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ABSENT FATHERS DUE TO MIGRANT WORK:

Its traumatic impact on adolescent male children in Zimbabwe.

By

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my spiritual fathers the late **Rev R.P Muguwu** and **J Juru** along with **NZ Makwehe** now retired from active ministry of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and Late grandfather **Misheck Kumbuyo**: who mentored me to understand that *a boy knows that he is a Christian man only when he walks with Christian men.*

To My two Sons**: Simbarashe** and **Tayamika** who guided my thoughts in the research Journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

DECLARATION

I declare that a dissertation on

ABSENT FATHER DUE TO MIGRANT WORK:

Its traumatic impact on adolescent male children in Zimbabwe.

Is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed…………………………………………………….Date…………………….…

ANANIAS KUMBUYO NYANJAYA

Signed………………………………………………………..Date………………………

PROFESSOR: MJ MASANGO (Promoter)

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ACRONYMS

AIDS -   Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

BCU –   Boys Christian Union

HIV -   Human Immunodeficiency Virus

Ie   -   That is to say

Jr   -   Junior

MCU -   Men's Christian Union

MDC-   Movement for Democratic Change

MCZ –   Methodist Church in Zimbabwe

SADC –   Southern African Development Community

ZANU-PF - Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front

KEY WORDS

Adolescent

Absent Father

Diaspora

Co-researcher

Identity

Migration

Narrative

Practical theology

Pastoral care

Theory

Qualitative

Quantitative

Sacred reality

Survey

ABSTRACT

Only men can initiate boys into men. Boys are prepared into men by men of integrity, for that reason, when a father is absent a male model has to be found. Lack of models is the number one enemy for our adolescent males in Zimbabwe today. The absence of adult role models means adolescent males are moulded by unsupervised, doubtful and inexperienced peers. In the past the bringing up of a child was a community responsibility. In the present day children are growing up as sheep without a male shepherd. The qualitative and quantitative research methods guided the process of this study. The study revealed that fathers are absent because they have migrated to other countries and that their absence has a negative impact on developing healthy adolescent males.

Migration of fathers to the Diaspora could not be resisted by men because of the socio-economic and political situation in Zimbabwe. Fathers have left the country for greener pastures. The exodus of fathers to the Diaspora has created a vacuum when it comes to mentoring and moulding of male children into adults. The study carried out with adolescent boys indicated that fathers in the Diaspora are engaged in some form of income generating activities. As a result, some of these men are able to provide material needs intended for their families back home. However, the absence of these fathers has made some children feel emotionally abandoned and betrayed, while others are disappointed by fathers who did not bid them farewell at the time they were living the country. There is another group that felt that the absence benefited them. The absence of fathers destroyed father – son relationships, generated anger, bitterness and lack of any future trust with fathers. When children are angered and bitterness resides in them, they would go against their father's potential assistance.

On the other hand, in the process of the study on the absent father, a Christian model of caring for an individual and community emerged. The church has been noted to be the only institution that would guide the society to value the job of caring for the people of God who are in needy situations. When the church cares for the adolescents it will be caring for itself as well as the body of Christ.

The author considered the views from James fowler (1981) and Gerkin (1997) on the stages of faith development and the idea of seeing the church as a community of faith in order for this research to portray the community of faith as a Community of Love. This is because it is only by Christ's love that people are forgiven by God through grace. In addition, it is through love that people are nurtured; miracles of spiritual and numerical growth are realised.

Acts 2; bears witness of the power in love fellowships or communities. He states that in sharing the gospel of Christ in love fellowships each member becomes a part of Christ's body that spreads the gospel. The love fellowships make the church to be more than a preaching or meeting point. It becomes a family where all members have the opportunity to share their experiences at fellowship and individual levels. People will not depend on one person for spiritual growth but on each other for spiritual nourishment. Gerkin was important throughout the research with his pastoral care approach of caring for an individual and the communities of a Christian story in addition to guiding the researcher to create a model for a caring community.

Therefore, caring of boys whose fathers are absent requires both individual mentors and local communities to model them. The church has been found wanting by the boys in this study. Boys have indicated that the church was not aware of their pain. This shows that the church was unable to see the depressed and hear the silent voices in order to interpret their situation. This reveals that the church has some parts that need spiritual attention in order for the body of Christ to function optimally. Children will open their hearts in love fellowships in order to be healed, nurtured, sustained and guided through love. Faith will be expressed in a more mature and responsible way when all is done in love.

Faith in this study is the act of love that guides individuals and communities to an expression of freedom and responsibility in trusting God's presence in human situations. It aims at increasing love for one another and to God. For it is only through Christ's love that healthy memories are created.

Chapter one gives the background and context of the problem to the study. It reveals that the motivation to carry out the study emerged from the author's journey with his father and interactions with young people as a youth pastor. Therefore the socio-economic and political

situation in Zimbabwe created an environment for the study to be carried out. In addition, absences of mothers at church prompted him to consider carrying out a study on the: **Absent fathers due to migrant work: Its traumatic impact on adolescent males in Zimbabwe.** Many women went to collect money from their husbands who are in the Diaspora each month end .**Chapters two** demonstrates how a qualitative and quantitative method of carrying of the research is helpful. Listening to stories of the adolescent males enriched the research process. **Chapter three** dealt with the stages of human development coined by Erik Erikson with the intention to give the reader an understanding regarding the worth of adolescence stage. **Chapter four** explains father and fatherhood, the role of a father and impact of absence towards the up bringing of adolescent male children. Adolescent males develop their masculinity from their fathers for this reason every child should have a male model in order for him to be a man. **In chapter five** the researcher engaged in dialogue with adolescent males. **Chapter six** gave the concluding thoughts and recommendations to the study.

The church has been identified as central in guiding children at individual and group levels in this era. The church should be a component of the extended family that is unique but related to the family units without competing with it. Every son needs a biological father from whom he learns how to manage weakness and strengths in his life and act in response to the challenges of the global village. Therefore, a father ought to be a male person in Zimbabwe who fears God and loves his sons not an angel out of this planet. Finally every adolescent child needs Christian males to guide him for it is through Christ's love that healthy male memories are created.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHAPTER ONE

Chapter one gave the background to the study of the adolescents by the researcher. It has revealed that the researcher's journey with his father, his role in the church as a youth pastor and the absences of mothers at the church prompted him to consider carrying out a study on the: **Absent father due to migrant work; its traumatic impact on adolescent males in Zimbabwe.** The question that emerged to the researcher is that; how can a male child develop into adulthood in the absence of his biological father in Zimbabwe? The researcher's journey into adulthood illuminated the positive experiences of adolescents when fathers are present. This is because growing up with his parents benefited him much. The objective to the study was to assess the traumatic impact of absent fathers on the adolescent males. The aim was to assist the adolescent males to identify the causes of their trauma and create a model that would support them in developing into healthy adults. The assumption was that children were experiencing trauma when fathers are absent and that only religion is able to answer the question of the purpose of life.

CHAPTER TWO

The chapter explained the methodology used in carrying out the research. It clarifies how qualitative and quantitative methods of carrying out the research were helpful. Listening to stories of the adolescent males enriched the research process. The boys connected their past experiences with what they were presently going through. The qualitative method of data collection helped boys to recount their experiences and face the realities of their pains which assisted them to modify the ideas that they previously held about their situation see Chapter six (item 6.11). The quantitative method helped the researcher to observe how each child responded to the questions in order to draw conclusions on the impact of the absent fathers towards their sons. Gerkin's shepherding model of caring for the individual and community facilitated the creation of the church's pastoral care model of caring for boys whose fathers are absent. Pastoral care as a sub-discipline of practical theology responded to the experiences of the adolescents by listening to them in order to create a model for caring. The chapter also showed how data was collected and analysed in chapter five.

CHAPTER THREE

The chapter presented the adolescent growth process with the intention to give the researcher and readers an idea concerning the value of adolescence stage. It also assisted the researcher to comprehend the phase which is the center of attention in this study. Nevertheless, the significance of this stage does not overlook the consequences of an absent father toward male children that may as well trap them during human development. The entire journey from birth to death is important to human beings. The chief challenges in the adolescent stage are the physiological, cognitive, spiritual and psychosocial changes that take place within a person while major decisions in life have to be made. Therefore, a plan to assist boys must be given by the father, church and community. When a child is growing the community provides the material that an adolescent uses for the formation of his identity. The failure by an adolescent male to draw his strength from the community resources leads to traumatic experiences in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, it is through the community that a personal identity is realised. The community is important in identity formation in Zimbabwe. The failure by a child to draw its identity from the community leads him into traumatic experiences, because it is a disruption of one's normal growing environment. For that reason children who are the lifeblood of the society should be considered seriously during this stage of identity formation; if not when the crises of the previous stages are hooked on the adolescent stage with no models, they may lead to identity diffusion. Identity diffusion might lead to unhealthy behaviors in adolescents. The outcome of the observations confirmed that adolescents are affected by the absence of their fathers and that they need guidance in order for them to engage in helpful behaviors. Therefore, Erik Erikson (1968) was important in his human development stages for he assisted the author to be aware that absence of fathers poses a challenge in identity formation among male children. Furthermore, he assisted the researcher to engage Gerkin (1997) in creating a shepherding model that facilitates pastoral care for boys during their adolescence.

CHAPTER FOUR

The chapter confirms the impact of a father on his son. Parents have been described as key in the life of every child. Adolescent males develop their masculinity from their fathers, for this reason, every child should have a male model in order for him to be a man. The image of a father to a son enables the African sons to live in harmony with their world in which the stories of the God of their fathers are told. Parents have been identified as second only to God (see item 4:2). Therefore, the father's presence and role assists the boy child to master self and the environment correctly.

However, the political and economic environment in Zimbabwe has robbed the children of an irreplaceable background that emerges from the father and males within the extended family. The absent father environment has come out from the migration of males to foreign countries. Parents as second only to God play a very significant role in the lives of their sons. The father's failure or absence among the Africans in Zimbabwe generates unhappiness in a child because it is an absence of God. Although this chapter still maintains the key role played by the father in the life of the son the author does not take for granted the influence of other males in the extended family and society. The author recognises the central role played by biological fathers in the lives of their sons. For example, the father influences and controls the son's freedom of association. A father is a man who carries out roles that a biological father of a child plays. His activities go beyond the immediate family but it extends to the community.

Therefore, a man may be called a father even when he is not married and has no children because of his social role. This is because the designation 'father'   is assigned to a man by society. The term father is used to represent fatherhood in Zimbabwe, though it can refer to any older man as a way of respect ascribed to a man by society. He is the provider of security, food, guidance and defines the family structure and its content. In the past, boys were mentored by males within the extended family and society. What is more important is that the bringing up of a child in emotionally close families does not exclusively fall on the biological fathers. This does not mean that the absence of the biological father is not vital, except that it is carried out by the males within the extended family. This chapter has revealed that true masculinity of a son is formed through a relationship with a God fearing father and caring community. Absences of fathers create irreversible challenges in most families and damage the future of many sons.

CHAPTER FIVE

In this chapter the researcher engaged in dialogue with adolescent males. In narrative research a researcher listens to stories of his co-researchers in order to take note of their inner feelings. The stories revealed the emotional pain that the adolescents were going through unnoticed by the church and other members of the society. The experiences expressed, confirm the theory which states that, lack of a male role model is traumatic and leads to identity confusion in adolescent males.

Trauma has been expressed in two major ways; the first was a longing for the father which was revealed through anger and tears. The other was the comfort of being with the mother and wanting to learn to be a man from women, while wanting to be provided for by the father. In one situation an adolescent felt his father should continue to live out of the country in order to provide for the family. When the father visited home this child did not share stories with him, he instead requested things through his mother. In his view he thinks what is important is the father-mother relationship. He depended on his father for his material needs and on his mother for the emotional support.

Many adolescent males did not verbally express inner feelings, but the sign of hurt, frustration and distance could not be concealed from the researcher in the research journey. Tears could not be controlled in view of the fact that the God built inland dam that is in every human being spilt over and destroyed the man made cultural walls in boys (of being silent sons). Culturally, boys are supposed to be strong and should not cry nevertheless the hurt in the boys allowed the uncontrolled flow of tears. The chapter also revealed that the impact of absence of fathers towards the adolescent males is disturbing or upsetting and that anger and bitterness are enemies in the lives of many sons. The chapter furthermore noted that when fathers are absent adolescent males become imprisoned in the women world. Consequently the circumstances may lead to loss of a male image in boys which may be expressed into inner conflicts in their adulthood. The study revealed that male children are affected by the absence of their fathers during adolescence.

CHAPTER SIX

The research on: **Absent fathers due to migrant work: Its traumatic impact on adolescent males in Zimbabwe** was worth taking. It is through this research that adolescents in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe have contributed to a plan of caring for children whose fathers are working far away from home. In addition, through this research the church will recognise adolescents whose fathers are in nonattendance to the emotional, spiritual and social needs of their sons.

Furthermore, the study confirms that **African adolescents are injured by the absence of fathers** especially with the changes that are taking place in the family structure due to political and economic and social challenges in the global village. Significantly, the research has identified opportunities for complementing the father's role by revealing its programme to families that adolescents live in.

Through group discussions with adult males, peer groups and individual contacts, the church should empower the adolescents whose fathers are away due to migrant work. The identified roles make the church to recognise the community of faith (itself) as the most appropriate instrument in supporting adolescent males to cross into adulthood when their fathers are absent. Additionally the church stands as the voice to the society and government in creating awareness of the risks of unguided entry into the man's world by the adolescents. This is due to the fragmentation of the family structures. Therefore, the recommendations in chapter six (see item 6.10) will aid churches to complement the role played by society in caring for adolescents. It is however the role of the church to guide adolescents through lessons on respect, forgiveness, love, choice of friends and the security that Jesus Christ provides in their lives when they understand him as their chief model.

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