

MOLO SONGOLOLO

Challenges of Fatherhood in Contemporary South Africa



Patric Solomons

About Molo Songololo

- Registered and Designated Child Rights & Protection organisation
- Support services for child victims of sexual violence, those at risk and their families
- Empower children to know, respect and protect their rights and participate in decisions making
- Awareness, advocacy and education to promote and protect the rights of children

Young Men's Forum

Provide insights into challenges of fatherhood
boys 12 to 17 years of age



Defining fatherhood

A state / responsibility of being a father

A teen or adult male taking on a parent role and responsibility.

- **Biological father**
- **Non-biological father**

Young Men's Forum

A father is a male person who fulfil parental responsibilities, is dependable, reliable, supportive; and striving to provide a loving, caring, safe and nurturing home and environment for their children; and support their needs, interests, talents and educational development.

“Impregnating a female do not mean you automatically become a father”



Children's experiences of fatherhood!

- Live together in same house / location
- Live without biological father
- Live with other family members
- Live with a step-father, mother's boyfriend, other
- Live in same neighbourhood – some / no contact
- Live in same town or city – some / no contact
- No contact – unaware of whereabouts / prison / left
- No longer alive – deceased
- Abandoned before birth
- Abandoned after birth
- Unknown from birth

Children's views about fatherhood

- **Provider** - ? *Many struggle / are unable to provide*
 - low wages, Unemployed / poverty /
- **Protector** - ? *Many fail to do so / are offenders*
- Partners and supporter – *few identified as such*
- Controller
- Abuser
- Troublemaker - Housebreaker
- Failure and disappointment
- Unreliable and untrustworthy
- Deserter – a runaway

Children's ideas of what fatherhood should be like

- Responsible and dependable
- Trustworthy and reliable
- Loving, caring and trusting person / experience
- Fun and enjoyable person / experience
- Provider and backer
- Protector and comforter
- Nurturer, guide and supporter
- Communicator and listener
- Helper and motivator

Key challenges for fatherhood in contemporary South Africa!

Must be viewed through the following lenses to ensure greater understanding of the underlying causes of these challenges;

- **Patriarchy**
- **Gender discrimination**
- **Sexism**
- **Socialisation of boys and men**
- **Violence**

Insights into these are drawn from YOUNG MEN'S FORUM participants to the role of fathers in their lives

Patriarchy

Beliefs of superiority – male privilege – entitlement and ideas of inherent power over women and children – and using that power to their own advancement and protection

Young Men's Forum

Despite awareness and knowledge of human rights, teen boys express the following; “Boys and men are stronger than girls and women. Boys and men have more power. Boys are taught to be boys from birth. It is natural, it is what it is.”

Fatherhood challenges must be examined in the context of male superiority.



Gender inequality

- Belief that men and women are not equal and taking action to enforce this perceived inequality

Young Men's Forum

Boys accept that they must be treated fairly and equally. However, boys continue to harbour ideas that men and women are not equal. “Girls can not be expected to be treated the same as boys. There are certain things for girls and other stuff for boys”.

Many fathers fail to live up to their own, family and societal expectations; and use their power in one way or another to dominate.

Sexism

- Discrimination based on sex or gender or the belief that men are superior to women and thus discrimination is justified

Young Men's Forum

- “Girls and women are allowed to do many things today. It's not sexism not to allow girls and women to do certain things. It is just wrong for them to sleep around and have many partners. It is no problem for boys and men. We must have sex”.

Many children are the result of unplanned and forced sex. Women often have very little say in when and how they have sex. Girls and women are treated “differently” because they female.

Socialisation of boys and men through culture, religion and beliefs

- Patriarchy, gender inequality, sexism are enforced through culture, religion and social beliefs from one generation to the next.

Young Men's Forum

- Generally mothers, aunts, grandmothers and sisters are the primary caregivers. “Girls do housework and boys get to do their thing. We are taught to one-day take a wife and have kids. Mothers are disappointed if you don't marry, have kids or when you gay”.
- *Woman are generally forced to perpetuate male superiority and shape the gender roles for their children.*

Violence

The culture of violence in south Africa is pervasive and men identified as the main offenders. Sexual violence threatens every household, women and children are most vulnerable.

Young Men's Forum

‘It is hard because everyone suspect you. I sometimes stay home and is afraid to go out because I might get blamed. If something bad happens its always men. Some boys commit crime because they are already suspects’.

Fathers generally fail to engage effectively on issues of violence and crime. Many shy away from it and many are offenders of domestic violence.

Changing male characteristics

- Hyper-masculinity
- Dominance
- Having control
- Aggression
- Suppression of emotions and feelings

These male characteristics are being contested by various social, cultural and political developments.

- Social – integration – individualism - feminism
- Sexual – Freedom & Fluidity - LGBTIQ
- Religious – Tolerance
- Political – Human Rights

Ongoing challenges of fatherhood

- Human Rights culture contesting role of men & fathers
- Women's empowerment defying patriarchy and notions of male superiority and entitlement
- Gender equality and non-discrimination re-defining the role of men/fathers as partners and supporters
- Changing perceptions of men as perpetrators and offenders
- Amplifying voices and actions of men's / fathers against violence.
- Questioning men and fathers poor engagement in parenting support and development initiatives
- Support services for men/fathers

Making progress – more fathers are

- fulfilling their parental responsibilities
- sharing household income and child care responsibilities
- sharing household chores
- Paying child maintenance
- Involved in and shape children's interests, talents and educational development
- Sole care giver

Need to accelerate interventions to challenge patriarchy, gender in-equality, gender discrimination and sexism.

Thank you!



Patric Solomons

Tel: 021 448 5421

Email: Psolomons@molo.org.za