in which the fathers' emotional involvement in their children's lives were influenced by their feelings towards their own families. Two participants in this study grew up without at least one parent. Thabo grew up without both parents and Gavin grew up without a father. The young fathers discussed the difficulty of growing up without parents. Both participants discussed this before the interviewer even asked about it. This indicated how they felt about the importance of parental roles in a young father's life.

Thabo discussed the importance of emotional support systems by discussing the way in which parents teach their children how to love through showing them love. In this way, love from parents or guardians are a form of emotional support. He expressed not being shown love from a parent. He furthered this discussion by saying that if it were not for his grandmother showing him love, he would have had to observe the way other parents show their children love, and then in that way learn how to show his child love. This highlights the importance of emotional support systems in the young father's life. This confirms the findings of Langa and Smith (2012), in which the young fathers in their study expressed their commitment to being loving fathers. This also indicates the importance of emotional support systems in a young father's life because they understood the importance of their emotional involvement in their children's lives. With the lack of emotional support from parents, and the compensation of this support by his grandmother, Thabo understood the value of it. This is indicative of the emotional understanding of one's emotional support systems through personal experience. Within the literature, the maternal and paternal parents have been found to impact on the young fathers' fatherhood roles (Fagan et al., 2007). The findings in this section confirm the link between parental support and young

fathers' involvement in their children's lives, reported by Fagan et al. (2007), through the participants' experience of their parental absence.

Participants who grew up without parents understood the importance of them. Growing up without a father has not only made Gavin value the role of a father in a child's life, it has also made him value the role of a mother. This value was indicated by his strong relationship with his mother. Swartz and Bhana (2009) highlighted the importance that the young fathers in their study placed on the support from their mothers. This has affected Gavin's decision-making as a father in his child's life. After being denied access to his son, he decided not to apply for full custody. He put his son's needs first and understood that his child also needs a mother in his life. This was to ensure that his child would grow up with a strong emotional support system. This indicated that his emotional involvement in his child's life consisted of making decisions based on what was best for the child. As discussed previously in this chapter, prioritizing a child's best interests is a characteristic of a good father (Morrell, 2006). This is an example of how their experiences of their emotional support influenced their perceptions of paternal involvement. It is selfless, and highlights the care that forms part of the fathering role. It is clear how the young father's experience of emotional support, growing up without a father, and a strong relationship with his mother, influenced his emotional involvement in his child's life. Swartz and Bhana (2009) mentioned that young fathers did not discuss any other types of support that mothers provided, apart from emotional and financial support. In addition, Clark et al. (2015) reported that young fathers expressed being better fathers because of the guidance and support of their mothers. This finding contributed to the importance of their mothers' support toward them, because it provided them with appreciation of the maternal role, which may lead to them minimizing conflict with the mother of their child, which in turn, will benefit their child. Thabo grew up without a mother and when he discussed how he felt about the mother of his child neglecting his son, he said, *"It made me feel terrible coz a child growing up without a mother it's very difficult"*. This indicates his appreciation and understanding of the importance of the maternal parenting role.

However, both these young fathers placed particular emphasis on the importance of a father figure in their lives. Because of their own parents' absence in their childhood,

participants expressed particular importance of the father figure in a child's life. According to Marcisz (2013), fathers play an important role in their sons' lives during the stages of their early life development, which shapes their sons' fatherhood perceptions. In Marcisz (2013), the adult fathers expressed the difficulty they experienced with absent fathers, and this difficulty motivated them to be emotionally present fathers to their own children. In addition, Swartz and Bhana (2009) found that the reason young fathers accepted paternity was due to their own fathers' denial of paternity. However, Swartz and Bhana (2009) highlighted the mixed findings where some young fathers accepted paternity due to their own father's involvement in their lives. According to Chideya and Williams (2013), fathers and male role models usually pass down knowledge and advice for fatherhood to the young fathers.

Both participants highlighted the importance of the paternal figure in a child's life. According to Ratele et al. (2012), the paternal role is important to the family as a whole. Growing up without a paternal parent made these fathers aware of the importance of the fatherhood role. From their experience, they could relate what they needed from a father to understand what their children needed from a father. Gavin confirmed the importance of a father figure at this point of his life when he discussed speaking to his uncle when he found out that he was going to be a father. Gavin's uncle took on the paternal role in his life and for the rest of his family. When asked how his parents or guardians felt about him becoming a father, he automatically discussed his experience of speaking to a fatherly figure about becoming a father. The fact that he emphasized speaking to his uncle indicated his view of the importance of having a fatherly figure in his life. Within the literature, Fagan et al. (2007) discussed the link between parental support and the young father's involvement in his child's life. Within their study, the amount of social support did not have a large impact on fatherhood involvement, but the specific roles from which the support was coming, did Fagan et al. (2007). This finding indicates that the fathers' own father is one of the roles that are important to their paternal involvement. In addition, it is evident that Gavin's uncle fills the role of a social father, someone who takes care of a child who is not biologically his own (Rabe, 2012). This is also known as flexible fathering (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). This indicates the importance of the social father, and the practice of flexible fathering, in providing children with the care that they could not get from their own fathers due to their absence.

Both the participants emphasized the importance of the father's role in the child's life based on their experiences of paternal absence. For example in the excerpt below, Thabo discussed the importance of the father's role in showing his child love: *"Many things I did not do with my dad...I want to do everything for my child...I want him to feel loved and to know that his dad loved him and made everything that he could"*. This indicated that he believed that it is a father's duty to show his child love and make him feel loved. Both the participants expressed this. This finding is in contrast to the findings in Mazembo et al. (2013), where the fathers believed that caregiving activities formed part of the maternal parent's role. In addition, it contributes to the findings of Langa and Smith (2012), in which the fathers were committed to being good, caring and loving fathers.

Furthermore, as discussed in a previous paragraph in this section, Thabo explained how the love parents show their children also teaches their children how to love. Thus, the love that his grandmother showed him taught him how to love his child. He emphasized that if it were not for his grandmother, he would have had to observe other parents and apply it to his fathering. As indicated in the above quotation, he described it as the father's role. This finding from Thabo, as well as Gavin emphasizing the importance of a fatherly figure by seeking guidance from his uncle, indicates that the fathers' experience of paternal absence caused a certain extent of lack of knowledge with regard to their fathering role. This enforces the findings from Mavungu (2013) and Mazembo et al. (2013), which state that adult fathers, who grew up without their own fathers, did not know how to behave toward their children. This indicated the importance of an emotional support system in teaching children how to show love. In addition, Mavungu (2013) mentioned that a father's love for a child served as a motivation to be involved in his life. This also confirmed that being emotionally involved in a child's life made the child feel loved because it is motivated by the father's love for his child. Growing up without a father may thus create a deeper understanding of the importance of the father's emotional involvement in his child's life. The emotional support that Thabo received from his grandmother was in the transfer of knowledge on how to love through showing him love. This indicated how he perceived the importance of the emotional involvement of a parent in their child's life.

In addition, the participants discussed how they engaged in certain activities with their children because they never got to do them with their own fathers. This indicated that these are activities that they enjoy and which they would have liked to engage in with their own fathers. Therefore, the young fathers' experiences of growing up without a father, served as motivation to enjoy these kinds of activities with their children. Cronje (2012) discussed similar findings in previous literature, in which young fathers expressed motivation toward an active role in their children's lives due to their experience of their own father's absence. However, in existing literature, fathers tend to model their own fathers' behaviour (Marcisz, 2013). This indicates that these fathers also try to be the type of father that they wish they grew up having, which includes engaging in activities that they enjoy and feel they would have enjoyed participating in with their own fathers.

#### **5.5. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

Some limitations in this study will be discussed in this section. One participant had trouble understanding the research questions because his level of English was not that good. As most of the participants were older transition-aged fathers, with ages ranging from 18 to 22 years old, it may be a limitation as there is no data from younger fathers. The difference in the age, race and culture of the researcher conducting the interview may have affected the participants' response. According to Kvale (2006), the interview situation consists of an asymmetrical power relation between the interviewer and interviewee. Within this situation, both the interviewer and interviewee are constantly negotiating their position within the interview, and this influences the information discussed by the participant in various ways (Kvale, 2006).

The researcher is a female and is older than the participants who are adolescent fathers. The use of a snowball sampling strategy is also a limitation. According to Swartz and Bhana (2009), it was found that young women had less success in recruiting young fathers to participate in their study than the young men who were recruiting participants. Thus, the researcher's gender affected the recruitment of participants, as it took a significant amount of time. The majority of young fathers approached were not interested in participating in the study. The researcher

experienced numerous challenges in data collection, which were discussed in the method section of this report. Due to time constraints and the difficulty of recruiting participants, the sample size of this study is small, which minimizes the chance of transferability to wider populations. In addition, this study was also focused on one area, a small town in Johannesburg, and that minimizes the chance of transferability to wider populations.

In addition, the researcher is of Indian descent, which differs to some participants. This may have affected the way participants structured their answers to the questions. This is because participants are conscious of their gender roles shaped by their culture, thus this influences their responses in accordance to the interviewees gender role (Madhavan et al., 2015). They may construct their responses according to the interviewer's agenda that they may identify through the type of questions asked and the participant information sheet explaining the study (Kvale, 2006).

Limitations in this study may have also resulted from the use of interviews as a method of data collection. Interview data are often critiqued as unreliable because it does not capture the truth or reality of what the fathers' are discussing (Gergen, 1985). This is because it is a reflection of their experience. However, this study is examining the fathers' reconstructed narrated experiences. Thus, the aim was to explore the ways in which the fathers narrate their experiences of fatherhood and how they use these constructions to make meaning of their situation. The researcher was aware of this limitation thus the research question seeks to examine constructions of experiences and not experiences on their own. In addition, the researcher decided to use semi-structured interviews based on the benefit of the depth of information the participants may provide and the advantage of probing in order to gain more information if needed. According to Madhavan et al. (2015), an advantage of using interviews as a method of data collection is the ability of the interviewer to access important information in order to confirm responses provided in the interview by the participant. This was done strategically through probing (Madhavan et al., 2015).

Another limitation of the use of interviews is that it is dominated by its agenda (Kvale, 2006). This means that the participants' perceptions of the interviewer's expectations lead to a social desirability bias. The participants answer questions

according to what they believe the researcher wants to hear. This study made use of semi-structured, open-ended questions to minimize this. Probing is also critiqued due to the view that the interviewer indicates what they want to hear and that affects the participants' responses. In the interview process, probing was kept to a minimum and open-ended questions were asked, for example, "How did that make you feel? Can you explain further?"

## **5.6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Due to small sample size, the fathers' emotional involvement in their child's life need to be further researched. As seen in previous studies, the use of a school in the recruitment of participants may be advantageous in recruiting participants (Chideya & Williams, 2013; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). However, this will limit the sample to in-school fathers. This limitation may interfere with the chances of transferability because most of the participants will be around the same age and most likely be unemployed. Hence, future research should not only use a school to recruit participants but expand recruiting in other ways in order to obtain a sample with older fathers, fathers who have had more experience of fathering and occupy different employment statuses. According to Morrell (2006), the capability of the father to support his child financially places the father in a position to engage comfortably in other fatherhood activities, such as those that require emotional involvement. Thus, in order to get a holistic view of young fathers' perception of the importance of their emotional involvement in their child's lives, a study would need to comprise of a diverse sample inclusive of participants from both in-school, finished school, employed and unemployed. The findings of positive emotions associated with fatherhood may be further explored in order to expand on other duties that are emotionally rewarding, and other emotions experienced.

An interesting finding, one that should be further explored, in this research was the differences in how the participants described the role of their emotional support systems. This study confirmed the benefits of an encouraging support system, however there were some contradictions in findings across participants with regard to how much encouragement they need and the frequency. There is thus a need for further exploration of the role of support and where the support is coming from.

## **5.7. CONCLUSION**

Within the literature on fatherhood, there has been a dearth in the focus on young fathers in developing countries (Hendricks et al., 2010). In South Africa research on the emotional state of young fathers are not as well researched as their masculinity (Chideya & Williams, 2013). This includes research of their emotional involvement in their child's lives (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012; Morrell & Richter, 2006). This study aimed to examine how young fathers understand the role of the father's emotional involvement with his child. In addition, it aimed to explore whether young fathers might be more involved in fathering with the availability of an emotional support system. This study explored at the constructed experiences of four participants between the ages of 18 to 22 years old. This study made use of semi-structured interviews and a thematic analysis in order to do so.

This study consisted of a small however, diverse sample. All the fathers in this study were emotionally present in their children's lives regardless of their employment status. South African literature on young fathers emphasises the importance of being emotionally involved in their child's lives (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Langa & Smith, 2012; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). This study has expanded on the importance of emotional involvement that young fathers have emphasized in previous literature. This study also responds to previous research which suggested that future studies needs to be focused on young fathers' perceptions of their involvement and what this should entail (Chideya & Williams, 2013). Through the participants' discussions of the effects of fatherhood and their perceptions of paternal involvement, this study has increased the awareness of young fathers' perceptions of the importance of their emotional involvement in their children's lives. The young fathers perceived the importance of the father's emotional involvement in his child's life through the experience of personal growth and the growth of a bond between father and child. They perceived this as an effect of fatherhood and emphasized the emotional rewards that arose from the growth of the bond. In addition, the young fathers in this study described two main perceptions of fatherhood, namely, the role of the good father as emotionally involved, and fatherhood as ownership. Both these roles entailed the emotional involvement of fathers in their children's lives through different practices. These perceptions were accompanied by an ingrained duty to fulfil these roles. Thus, the fathers' perceptions of the importance of emotional involvement in their

children's lives is displayed in their expressed need to fulfil these roles, the obstacles that they encountered and overcame in fulfilling these roles, and the compromises they made in order to fulfil these roles.

This study also expands on previous literature on fathers' perceptions of paternal involvement, by focusing on the ways in which their emotional support systems influence the perceptions of the importance of the fathers' emotional involvement in child's life. Young fathers experienced support from their emotional support systems through the advice from and exemplary modelling of family and friends. Emotional support was found in family, friends, the mother of their child, and the mother of their child's kin. Young fathers' emotional support systems soothed their transition into fatherhood by providing reassurance of their paternal expectations and paternal role. The young fathers actively learnt how to assume the fatherhood role through the guidance of their emotional support systems, by listening to their advice and observing their behaviour. This expanded on previous literature, which state that the kin play a critical role in supporting fatherhood and their caregiving activities (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). The young fathers provided a detailed description of their experience of support and their specific needs in this domain. Parental absence was found to affect the young fathers' fatherhood role and their appreciation of both the parental figures in a child's life. Young fathers' experience of paternal absence was a significant factor in their fatherhood practices and the decisions they made as fathers.

This study has contributed to the limited amount of existing literature on how young fathers understand the importance of the father's emotional involvement with his child. In addition, the young fathers in this study showed that young fathers might be more involved in fathering their children if these fathers had a stronger emotional support system behind them. Given the small sample size, it is critical for the research on young father's emotional involvement in their child's lives to be expanded.

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**APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INFORMATION**

The table below provides basic demographic information for each participant. This tabulation is the representation of the information gathered from the biographical information section of the interview schedule.

Participant	P1 (Thabo)	P2 (Abdul)	P3 (Gavin)	P4 (Zinhle)
Age	18 years old	21 years old	22 years old	21 years old
Age of Child	1 year old	6 months old	1.5 years old	4 years old
Ethnicity	Black	Indian	Indian	Black
Living Arrangements	Lives with his Grandmother. The child's mother lives separate from him and his child. His child lives with him.	Lives with his parents. The child's mother lives with her guardians. Share residence on the weekends. The child lives with the mother.	Lives with his grandmother. The child's mother lives with her own mother. The child lives with the mother.	Lives with his grandmother and mother. The child's mother lives in a different flat of the same building with her mother. The child lives with the mother.
Relationship status	Separated from his child's mother (Single)	In a relationship with his child's mother	Separated from his child's mother (Single)	In a relationship with his child's mother
Level of Education	Grade 11	Matriculated. Studied for 1.5 years	Matriculated	Matriculated
Employment Status	Unemployed	Unemployed	Employed	Employed

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### Section A

#### Biographic Information

1. Age
2. Age of child
3. Duration of fatherhood
4. Ethnicity
5. Living arrangements
6. Relationship status
7. Level of Education
8. Employment status

### Section B

#### Research Focused Questions

9. How did you come to know that you had fathered a child?
10. How did you feel about the news?
11. How did your parents or guardians feel about this?
12. Were you present at the birth of your child?
13. Can you describe what your relationship with your child's mother and her family is like?
14. How do you understand your role as a father?
15. Can you tell me how you feel about being a father?
16. How would you describe your way of raising or caring for your child?
17. Can you describe any activities that you and your child enjoy doing together?
18. Can you tell me about any type of support you have received from your family or friends?
19. Are you satisfied (content) with the support?
20. Do you feel as though this support has affected your role as a father?
21. Can you tell me what kind of support would affect your role as a father?
22. Are there any experiences of being a father that have been particularly important to you?
23. Can you tell me who looks after your child?
24. Can you describe how often you see your child?

25. Can you tell me how your life has changed after becoming a father?
26. What do you perceive as a good father?
27. How would you like to engage with your child?
28. Would you like to tell me anything else?
29. Do you have any questions?

## APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



**PSYCHOLOGY**  
**THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)**



### **“Perceptions of fatherhood and emotional support by young South African fathers”**

Dear Sir,

My name is Carissa Poonsammy and I am doing a study about South African young fathers. I am a student at the University of the Witwatersrand and am doing this research for my Master of Arts degree in the field of Social and Psychological research by Coursework and Research Report. I am interested in the perceptions and experiences of Fathers who are between the ages of 14-24 years old, who have fathered a child that is at least six months of age and lives in Johannesburg. I would like to invite you to tell me how you perceive the role of emotional involvement with your child and your experience of emotional support. Participation involves a one-hour interview that will be in English.

With permission interviews will be taped (audio- recorded) to make sure that the information is recorded in a detailed and truthful way. Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time prior to the write up of the final report with no negative consequences. You do not have to answer any question if you feel uncomfortable doing so. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will be able to listen to the taped interview or read the written copy of the interview.

The written copy will be kept as a private document on a computer that is password protected. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will know this password. All information provided would be confidential, anonymity cannot be granted due to the interview that will be conducted by the researcher. Information that may identify will not be included in the written copy of the interview or any other part of this study. The researcher will provide you with a written copy of your interview within three weeks after the interview so that you are able to ask any further questions or elaborate on any particular aspect related to your interview. You will be able to access the written results of this study following examination of the final report; it will be available in the public academic domain. The information gathered by interviews from participants may form part of journal publications. Anyone who has been treated for or diagnosed with any psychiatric or psychological illness, or are taking or recovering from dependence on any mood altering medicine such as anti-depressants, alcohol or illegal drugs, will not be allowed to participate in this study. If you need counselling following participation in this study, you can contact Lifeline on 011 422-4242.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please feel free to contact me (details to follow). Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely

Carissa Poonsammy

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Supervisor: Leonie Human

011 717-4508

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**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER: H17/06/44**

## APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT



**PSYCHOLOGY**  
**THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)**



### **Informed Consent for Participation in interviews, audio-recording of interviews, and use of direct quotations in write up.**

#### **“Perceptions of fatherhood and emotional support by young South African fathers”**

I hereby confirm that I am participating out of my own free will.

	YES	NO
I give my permission for the interview to be taped (audio-recorded) to make sure that the information is recorded and written in a detailed and truthful way.		
I give permission for direct quotations from the interview to be included in the write up of the research report should the researcher wish to include them.		
I am aware that I may stop the interview at any point and that I may withdraw at any time prior to the write up of the final report with no negative consequences.		
I understand that only the researcher and the supervisor will be able to see the written copy of the interview.		
I understand that no information that may identify me will be included in the written copy of the interview and that another name will be used to protect my identity.		
I am aware that I may choose not to answer any question I feel uncomfortable with and that I may ask any questions I need to.		
I understand that I will be provided with the written copy of my interview and will be able to access the results of this study after the thesis has been examined.		

I consent to voluntary participation in this study:

Participant Name and Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer:

Interviewer Name and Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_