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Men to men: Single fathers' suggestions for [fellow] men who are raising their adolescent daughters

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ABSTRACT

Parenting adolescents has proven to be a stressful undertaking. Through the lens of the Fatherhood-Masculinity Model, this qualitative study presents and discusses single fathers' suggestions for other men who are raising adolescent daughters. The approach adopted here is that, in the literature on the father-child relationship, the focus is predominantly on the relationship between fathers and sons. The current study intends to address this imbalance. The argument made here is that more attention should be devoted to father-focused parenting approaches to interventions, so as to strengthen their skills. While upholding their traditional role as providers within the family, single fathers who are raising adolescent daughters also have the ability to offer affectionate and nurturing support to meet their girl children's emotional and physical requirements. Data saturation was reached after selecting 14 participants, contacted through telephonic interviews and using open-ended questions contained in an interview guide. The data were subsequently analysed thematically. The principles of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were applicable throughout the research process. The findings widely acknowledged the importance of the father-daughter relationship, highlighting the potential benefits of professional help for single fathers. The study also aimed to break down persistent misconceptions about the father-daughter relationship and guide the social work profession towards a more single-father-focused approach. The study made recommendations for social work practice and curriculum as well as policy.

Keywords: adolescence; adolescent daughters; parenting; single fathers

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL BACKGROUND

The word 'father' evokes many images for a child, including that of a strong man who will love and protect her, and provide for their needs (Makofane, 2015). Across cultures, the father's role in the development of children's cognitive and social skills appears to powerful (Rollè et al., 2019). Fathers' parenting is recognised as an important factor that contributes to the emotional and cognitive development of children, particularly when they reach the adolescent stage (Lesch & De Jager, 2014). The literature focusing on the relationship between fathers and daughters, however, is always overshadowed by studies of the father-son dynamic (Noronha & Monteiro, 2016).

Single-parent households have become a common phenomenon in many societies, yet they have not received the same attention and scholarly interest as families (Curtis et al., 2017). Despite single parenting once being viewed as the exception to the norm, it has become quite common, as many households are headed by a single parent who is responsible for the wellbeing of the children (Mudau et al., 2018). There are different forms of single-parent families, headed either by a single mother or father. These families might be headed by a divorced parent, a widowed spouse or a parent who is single by choice (Cheng & Wu, 2016). Mudau et al. (2018) assert that some consider single parenting to be 'abnormal', as they believe children should be raised in a typical household consisting of two parents – a mother and a father.

The quality of a parent-adolescent relationship is associated with both positive and negative effects, including social competence and positive values, but also depression and aggression (McKinney & Renk, 2011). Many single fathers contribute to their daughters' development by maintaining order through the application of rules, by providing guidance, being role models for them, and serving as a link between the family and other individuals, communities and the outside world. Of the studies on family relationships, the father-daughter relationship during adolescence is perhaps the worst understood and least studied (Lamb & Lewis, 2010).

This article is derived from a postgraduate dissertation that explored the experiences of single fathers who were raising adolescent daughters. Notably, the goal here is to present and discuss suggestions which single fathers can make to other men in a similar situation. The argument put forward here is that more attention should be paid to father-focused parenting approaches to interventions to strengthen fathers' skills, deepen their involvement.

ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a difficult period, as young people often experience physical, psychological, social and behavioural changes (Kobak et al., 2017; Valizadeh et al., 2018). As the literature shows, parenting adolescents is stressful and, because of significant changes in the family structure and/or other factors such as divorce, many fathers have been left in the role of single parent (Jafari et al., 2016). Many adolescents think that, to survive in the world, they must do what they can to achieve a certain status. As the literature indicates, it is up to parents to correct any misconceptions and even to resolve any uncertainties about performing their parental roles so that they can raise well-adjusted adolescents (Kobak et al., 2017). Single fathers have not received the same level of scholarly attention as single mothers (Forehand et al., 2016). If an

adolescent girl has no female parent available to discuss her changing body and answer her many questions, fathers may have to assume that responsibility, or the questions must be postponed inconveniently and indefinitely until someone who can help is available. Many fathers are scared to talk to their adolescent daughters about sensitive topics such as sex, puberty and menstruation (Allen, 2012).

THE PHENOMENON OF SINGLE FATHERHOOD

Single fatherhood is a dynamic and constantly evolving phenomenon. As a concept, it refers to a family structure in which a man, who is not in a marital relationship or cohabiting, takes on the primary role of caregiver and parent of one or more children (Ali & Soomar, 2019; Kong & Kim, 2015). The role may stem from various circumstances, including separation, divorce or the death of a spouse/partner. In some instances, it could just be a man's personal choice to raise his children as a single parent. Changes in family law and custody arrangements around the world have evolved to promote greater gender equality within marital relationships, which has also led to an increase in the number of cases where fathers are granted custody of their children (Coles, 2015). The main challenges which single fathers experience might vary widely, depending on their circumstances, but they often involve managing household tasks, childcare and the overall upbringing of their children without a co-parent (Coles, 2015).

THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN FATHERHOOD

Social constructions of fatherhood vary across cultures and countries (Gregory & Milner, 2011). Traditionally, fathers are portrayed as disciplinarians who are expected to be strict and emotionally aloof towards their children (Zhang et al., 2021). Traditional fatherhood discourses were overly restrictive of the father's involvement in pre- and post-natal care, and engagement in the caregiving of their children, although those restrictions have lessened over time. Seemingly, the model of fatherhood – that of being the 'breadwinner' – is in decline and men now recognise that fatherhood involves more than just working to support their children materially (Churchill & Craig, 2022). The contemporary idea of fatherhood reflects a 'new man' who is highly involved in the care of his children and is a nurturing father (Randles, 2018). In modern societies, young fathers in particular feel a strong sense of responsibility towards their children (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015).

Contrary to the dominant discourse of 'bad men' (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015), absent fathers (Gregory & Milner, 2011), 'deadbeat dads' (O'Gara, 2024) or reluctant dads (Rehel, 2014), fathers nowadays would prefer to be more involved in all aspects of parenting, which is more likely to deliver positive outcomes for both the parent and the child (Mogro-Wilson & Cifuentes Jr, 2020). The theme of 'new fatherhood' has received support in many countries (Gregory & Milner, 2011), with governments providing legislative support for fathers who wish to reconcile work and family demands (Churchill & Craig, 2022). These governments seem to be striving for gender equality (Lim, 2021) – a move which represents a significant transformation of the concept of fatherhood and fathering practices in recent decades (Churchill & Craig, 2022). Traditionally, parental leave was exclusively available to women, because of the way in which the social system construed childcare as primarily a maternal responsibility, while males were viewed as breadwinners (Gregory & Milner, 2011). Today, however, new

fathers can claim paternity leave in countries such as France, Australia (Churchill & Craig, 2022) and Singapore (Lim, 2021). Here in South Africa, new fathers are entitled to ten days' paternal leave in terms of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 75 of 1997 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1997), as amended by the Labour Laws Amendment Act, 10 of 2018 (RSA, 2018). These policies, which promote responsible fatherhood, are a response to concerns about 'fatherlessness' as a growing social problem (Randles, 2018).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Adolescence is a challenging period, with young people experiencing physical, psychological, social and behavioural changes (Valizadeh et al., 2018). There are, however, no obvious reasons as to why parents perceive this period as being very challenging regarding the issues they experience, or their concerns relating to their adolescent offspring. This confirms that little is known about the experiences of parents, specifically single fathers, during this stage of their children's lives (Currie & Sider, 2013).

There is a popular view that fathers cannot perform the nurturing and caregiving roles generally associated with a mother. Given such negative attitudes towards fathers, this researcher was prompted to study the experiences of single men who raise adolescent children, specifically with a view to encouraging them to achieve effective communication and build positive relationships with their adolescent girl children. The study also aims to break down persistent misconceptions about the father-daughter relationship and guide the social work profession to adopting a more single-father-focused approach.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted Pleck's (2010) Fatherhood-Masculinity Model, which helps to explain that specific roles of fathering are prescribed according to notions of masculinity and the gender differences between men and women. The model explains that a father's male gender status potentially influences his paternal parenting behaviours and attitudes. It differentiates between masculinity as the male's gender status and masculinity as a man's masculine orientation. The Fatherhood-Masculinity Model systematically explores the potential connections between the dual aspects of fatherhood and masculinity, and their intricate potential connections to child-related outcomes as well as the outcomes in respect of the father's wellbeing (Pleck, 2010). Although no single fathering model applies to all men (Ratele et al., 2012), this model was selected because many fathers experience contradictions between their parenting practice and the social and cultural norms of the modern world (Magaraggia, 2013). These fathers are challenged to integrate engaged parenting practices in their fathering roles. For example, fathers in traditional paternal child relationships uphold dominant traditional forms of masculinity and repress emotionality, affectivity and physical closeness.

Attachment theory was also deemed appropriate for this study: John Bowlby (1944, 1951, 1969), who developed the theory, conceptualised attachment as an intrinsic need for a child to secure and maintain psychological connectedness throughout their lifetime (Coffman & Swank, 2021). This theory is premised on the belief that a child who consistently experiences responsive and sensitive caregiving develops an expectation that others will be supportive and available in times of need (Ali et al., 2021). This assumption makes attachment theory a

valuable framework within which to explore single fathers' experiences of raising adolescent daughters. Furthermore, the vital role of parents in attachment theory and the clear importance of sound parenting for child development (Jones et al., 2015) highlight the relevance and appropriateness of this theory to the study.

APPLICATION OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative, exploratory and descriptive study seeks to present and discuss single fathers' suggestions to their fellow fathers who are raising adolescent daughters. The qualitative approach allowed for the identification and elaboration of the participants' subjective experiences in terms of breadth and depth (Funk & Kobayashi, 2016). An exploratory design was employed, since there is very limited knowledge about this topic (Schmitz, 2016); descriptive design was deemed relevant for conveying an accurate account of the participants' suggestions to other men who are raising their adolescent daughters (Grove et al., 2013).

Customarily, qualitative studies involve relatively small samples (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Data saturation was achieved during the tenth interview; to confirm data saturation, four more interviews were conducted and no new information emerged. In line with purposive sampling techniques, the study only considered fathers who had never been married and were raising adolescent daughters on their own. These experiences provided useful insights into the realities of single fathers who had never experienced the assistance of their partners in raising their children. For practical and convenience reasons, participants had to reside in the area of Umgungundlovu in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. All the interviews were conducted in isiZulu, the predominant language spoken in the area. The interview guide was translated by the first author (who is a native isiZulu speaker) and the translated version was subsequently verified by the second author. It is important to note that the fundamental intention with this translation was to convey meaning rather than literal equivalence (Makusha et al., 2013). In addition to the participants' biographical profiles (age, level of education, the period for which they had been raising their adolescent daughter, source of income, as well as the age of their daughter), the interview guide explored what advice each participant could give to other fathers who are bringing up adolescent daughters.

Data were gathered through semi-structured telephonic interviews conducted by means of open-ended questions contained in an interview guide. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, telephonic interviews were deemed ideal for collecting data from the participants, because of the associated health restrictions. With the written permission of the participants, all the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. After that the data were analysed thematically. Seven themes emerged from the data. However, for the purpose of this article, only the findings from the themes that captured the advice the participants would give to other fathers who are raising their adolescent daughters are presented.

Credibility was achieved by continually verifying current findings against previous research findings and literature, engaging the participants in the verification process, and consultations between the first and second authors as well as the institutional research committees. Confirmability was achieved by documenting information gained during data collection. The findings were validated using an independent coder in the data analysis to ensure dependability.

In this study, transferability was enhanced by providing thick descriptions of the findings, with appropriate verbatim quotations. To avoid any personal biases, the first author did not collect data from any of her colleagues, friends, clients or their immediate families.

Regarding ethical issues, approval was requested from, and granted by, the University of South Africa's Departmental Research and Ethics Committee (reference number 4788503_CREC_CHS_2022). Additionally, participants consented in writing to participate in the study. All the participants were assured of confidentiality and, at the end of each interview, were reminded that a debriefing service was available, should they require it. However, no participants expressed such a need.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 below summarises the participants' biographical profiles.

Table 1: **Participants' biographical profiles**

Participant code	Age	Level of education	Period of raising an adolescent daughter alone (in years)	Source of income	Age of the adolescent daughter
Participant 1	47	Bachelor's degree	8	Community development worker	16
Participant 2	44	Bachelor's degree	14	Social worker	14
Participant 3	42	Diploma	5	Self-employed	17
Participant 4	45	Diploma	3	Director	19
Participant 5	41	Diploma	5	Psychologist	16
Participant 6	43	Bachelors' degree	14	Employed	18
Participant 7	41	Postgraduate	6	Educator	16
Participant 8	46	Bachelors' degree	15	Educator	17
Participant 9	42	Diploma	7	Public administrator	15
Participant 10	42	Grade 4	6	Farm general worker	13
Participant 11	47	Bachelors' degree	13	Social worker	13
Participant 12	47	Bachelor's degree	14	Social worker	18
Participant 13	46	Diploma	10	Farmer	16
Participant 14	48	Postgraduate	1	Educator	16

The details are somewhat self-explanatory, but key among them is that, with all the participants, the daughters' ages fell within the adolescent category, ranging from 13 to 19 years. Adolescence refers to the transitional phase in an individual's psychological and physical development, typically spanning from the onset of puberty to the attainment of legal adulthood (Zaky, 2016). This stage is marked by rapid biological, cognitive and neurological transformations, which significantly influence psychological functioning and interpersonal relationships (Branje, 2018). Throughout this period, it is believed that parent-child relationships evolve into more impartial, interdependent and mutual partnerships.

PRESENTATION OF THEMES

The main purpose of this study was to explore the participants' valuable suggestions for men who are raising daughters as single fathers. By tapping into the experiences and insights of those individuals, the study sought to shed light on effective strategies and approaches that can enhance father-daughter relationships and contribute to the overall wellbeing of those young ladies. The findings from this exploration were analysed thematically, in tandem with the available literature, under several themes.

Theme 1: Single fathers should be emotionally present, loving, nurturing, and foster open communication with their adolescent daughters

One of the current topics generating significant debate in family-focused research revolves around the pursuit of optimal parenting strategies and practices (McKinney et al., 2011). However, single fathers should understand the fragility of a girl child, and her need for extra love and attention. As the literature shows, girls may seek love elsewhere if they do not receive it at home, leading to negative consequences (Dixon-Ward & Chan, 2022).

Most of the participants overwhelmingly advised single fathers to be present in all aspects of their daughters' lives, both physically and emotionally. Being physically present makes a significant difference, in their view, in that material possessions cannot replace the value of personal connection and an understanding of their daughters' preferences and needs. This assertion is expressed in the comprehensive comment below:

> *The advice I can give to other fathers, who are raising their children by themselves, is that they must understand that a girl child is very fragile. They always need extra love. When I say extra love, I mean attention. Most of the girls act out … because they don't get enough love in their own home. That is the reason why they go and seek it somewhere else, in a wrong way. So, make sure that, as a father, you are always present. Make sure that you listen to your girl child often. Although you* [might] *not* [be] *wealthy, you cannot* [meet her] *financial needs, but you have to be there emotionally, physically and mentally. You must be present and, most importantly, what I know according to my own experience, physical presence makes a lot of difference. You hear the child say, "My dad is always there for me", you* [might] *give them money and whatever you want to give them, but if you are never present, they can never say that you are always there for them. There are things you cannot exchange* [for] *money, which children want. Sometimes they just want you to jog with them, run around with them and, sometimes, they just want you to watch TV with them. Most of the time, as parents, we ignore all those things, because we are busy with our own things.*

> *When you come home, you don't even know what your daughter likes, you don't know what kind of food your daughter likes, because you are never present. So, those are critical things which are needed the most.* (Participant 5)

This comment emphasises the significance of fathers being present in their daughters' lives and being emotionally supportive, as this contributes to their overall wellbeing and helps to establish strong parent-child bonds (Soenens et al., 2017). Studies suggest that a positive and engaged father-daughter relationship has many benefits for the child's emotional wellbeing, self-esteem, academic achievement and social competence (Clowes et al., 2013). The presence of a loving and involved single father contributes to a sense of security and serves as a valuable role model for girls, as they navigate relationships and develop their own identities (Cabrera, Shannon et al., 2014).

The participants also emphasised the importance of open communication, love, patience and the need to create a healthy environment for effective parent-child interaction. According to Runcan (2012), the time a parent spends engaging with his children in a secure and supportive environment, where open communication occurs about the child's feelings and interests, is incredibly valuable. This is evident from participants' suggestions in the comments below:

> *When the mother has moved on with her life and you are alone, be present, love your child, and be an approachable father. Create a healthy environment for a child to be able to talk to you, so that you will be a solution to your child's problems. Be a father, brother and friend to your girl child. Make sure that she communicates with you more than* [with] *her friends. If she asks questions and you don't know, be honest with her, research and come back with an answer.* (Participant 2)

> *Well, … it is important to be open. Love your child and be patient with your child. We must make sure that we create a healthy environment for our children to communicate with us about everything. If we don't do that, our children will go to outsiders and share their difficulties with them. As a father, you must become a friend to your daughter. The child must not fear you;* [you must] *understand each other and communicate effectively.* (Participant 6)

The literature similarly suggests that demonstrating love and patience towards children is vital for their emotional development (Lopez, 2020). Fathers who show affection, care and understanding create a nurturing environment, where children feel valued and supported (Zia & Ali, 2014). Patience allows fathers to listen attentively, validate their children's emotions, and respond in a calm and understanding manner (Cabrera et al., 2014).

The participants further highlighted that it is important for parents to demonstrate trust in their children's decision-making abilities, as they grow older. The significance of maintaining a positive relationship between a girl child and other female figures in her life, for emotional support, was encouraged by this participant:

> *As a parent, you must tell the child the truth from the onset. Tell the child what happened to her mother, and where she is. Do not be biased or take sides and make the other partner a bad person to the child. That will make a child have hatred. Develop a good relationship*

> *between your girl child and other females that are close to you, for example, your sister or your mother. That will help her to have people to talk to when she needs a female figure. Be honest, open, transparent, and have trust. Show your child that you trust that she can make informed decisions.* (Participant 1)

Evidently, and as also shown in the literature (Barry et al., 2017), building a positive relationship between a child and supportive adults, such as extended family members or close friends, can contribute to her social and emotional wellbeing. As Fernández-Río and Suarez (2016) suggest, allowing children to have autonomy, within appropriate limits, supports the development of their self-confidence, responsibility and problem-solving skills.

The literature emphasises the importance of being strong and resilient in dealing with the difficulties arising while raising an adolescent (Southwick et al., 2014). This quality can help parents to maintain their authority and make difficult decisions when necessary. The emphasis is on the significance of being open-minded as a parent. According to McRae (2016, p. 98), embracing the value of open-mindedness is particularly evident through the "realism of morality", which encompasses a broad spectrum of principles such as self-respect, respect for others, and genuine care for the wellbeing of oneself and others. This enables parents to understand and appreciate the unique perspectives, interests and aspirations of adolescent girls (Pachiappan et al., 2022).

One participant highlighted important qualities and approaches needed in raising adolescent girls, and suggests adopting specific strategies to effectively navigate the challenges facing this cohort:

> *Okay, what I can say is that they* [fathers] *must have a backbone, be open-minded and patient. There are many challenges that teenage girls are facing. When you make rules, make them with a pure heart. One must know that he is raising someone who has a future ahead of her, and someone who is going to be a future parent as well. When the child has made a mistake, talk about it, guide her with love, and understand that she will learn from that mistake, and, finally, forgive your child. Do not be too strict, be approachable.* (Participant 13)

This comment seems to emphasise that raising adolescents can be challenging and that patience is crucial in dealing with unpredictable behaviour. Therefore, by being patient, parents can provide the necessary support and guidance to allow their children to explore and learn from their experiences. Fathers should guide their adolescent daughters to understand that their actions and decisions will shape their future paths (Keizer et al., 2019). The responsibility of preparing adolescent daughters for adulthood, including for their potential roles as future parents themselves, should also be addressed.

Some participants encouraged single fathers to take a relaxed approach and allow their children to develop at their own pace. Furthermore, the significance of offering choices and empowering children to make their own decisions, allowing them to learn from their own mistakes and grow independently, is emphasised in the comment below:

> *I would advise them to take it easy and give the children a chance to blossom. They should allow them to be free. Sometimes, as parents we want our children to do things as we want them to, failing to understand that they will take time to become what we want them to be. When you allow her to have choices, she will learn to live with her choices. If I make decisions for her, she will sometimes say, "These are my father's choices, at some stage I have to do things my way." As a parent, take it easy, don't be a superhero, don't be someone who knows everything. Lastly, allow the child to make her own choices, so that when she makes mistakes, she will learn from them and will also try to correct them, in her own way. That is what I am trying to do.* (Participant 8)

This view demonstrates that effective communication is indeed crucial in parenting, as it allows for the proper identification and resolution of issues. When communication is lacking, problems may go unnoticed or take longer to address (Jaureguizar et al., 2018).

The importance of emotional closeness and consistency in the father-daughter relationship was also emphasised by this comment:

> *What I can say, is that they must not distance themselves emotionally from their daughters. They must be pillars of strength and be consistent with their adolescent girls. My daughter must be assured that, when she needs me as a father, I will always be there for her. They must always keep their promises … no broken promises at all. If a child has some activities at school and a father has promised a child to come to school, he must make sure that he comes, so that the child will trust that her father will always be there when she needs him. Even if it's not about school activities, … anything you promised the child as a father, you must make sure you fulfil the promise.* (Participant 11)

The comment demonstrates that the bond between father and daughter is a dynamic and intricate relationship that shapes both their lives. Therefore, the findings seem to corroborate the assertion that fathers who maintain emotional closeness, demonstrate consistency and fulfil their promises play a vital role in the wellbeing and development of their adolescent daughters (Stein et al., 2016). By being present, reliable and supportive, fathers can establish a strong foundation for a trusting and positive father-daughter relationship.

Theme 2: Teach your adolescent daughter the importance of financial literacy

Parents often bear the financial consequences of their children's lack of financial capability and independence. Hence, they should place significant emphasis on financial education. Some scholars argue that the lack of financial literacy and erratic financial spending behaviour among the younger generation are incredibly concerning (Mohammed et al., 2018). There is a learning curve when it comes to financial literacy, as young individuals often learn from their own financial mistakes and experiences (Sasmito et al., 2023). It is very important to teach children about budgeting and managing money, for their current and future financial wellbeing.

By providing practical experiences, such as allowing them to manage a specific amount of (pocket) money and encouraging accountability (Lührmann et al., 2018), parents can effectively teach their children how to manage their finances and foster responsible financial habits. This is indicated in the comments below:

You also need to teach them to differentiate between their needs and wants. (Participant 5)

She must understand budgeting. The child must know that she needs to plan accordingly when she wants to buy something and know that, in life, you do not get everything you want. We get things one at a time. Once you don't teach her to budget, you might create an impression that she will get everything she wants from you as a parent, at any time. (Participant 2)

Give her [an] *amount of money to manage. After a month, ask her to account for what she did with the money you gave her. A child must always know that you are a parent, but do not be too harsh.* (Participant 1)

These suggestions emphasise the importance of financial literacy. According to Zhu (2021), adolescents' financial behaviours typically do not revolve around budgeting, spending and saving conscientiously. However, the lifestyles they develop during this phase can persist into adulthood and have long-term effects on their financial wellbeing. Fahrurrozi et al. (2022) emphasise that parents can help their children understand the value of money, the importance of making thoughtful financial decisions and the need to prioritise their expenses. As young adolescents progress into adulthood they will face difficult financial challenges, including managing their accounts and prioritising savings (Amagir et al., 2018). An increasing number of young adults are facing hardships when their parents are unable to meet their financial obligations (Kim & Chatterjee, 2013).

Theme 3: Be humble enough to reach out for help from the experts

In today's world, parents receive a lot of advice from different sources, like family members, doctors and other experts. Sometimes this advice can be confusing and contradictory. Pedersen (2017) argues that parents should determine which qualities and skills are important to ensure that they raise 'successful' and happy adults. It is therefore vital to seek professional help and support when parenting, particularly when it comes to a child's health and development (Radez et al., 2021). Some scholars point out that parents who engage with healthcare practitioners and follow their guidance tend to have better outcomes in the process of seeing to their child's wellbeing (Forehand et al., 2015).

The participants' accounts provide the assurance that raising an adolescent girl child is achievable, but requires support from relevant professionals who are well trained in guiding children, as attested to in the comment below:

They must be patient, and they must be willing to learn and not be ashamed to visit health practitioners. It is doable … raising a girl child is doable. They must prefer to consult with health practitioners. Public health centres are free, and you can get help without paying [as] *much money* [as] *others pay in the private sector. Nurses are well trained in advising children; they can even go the extra mile and reach the things you cannot discuss with your daughter.* (Participant 9)

This extract demonstrates that seeking guidance and support from a range of sources when raising adolescent girls is important for single fathers. In this instance, the role of nurses is to provide support and education to parents, which ultimately delivers positive outcomes for the

child. Nurses are not only trained to address physical health concerns, but also to provide support with the emotional and behavioural aspects of a child's development, making them important resources for single fathers seeking guidance in raising adolescent daughters (Baker et al., 2011).

Parenting interventions have significant potential for fostering the wellbeing of children, families and communities. They can have a comprehensive and positive impact on various aspects of the social, physical, spiritual and mental dimensions of human welfare, as affirmed in this comment:

> *There are also some seminars where parents are taught … parenting skills. We should also seek help from people who have done this before, men who have raised adolescent girls on their own. We must also bring our children close to people who believe in God, and people who go to church. It has helped me a lot to have a relationship with my neighbours, who believe in God. Even if you* [as a parent] *don't go to church like me, you must allow your child to go to church, because it helps. People who pray, make things easy* [laughs]. (Participant 10)

The comment seems to corroborate the widely held belief of most religious people, across various faiths, that prayer is of fundamental importance as a distinctive expression of spirituality (Kohn, 2020). Most religious people turn to their respective religious doctrines to find solutions to stress, hesitation and panic (Putra et al., 2023). Additionally, a review of the research revealed that scholars recognise the influential role of parents, peers and mentors in shaping the religious development of adolescents (Cohen-Malayev et al., 2014).

Two participants acknowledged that counselling can educate parents about the typical challenges adolescents face, thus assisting them in supporting their children during any critical period. It can also help parents build a strong and supportive relationship with their adolescents, promoting positive emotional health and wellbeing, as indicated in the comments below:

> *We were referred to a school social worker from the Department of Social Development. We had counselling because it was recommended for trauma, to assist her to grieve and so forth. So, she attended those sessions, and I attended those sessions. So, that's when I built self-discovery. Yes, and they helped me with life skills, parental roles, and responsibilities.* (Participant 3)

> *The social worker has also assisted a lot since* [my daughter] *went for behavioural change sessions. She would always come and share most of the things that were discussed in those programmes, and I have noticed that they helped her a lot.* (Participant 9)

The literature describes social workers' assistance in addressing behavioural change issues and further highlights the significance of professional support in promoting positive outcomes for adolescents and their parents (Hawley & Williford, 2015). Some scholars argue that behavioural change is evidence of the success of interventions designed to address various issues in adolescents (Kosterman et al., 2019). Social workers are trained professionals who are equipped to offer personalised support and guidance to young ladies and their families.

They are well equipped to address the psychosocial needs of individuals and facilitate positive change in their lives (Dyrkacz, 2022).

The findings further revealed that certain activities, such as youth camps, might have a positive impact on the lives of adolescent girls. These camps can provide a supportive and nurturing environment for young individuals, which allows them to explore their emotions, develop coping strategies and skills, and enhance their social interactions (Rose et al., 2018). Adolescents' participation in these activities can contribute to their emotional wellbeing, self-awareness and overall positive development during different developmental stages (Guerra-Bustamante et al., 2019). The comment below attests to this view:

> *They used to go to youth camps with my neighbours … Their church organises some sessions with counsellors, but I don't know what they were doing there and whether professionals conducted those sessions. I used to hear from my daughter when she came back from those sessions.* (Participant 10)

Similarly, studies have proven that involvement in extramural activities can have many benefits for adolescents, including reduced stress and anxiety, improved social skills, enhanced self-esteem and better emotional regulation. In their study into the promotion of youth development, Fredricks and Simpkins (2012) found that adolescents who engage in organised social activities have a better chance of positive growth and development. Furthermore, such activities offer opportunities for adolescent self-recovery and self-expression, and for engaging in problem-solving; to learn the competencies needed that will contribute to the overall wellbeing of adolescents and their families.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Drawing from Pleck's (2010) Fatherhood-Masculinity Model and John Bowlby's attachment theory, the findings delved into the realities of single men who were raising adolescent daughters at the time of the study. The goal was to present and discuss single fathers' suggestions to such men. Consistent with the key tenets of attachment theory, the findings reported on here acknowledge the importance of the father-daughter relationship. Most participants emphasised the need for single fathers to be open and approachable to their daughters. The first two themes explored the roles, responsibilities and characteristics of a good father. In this regard, Pleck's (2010) Fatherhood-Masculinity Model was deemed relevant for understanding single fathers' experiences of the contradictions between their parenting practice desires and some modern-day social and cultural norms. The findings overwhelmingly emphasised the invaluable benefits of creating a healthy environment for effective parent-child relationships. Open communication, love, trust, honesty, transparency and patience were identified as important ingredients for such engagement. These factors serve to build a strong bond and trust between single fathers and their children, enabling the sharing of experiences and difficulties. Other authors contend that trust plays a fundamental role in building social relations and establishing harmony between parents and children (Hakim et al., 2012). Studies have shown that fathers' active involvement positively affects children's wellbeing, as well as their cognitive, emotional and social development (Lv et al., 2018). As the findings attest, single fathers also have the ability to offer affectionate and nurturing support to meet their

children's emotional and physical needs, while upholding their traditional role as providers within the family. The value of fostering a supportive and inclusive environment that allows a child to express herself freely and that promote a strong parent-child bond cannot be underestimated (Zia & Ali, 2014). In exploring the journey of single parents, studies suggest that positive parenting practices, such as showing emotional warmth and being consistent can enhance father-child relationships (Cabrera et al., 2014).

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The last theme highlighted the potential benefits of professional help for single fathers. Counselling and parenting programmes are crucial for enhancing parenting skills. Studies have confirmed the importance of acknowledging the potential benefits of professional help in parenting, including single-father parenting (Yoo et al., 2020). Counselling and parenting programmes are very effective in enhancing parenting skills and parent-child relationships. Thus, single fathers seeking help should not be seen as a weakness, but rather as a way of enhancing their parenting skills and addressing life's challenges effectively. Professional intervention may offer a valuable platform for parents to process their experiences, gain insights and receive proper guidance (DeHoff et al., 2016). The participants' reflections seem to corroborate the assertion that seeking counselling and learning parenting skills can help parents to develop effective communication strategies that are crucial for understanding their children's needs and concerns (Loukia & Ourania, 2020). Blickman and Campbell (2023) highlight the crucial role of fathers in their daughters' lives, pointing out how positive father-daughter relationships contribute to the wellbeing and development of adolescents. It is also important to understand that adolescents often require emotional support and open communication with their parents. Seeking professional help can equip parents with the tools needed to provide this support effectively (Murphy et al., 2022).

The findings highlight the value of social support in the parenting process. Fostering strong family relationships is crucial for providing children with a sense of support and belonging (Skilbred et al., 2017). By nurturing connections with extended family members, children can benefit from the love, guidance and diverse perspectives that each family member brings. Furthermore, when adults who are important to the child cooperate, share responsibilities and involve themselves in decision making, children are more likely to thrive and succeed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Social work practice

Considering that many single fathers want to maintain a stable living environment and be attentive to their daughters' needs, social workers should organise parenting workshops and support groups exclusively for this group of men. Workshops can cover topics such as establishing effective communication, understanding the unique needs of adolescent girls and building healthy relationships.

- Policy

As single fathers may encounter challenges in meeting all the financial needs of their adolescent daughters, it is recommended that policymakers in the Department of Social Development establish policies that offer financial assistance and resources to low-income single-father-led households. This support should include childcare options, aid in affording necessities such as appropriate nutrition and the provision of access to quality education.

- Social work curriculum

In the light of the suggestion that fathers should strive to be emotionally present, as adolescent daughters need extra love and attention, it is recommended that researchers explore in-depth the dynamics of father-daughter relationships in single-parent households.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Generally, small samples are inherent in qualitative studies, which was the case in this instance. However, the researchers were not interested in representing the population as a whole, but in selecting a sample that would provide appropriate and rich insights into single fathers' suggestions to fellow fathers who are raising adolescent daughters.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Nompumelelo Princess Shange was a Master's student at the University of South Africa. The study was conducted from 2021 to 2023. Nompumelelo was responsible for conceptualising the topic, collecting the data, analysing the data and compiling the final report.

Nathaniel Phuti Kgadima is an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. His fields of interest are families and gender issues. He supervised the Master's study and was responsible for conceptualising the article from the main study.

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