

**INFLUENCE OF ABSENT UNDISCLOSED FATHERS ON DAUGHTERS SELF-ESTEEM IN SELECTED COLLEGES IN RUIRU-SUB COUNTY, KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA**

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**Abstract**

In family studies father-daughter relationship is one of those areas that has not been given adequate attention. Previous research has predominantly focused on the mother-daughter and father-son bonds, likely due to gender commonalities and shared roles. This work is intent on exploring the influence of absent undisclosed fathers on college-going daughter's self-esteem in Ruiru sub-County. The study employed a quantitative approach, considering the survey nature of examining how absentee fathers influence daughters' self-esteem, rather than a comprehensive exploration of subjective experiences. The estimated target population consisted of 647 female university students, and sample sizing was obtained by using the Taro Yemeni formula, leading to a sample of 247 participants. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory was utilized as the research tool due to its wide usage and established validity and reliability. Data analysis involved presenting results in frequency tables. The study concluded that a significant proportion of college women in Ruiru struggle to define their relationship with their fathers, resulting in dissatisfaction and sadness. Feelings of rejection, mistrust, and the influence of maternal teachings negatively impacted their self-esteem. The study recommended counseling, workshops, seminars, and forums for both absent father-daughter pairs and single mothers and fathers. Encouraging daughters to share their experiences and fostering positive fatherhood programs in the media were also advocated. The study highlights the significant role fathers play in the happiness, balance, and fulfillment of daughters, contradicting erroneous beliefs that undermine fatherhood.

**Keywords:** *Absent Undisclosed Fathers, Daughters, Self-Esteem, Ruiru Sub-County*

**INTRODUCTION**

One challenging issue in the study of absentee fathers is getting a fitting and appropriate definition for the word absence (Glenn, 2018). Before defining and specifying the types of absent fathers that is the focus of this study, the researcher began by exploring in general this phenomenon. Absent father is a social phenomenon that is global and rampant in most communities (Fazel, 2017). Research on the significance and effect of fatherlessness can be traced back as the Second World War when studies were conducted to assess how children's development was affected by their fathers' absence. In addition, there is a study by Freud identifying father loss as the single greatest loss a person can experience ( Dickerson , 2014).

The contemporary society is one of freedom, a society of indiscipline, one that lacks a sense of responsibility towards children, a society where Women feel empowered to take care of a child without a man (Larcher, 2007). Father absence has a recorded link to the establishment of feminist movements. In the 1960s due to inequality that existed between the genders, women sought for liberation. They initiated the decline of male traditional role and bringing about chaos in the role men in society. They came up with slogans like: “we don’t need them (men); they fought to do away with multiplied standard by sleeping with partner of their choice and having children in unmarried partnership just to prove to men they are able to serve the child as father and mother (Jackson, 2010; Peyper, Klerk, & Spies, 2015).

According to (Nielsen, 2012) father-daughter relationships specialist in the USA, there are many unmarried women who believe that so long as a daughter has good and harmonious rapport with the mother, the father is unnecessary. Some choose to artificially become inseminated by anonymous sperm donors because they believe that fathers are not necessary for the wellbeing of their children. The United States is leading the world in fatherless homes. Many children are being brought up by single mothers (Dickerson, 2014). Single motherhood is increasingly widespread in the United States. According to research conducted in USA, as many as 19 million children including youth adults do not know their fathers or are living in father absent homes, with most teenagers being raised by single caregivers or mothers (Gladys, 2020).

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Single parent families are growing very fast and in an alarming rate (East, Jackson, & O’ Brien, 2016). Most families are predominantly headed by women; hence there is a good number of children and adolescents given birth to by multiple partners and hence many children grow up without fathers at homes (East, Jackson, & O’ Brien, 2016). Absentee fatherhood is very predominant in Asian countries like Japan, many children grow up without their fathers (Gladys, 2020). In Africa South Africa is leading with almost half of the children growing up without father at home. (Mutege, Ndolo, & Walw’a, 2017), Namibia rank second after South Africa with high rates of father absence in Africa (Richter, Chikovore, & Makusha, 2010).

Over 25% of households in places like Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda are headed by women (Kimani & Kombo, 2010). In Kenya, father absence is equally a challenging and a rampant phenomenon (Ogola, Maithya, & Makungu, 2018). Kenya is not left out regarding the new trend of family structure and father absenteeism of our times. Globalization and western influence is exerting impact on the role of fathers. Due to globalization, alternative methods of raising children that were never there before are springing up. With the changing times, there is an abdication of paternal responsibilities and Kenyan traditional way of fatherhood (Larcher, 2007). This phenomenon is very relevant in the context of this study, On Madaraka day, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022, President Uhuru Kenyatta lamented the rise of single parenthood in the country with the following words:

The change face of Kenya family is captured in the census of 2017 it shows single parent family rose from 21.1% in 2009 to 38.2%. If this phenomenon is not arrested it will cause a lot of havoc to the fabric of Kenya family and member of the society (Mbutia, 2022). As previously stated, father-daughter relationship has been a neglected topic by past research cohorts. According to Skordas (1988), a well-known specialist of daughter/father relationships states that daughter is the forgotten children and fathers the often forgotten parents, (p. 98). Due to gender similarities and shared roles, the presumption was that fathers play a very significant role in the upbringing of daughters while fathers on the other hand do so for the boys in order the helping them learn how to be men (Thompson, 2014).

Additionally, public media raises a lot of concern on the importance of fathers in the society today there is a lot of public debate on radio and television programs addressing this subject.

Modern people are questioning whether fathers are truly important. Is a father necessary? Is a father truly necessary for a daughter? Most unmarried women who choose to become artificially inseminated by anonymous sperm donors do not believe that fathers are necessary for the wellbeing of their children (Nielsen, 2012).

### **Statement of the problem**

Family systems and dynamics has undergone a very drastic change (Anderson, 2002). Young people of today prefer come-we-stay to marriage. Non-marital union, premarital sex and out of wedlock child bearing is the order of the day and divorces rate are sky rocking. The new trend has affected adult's world view and experience of family life. In Kenya single parenting has risen from one in ten families to one in every three families. This unfortunate phenomenon is the cause of parental absence at home depriving the child of the much-needed warmth and love that is required for emotional and psychological maturity. For a child to develop confident in perceiving the world, for a child to trust self and trust others he/she need parental presence (Engler, 2010). Considering the above identified issues the goal of this work is to examine the impact of absentee fathers on college daughters' self-esteem in view of providing possible solutions

### **Objective**

To examine the impact of absent undisclosed fathers on the self-esteem of daughters in Ruiru sub County.

### **Empirical Literature**

In family studies, the experiences of children with absent and undisclosed fathers have been given no consideration or attention and a similar scenario applies to orphan hood (Nduna, 2014). A father is undisclosed/unknown when a child's mother is uncertain of who fathered the child. The mother of the child might also be ashamed to reveal the perennity, because the child might be the outcome of incest, rape, denied pregnancy or pregnancy from a married man. Also due to disagreement or fallout in relationship the mother might chose not to reveal the paternity of the child (Padi, Ndunab, Khunou, & Kholopane, 2014).

Quite often females who grow up with the absent of paternal linkage, experience identity related confusion. This confusion is frequently associated with the difficulty to fit in society level and within the maternal and paternal families. Such children are considered as illegitimate, they are not regarded as "real members" of the family. Most of the frequently feel like outrider. In some African culture such children need to undergo a ritual in which they are presented to the ancestor. A failure to perform this ritual may incur misfortune on the child. Children raised without fathers have less happy childhoods than those raised in father house hood. Children identities is severely affected by the mere fact of growing up unhappily without a father (Zulu 2014).

When children reach adolescent stage, the sense of their identities is awakened and they begin to get curious about who their father is. Many children are left with unanswered questions about their fathers, as well as self-doubt. Due to fear of depressing and upsetting their mother some children refrain from asking their mothers about their fathers (Koketso & Calvin 2019).

Individuals desire knowledge of their background. They need to know where they come from and where they belong. This knowledge helps understand oneself and give one a sense of identity. That is why when the father is absent, this sense of belonging and identity is lost, contributing unfortunately too many problems in one's social relationship (Larcher, 2007). The knowledge of one's father gives him or her identity and boost their self-esteem and sense of self (Shuma, 2018). In this light, father is key to the child's identity. The father's surname to the child symbolizes the child's connection to her family members and ancestors. In some culture ancestors are revered as the custodian and guarantors of good fortune, success,

prosperity and protection, (Zulu, 2014). The knowledge of father gives one the sense of belonging and at some point, one wants to identify with the family. Knowing one's family, makes one whole it gives one a complete family pictures and history, and avert predisposition to personality disorder and some chronic illnesses (Makofane, 2015).

According to ( Jackson , 2010), women with unknown / undisclosed Fathers always create a fantasy image of their fathers and for years, they spend time searching for an intimate relationship that can fulfill this fantasy. Such women always feel a chunk of themselves missing, thereby creating a void that only a father can fill. Growing up without a father is thought to foster self-reliance, such children cultivate the habit of not expect a lot from other they learn how to stand on their own.

Despite the difficulties that many young females face as a result of paternal absence, findings show that there are those who demonstrate resiliency. A resilient person is someone who have gone through hard life and has developed the capacity to look at the future with optimism. A Self-reliant individual is strong and capable enduring hard life believes in their self-worth and has the ability to cope and adapt in their respective environments. Despite the many short-coming associated with female growing up with a father some daughters exhibit positive traits they can help them to cope with societal exigencies. The resilience of some of these absent father daughters is the outcome of democratic, responsible and skillful parenting style of some single mothers. Some females from single parent background consider themselves as survivor who had no option but move on with their lives with or without a father, alienated from the paternal families some females who grew up without a father are self-sufficient (Zulu, 2014).

### **Theoretical Review**

This study is grounded on the attachment theory. According John Bowlby the author of this theory every child has a natural inclination to build form a link with the primary care giver. The infant develops the first bond and attachment with the mother since she the first primary provider of care The bond with the father only comes thereafter. ( Nielsen, 2012). According to attachment theorists, a child's relationship pattern throughout life is pattern after that of their relationship with their parents For children from difficult familial backgrounds, having strong bonds or significant connections with important individuals during the initial years of life acts as a protective factor against unfavorable outcomes. A child can create a secure attachment to other persons once they have established secure attachments to their parents. If not, the child may have established one of the less preferable attachment patterns, such as insecure avoidance, insecure resistance, or insecure disorganize.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted using qualitative research methodology. This study was done at Ruiru Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. The target population was 647 female university student in Ruiru Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. Purposive and snowball sampling was strategy used to collect data from students. The Taro Yamane formula (1967) proposed a sample size of 247 students. The Rosenberg self-esteem measure was used to assessed participant self-esteem. The researcher used questionnaires, which was distributed to the approved group. Quantitative method of analyzing data was applied as tables, pie charts and figures was used appropriately. Information which was collected from questionnaires was evaluated and the goals of the investigation using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to depict meaningful and effective summary.

## FINDINGS, AND ANALYSIS

### Descriptive analysis

#### Influence of absent unknown fathers on the self-esteem college ladies in Ruiru Sub County

The respondents were asked to state their relationship with their unknown absent fathers. They were asked to rate how good or bad relationship between them and their fathers and between their mother and fathers is and has been. The responses were presented in the table 1.

**Table 1: Relationship with unknown absent fathers**

Statement	Very good	Good	Bad	Very bad	Mean	Standard deviation
How would you describe your relationship with your father 5 years ago?	7.4%	11.9%	33.2%	45.5%	3.2090	.9215
How would you describe your relationship with you father today?	2.0%	7.0%	37.3%	53.3%	3.4221	.7130
How is the relationship between mother and father relation?	8.0%	1.2%	35.2%	62.7%	3.5984	.5617

**Source:** Field Data (2023)

The findings in Table 1 above show majority of the daughters (45.5%) describe their relationship with fathers 5 years ago to be very bad, 33.2% show that their relationship was bad, whereas 11.9% said it was good whereas 7.4% very good. The results showed a mean of 3.2090 with a standard deviation of 0.9215, an indication of closeness to the mean.

Further, the study found that 53.3% majority described their relationship with their unknown absent fathers today as very bad, 37.3% described it as bad, while 7% felt that it was good whereas 2% of the remaining described their relationship as very good today. The mean was 3.422 and a standard deviation of 0.7130, showing a closeness to the mean.

Finally, the findings revealed that 62.7% majority of the respondents said that relationship between their fathers and mothers was very bad, 35.2% said it was bad whereas 1.2% good and 8% of the remaining saying their relationship to be very good. The mean was 3.5984 with a standard deviation of 0.5617.

The respondents were expected to give their opinion based on the statements provided concerning unknown absent fathers, some of the red flags associated with low self-esteem and their feelings about their lives with no fathers. The findings are illustrated in table 2.

**Table 2: Influence of unknown absent fathers on daughters' self esteem**

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Satisfied with self	245	1.00	5.00	3.0735	1.42673
I feel sad	246	1.00	5.00	3.7073	1.21037
I work hard	241	1.00	5.00	3.8631	1.18054
I feel I don't work hard enough	247	1.00	5.00	2.8300	1.19766
I eat very little	247	1.00	5.00	2.7126	1.13444
I tend to over eat	247	1.00	5.00	2.6599	1.19183



I feel bad/embarrassed when others talk about their fathers	246	1.00	5.00	3.7927	1.30685
I don't understand myself	246	1.00	5.00	2.9553	1.39168
I don't like men	246	1.00	5.00	3.1504	1.39596
I feel unloved and rejected	246	1.00	5.00	3.4837	1.40471
Valid N (listwise)	234				

**Source:** Field Data (2023)

The findings shown in table 2 shows that the respondents agreed that they were generally satisfied with themselves as indicated by a mean of 3.07 and a standard deviation of 1.42673. The respondents also agreed that they usually feel sad because they have no fathers to associate with and to share their concerns as shown with a mean of 3.7073 and standard deviation of 1.21037.

The respondents further agreed that they generally work hard because they don't have a father as indicated by a mean of 3.86 and a standard deviation of 1.18054. When the respondents were asked whether they feel they don't work hard enough to achieve their goals, majority disagreed with the statement as indicated with a mean of 2.8300 and a standard deviation of 1.19766. Those who indicated they eat very little had a mean of 2.7126 and a standard deviation of 1.13444 reflecting a simple majority in disagreement. Majority of the respondents also disagreed that they tend to over eat to boost their self-esteem as indicated with a mean of 2.6599 and a standard deviation of 1.119183.

Moreover, majority of the respondents agreed that they generally feel bad/embarrassed when other people talk about their fathers as shown by a mean of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 1.30685 hence reducing their self-esteem. With a mean of 2.9553 and a standard deviation of 1.391, other respondents indicated that they don't understand themselves which really affected their self-esteem. Those who indicated they don't like men had a mean 3.1504 with a standard deviation of 1.39, an indication that majority of the respondents have bad feelings about their absent fathers. Finally, on whether the respondents felt unloved and a feeling of rejection, majority felt unloved and rejected by their absent unknown fathers as reflected with a mean of 3.48 with a standard deviation of 1.40471. In conclusion, the researcher observed that absent and unknown fathers had a great influence on their daughters' self-esteem.

The study also wanted to discover how their undisclosed father situation affect them as an individual. Most of the respondents said that they feel incomplete, embarrassed, rejected and abandoned hence engrossed with the feeling of not loved by their absent fathers. Some also said that they general feel disappointed when their friends talk about what their fathers have done them and also feel ashamed with high emotions when they see others having light moments with their fathers. The respondents also revealed that sometimes they feel low and cry asking God why they were neglected by their absent fathers, which affects them emotionally and psychologically. Some said they feel unworthy with low self-esteem because they lack father figure in their life to guide and curdle them with love. Other respondents had the view that they can no longer trust men in relationships and like to shy away from them, whereas others felt the sense of insecurity and irresponsibility and lack of commitment in marriages. Yet others said they have feelings of loneliness, heartbroken and less fortunate as they see their mothers struggle to cater for their needs single handedly.

### Correlation analysis

The correlation coefficient is a popular statistical tool for determining the degree and direction of a relationship between two variables. Findings from correlation analysis showed a significant negative correlation between absent unknown fathers and self-esteem of daughter's attending colleges in Ruiru Sub County, with a correlation coefficient of -0.598 at a significant level of 0.000. This implies that high levels of absent unknown fathers greatly and negatively influence the daughter's self-esteem.

**Table 3: Correlations results**

		Self-esteem
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	234
Unknown fathers	Pearson Correlation	-.598**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	234

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Field Data (2023)

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Conclusion

Drawing conclusions from the findings majority of the daughters exhibits negative feelings they are not satisfied with themselves and always feel because they don't have a father. They don't understand themselves which really affected their self-esteem. They feel embarrassed when others talk about their father. They have feelings of rejections and unloved by their absent unknown fathers. The daughters generally work hard to meet their needs because they don't have a father who can take care of them. All these are telltale signs of low self-esteem.

### Recommendations

The study advocates for rethinking and popularizing the African traditional concept of communal parenting or social fathering. Daughter should be encouraged to speak and share about the ways their absent fathers have impacted them. Fathers should learn the skills of good fathering and made aware of their importance in raising their daughters. Single mothers should be taught not to despise their children's father simply because things did not work out between them.

The study also advocates that the media should promote positive fatherhood programs because, for far too long, fatherhood has been undervalued and portrayed negatively in the at the expense of motherhood.

Daughters of absentee fathers should also take efforts to search for their fathers. The fathers should make efforts to reach out to their daughters although some of them may be ashamed and may be hindered by their inability of being a provider. Mothers are also encouraged to allow their daughters to know and introduce them to their fathers. This will make them bond easily and appreciate both their parenthood. This can be better be achieved through encouraging co-parenting programmes.

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