

The case of expectant fathers: negotiating the changing role of males in a 'female' world

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Abstract

Research was carried out to investigate the needs of expectant fathers and to determine whether television can be implemented to provide parent guidance to South African expectant fathers during the transition into fatherhood. Focus was on understanding the specific type of information required by expectant fathers, in conjunction with their perceptions of the most suitable form of media to provide such guidance. Sixty-five fathers were involved in a telephone survey, after which in-depth interviews were conducted with four fathers to establish their perceptions regarding the possible use of television to provide guidance to expectant fathers. It seems that expectant fathers experience a need for information to help prepare them for their role as a father, require more knowledge regarding the topic of fatherhood and pregnancy, wish to receive guidance to develop certain basic childcare skills, and perceive television to be the most suitable medium for providing them with such guidance.

Keywords: Television; Parent guidance; Expectant fathers; Fatherhood

Introduction

Exploring the needs of expectant fathers seems to have been neglected in scientific writing over the years, despite the apparent need for research in this field of interest. Bradley *et al.* (2004) point out that not much research has been done on exploring the experiences of first-time fathers, and that it is uncertain how men perceive existing levels of support and what other kinds of support they would appreciate. Highlighting the roles of expectant fathers seems to prepare them for parenthood by encouraging and empowering them, and promotes the development of healthy father-child relations. Furthermore, it seems necessary to examine the implementation of more practical forms of parent guidance to facilitate optimal parenting among expectant fathers. This may be done by making use of popular forms of mass media.

In addition to the aforementioned, becoming a parent is often viewed as more challenging for (post)modern parents than in former times, due to ever-changing societal perceptions about the roles of parents. Neither a single universally accepted set of behavioural rules for parenting nor a clear set of guiding principles on parenting exists. Consequently, parents-to-be often enter parenthood not knowing what to expect (Belsky & Kelly, 1994). Despite a great deal of parenting information being available in the form of books,

magazines, advertisements, television talk shows, antenatal classes, support groups, Internet web sites and visits to professionals, these sources for the most part focus on women entering motherhood and information to guide expectant mothers.

The past few years have been marked by an increased demand for information relating to the topic of fatherhood, with a focus on encouraging fathers to become more actively involved in the parenting process. While many fathers reveal an interest in being involved with primary childcare, others might be forced to take over the parenting tasks for reasons such as the death of their partners or unemployment. Despite the fact that fathers might play a vital role in children's development, they are often uninformed and uneducated about what is expected of a father, often resulting in them entering their fathering careers poorly (Finnbogadóttir *et al.*, 2003; Hosking, 2004).

Attention will now shift to a brief discussion of the changing role of fathers, their need for guidance, and television as a possible means to provide such guidance.

The changing roles of fathers

In South Africa the roles of parents are constantly reshaping and changing. As more and more women enter the labour force in (post)modern times, men are increasingly expected to assist with tasks related to the basic care of the family. Roles are no longer clearly defined according to gender but are determined by the partners themselves. In this manner, fatherhood has undergone a positive transformation and continues to be reconstructed as the man's role within the family is constantly changing. Many fathers are increasingly becoming involved in domestic and childrearing tasks, taking more responsibility and spending more time organising and planning their children's daily activities, as well as becoming more involved and included in the lives of their infants. As such, the role of the father has shifted from being regarded solely as a protector and provider to playing a more active role in basic childcare activities (Popenoe, 1996; Bigner, 1998; Cabrera *et al.*, 2000).

In (post)modern times, parenting is viewed as a true partnership and a joint venture between parents, where all parenting responsibilities are shared by husband and wife. Although partners might not be able to share parenting responsibilities equally, it is important for both partners to at least be involved in childcare activities, leading to mothers no longer being regarded as the primary caregivers of children (Popenoe, 1996; Cabrera *et al.*, 2000). Findings of a study by Smith (1995) illustrate the shift that has been taking place over recent years. According to the results of the study, only 38% of women received help from their partners with the care of their infants in the 1950s, as opposed to the 1990s when 82% of women reported paternal involvement in the practical care of infants.

Despite the expectations that fathers should become more involved in the task of parenting, existing literature and current trends in society regularly suggest that motherhood usually comes naturally, while the skills associated with first-time fatherhood are often more difficult to attain and need to be learnt more formally.

Therefore, although many fathers would like to fulfil their roles as parent, not many of today's fathers have role models to learn from and teach them the childcare skills they require first-hand. As a result, many fathers require guidelines as to how they should approach basic childcare responsibilities (Brott & Ash, 1995; Hosking, 2004).

Expectant fathers' need for guidance

Existing literature indicates a general concern that, although modern society wants fathers to change, it is still unclear as to how fathers should behave and how they should provide support to their partners (Popenoe, 1996; Lamb, 1997). In a survey conducted by the National Child Birth Trust, it was found that many fathers with newborn infants feel disregarded and ill-informed, and that there is a lack of support provided by health professionals. In addition, the findings indicate that fathers often feel that they are insufficiently informed about a wide range of important issues and that they require more knowledge on aspects such as mood swings during pregnancy, what a father should expect during labour, how to cope with postnatal depression, what to do when babies cry, basic information on breastfeeding and bottle feeding, as well as sexual intercourse after the birth of a child. Forty per cent of the men stated that they often feel that the information available for them related to pregnancy and birth is limited, and that they require more content to help prepare them for their role and tasks as fathers (BBC News Report, 2000; Singh & Newburn, cited in Cohen, 2001).

Although much of the information available for mothers is also accessible to fathers, many expectant fathers experience barriers to acquire the needed knowledge; for example, time constraints, illiteracy and insufficient financial resources. Despite recent attempts to provide more information on the father's parenting role (e.g. by means of Internet web sites, magazines and non-scientific books), the information available is still limited, compared with that for expectant mothers. In addition, available information does not always directly apply to the needs of South African expectant fathers and might leave them feeling frustrated.

Television as a possible means of providing guidance for expectant fathers

The use of media is widely considered as a possible influential source for shaping ideas and current beliefs - also with regard to fathers and fatherhood (Lloyd, cited in Moss, 1995). As such, popular forms of mass media can be regarded as potential channels to provide parent guidance in a practical form, in order to facilitate optimal parenting among expectant fathers. Despite the possibility of utilising the media to reach and educate society at large, it is at present not used sufficiently.

Television (as one such form of medium) has an all-encompassing effect on society and has been recognised as one of the greatest mediums of non-formal instruction (De Beer, 1998). In South Africa, more than four million households hold television licenses and approximately 14 million adults view television daily, making South Africa the country with the largest number of television viewers on the African continent (Mersham & Skinner, 2001). These figures highlight the importance of exploring the use of television

as an educational medium to assist and provide guidance to the majority of expectant fathers in South Africa; for example, by providing them with practical examples of how to engage in active parenting. Both parents should benefit from such programmes for expectant fathers, which in turn might enhance parental relationships and eliminate certain stressors often caused by the changing roles of parenting.

At present, parenting programmes for expectant fathers are uncommon and limited in South Africa. No educational parenting programmes specifically aimed at guiding expectant fathers currently exist, according to the list of the services presented, provided annually by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (De Beer, 1998). This implies a need for developing empowering parenting programmes for fathers, with the aim of guiding expectant fathers. By broadcasting basic information on parenting to expectant fathers via television, more South Africans might begin to acknowledge and understand the comprehensive role that fathers might play in parenthood and the development of their children. In doing so, both men and women might be able to establish what can and should be expected of fathers.

Research aim

In the light of what has already been stated, the general aim of the study was to determine whether television can be implemented to guide expectant fathers, supporting them during the transition into fatherhood and promoting positive father involvement by providing them with basic knowledge. Although alternate forms of media are available, television was selected as the medium to explore, due to its apparent ability to accommodate the majority of the South African population. Furthermore, television provides for those expectant fathers who might be illiterate, or visually or hearing impaired.

Research questions

A number of research questions that emerged from the primary research aim include the following:

- What kind of information and guidance do expectant fathers require?
- What are their views on the forms of guidance that are indeed available?
- How and in which form can the needs of expectant fathers be addressed?

In general, these questions centre around the changing roles of fathers, their need for guidance and television as a possible means to provide such guidance.

Research design

A mixed-methods overall design was followed, combining quantitative and qualitative components in two phases.

Sampling

Phase one: quantitative phase

During the first phase of the study a telephone survey (questionnaire) was conducted with 65 respondents, selected in the following way. During the initial stage, television was implemented to inform expectant fathers about the research. A short snippet was presented during a family programme, inviting expectant fathers to participate in the study. In addition, pamphlets about the study were designed and distributed at various clinics, doctors' rooms, hospitals and via midwives, all situated within Gauteng. The realised sample comprised 103 responses from expectant fathers willing to participate in the study. Purposeful sampling was then applied to settle on the number participants to be included during the first phase of the study. Participants had to:

- be expectant fathers;
- reside within the region of Gauteng;
- have access to television viewing;
- have access to a telephone; and
- understand and speak English.

Sixty-five of these expectant fathers qualified and were involved in completing a telephone questionnaire.

Phase two: qualitative phase

The first phase of the study was followed by four individual, face-to-face interviews that were conducted with purposefully selected expectant fathers. Purposeful sampling was used for this phase, drawing on the pool of 65 participants consulted in the telephone survey. Four participants were selected according to the following criteria. They had to:

- be expectant fathers;
- reside within the region of Gauteng;
- have access to television viewing;
- have access to a telephone;
- understand and speak English;
- have indicated their willingness to participate in the individual interviews, during the telephone survey;
- have indicated television as the most suitable medium for providing guidance to expectant fathers during the telephone questionnaire; and
- represent the following ethnic groups: Asian, Black, Coloured and White (one participant from each group was randomly selected from each of these four groups).

Measuring instruments

The questionnaire that was administered during the first phase of the study included questions on the central needs of expectant fathers, as well as their views on the possible use of television to address their needs.

The subsequent four individual interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes each. The interviews were based on open-ended questions and conducted according to an interview schedule that was designed against the background of the responses obtained during the telephone survey. The aim of the individual interviews was to obtain more in-depth descriptions of the participants' perceptions of the educational needs of the expectant father with regard to birth and childcare. In addition, the interviews aimed to ascertain whether or not television could be implemented to provide the information required by expectant fathers. All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and then analysed thematically.

Hypotheses

The following four statistical hypotheses were investigated:

- **H₀₁**: There is no association between the parental status of expectant fathers (whether or not they have children) and the population group (Asian, Black, Coloured and White ethnic groups).
- **H₀₂**: There is no association between the parental status of expectant fathers (whether or not they have children) and the marital status of expectant fathers.
- **H₀₃**: There is no association between the population group (Asian, Black, Coloured and White ethnic groups) and the marital status of expectant fathers.
- **H₀₄**: There is no association between the parental status of expectant fathers and the work status of expectant fathers.

Statistical analysis

The following statistical procedures were, *inter alia*, carried out to investigate our hypotheses:

- Calculation of frequencies.
- The chi-squared test for independence - to test for the association between two nominal (categorical) variables (Durrheim, 2002; Maree, 2003).
- The Fisher's exact test - used due to its suitability for cases where n is small or where the expected frequency under H_0 is not at least 5 (Steyn *et al.*, 2003).

Level of significance and effect sizes

The 5% level of significance was accepted for purposes of hypothesis testing. In the case of effect sizes, the following guidelines applied: $w = 0.1$ (small), $w = 0.3$ (medium), and $w = 0.5$ (large effect).

Data analysis and interpretation

Quantitative data obtained from the telephone survey were analysed using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) software (SAS Institute, 1990; Cohen *et al.*, 2001). Qualitative data were coded by employing content analysis to recognise themes, concepts and meanings in the information supplied by the participants (Burns, 2000; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002). Quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated, and the themes obtained from the qualitative data were compared with those acquired from the quantitative data. Correspondences and differences were formulated, in order to make, confirm and indicate any inferences (Burns, 2000). All results were then interpreted in terms of existing literature, to formulate findings and reach conclusions.

Limitations of the study

The findings of the study might be limited by the fact that the participants involved only represent those members of the total South African population who have access to television. As such, research results cannot necessarily be applied to the wider community. Due to the fact that individual interviews only involved four of the participants, the potential limitation of a lack of generalisability to all participants needs to be mentioned. Different data collection instruments and different research paradigms could be used to investigate this topic. In addition, different researchers may or may not arrive at different findings through a re-analysis of the current data.

Ethical measures

- Informed consent and voluntary participation. Expectant fathers were contacted telephonically, the nature and purpose of the research were explained and it was emphasised that participants may withdraw from the study at any time. Verbal informed consent from the volunteer participants was obtained before implementing the questionnaire.
- Protection from harm. No participants were exposed to any undue physical or psychological harm. Participants were debriefed after interviews and the necessary referral to a professional who could provide such a service was made.
- Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. All information shared by the participants were kept private until the study was finalised, after which the raw data were destroyed. Results are presented in an anonymous manner in order to protect the identities of the participants. All audiocassettes were destroyed as soon as the study had been completed.

Results

The quantitative component of the results will be discussed first. The descriptive quantitative results are presented, followed by a discussion of the inferential statistics.

Quantitative results

Biographical data (primary and secondary)

Expectant fathers' ages ranged from 20 to 54 years. Figure 1 represents the population group of participants. Forty (62%) of the telephone questionnaires were completed by Black, nine (14%) by White and eight (12%) by Asian and Coloured expectant fathers, respectively.

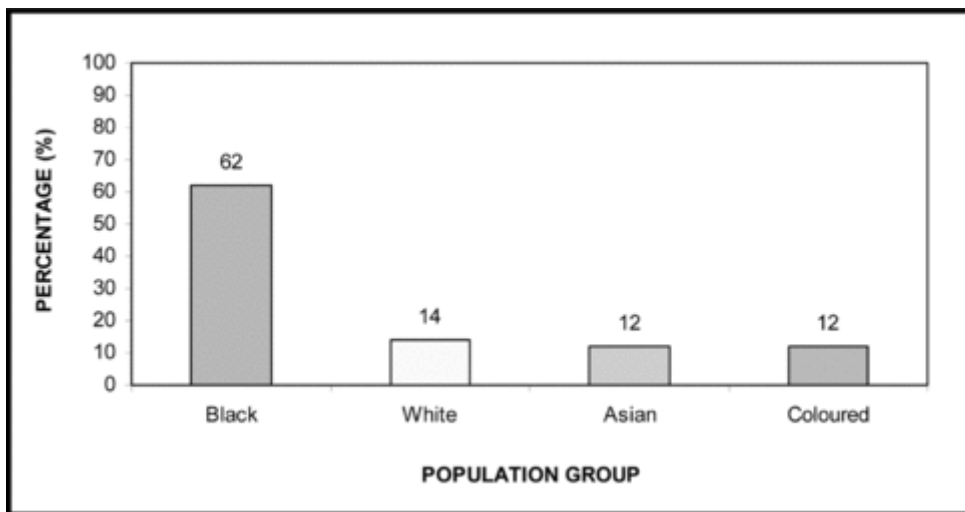


Figure 1. Population group of participants

Figure 2 shows the marital status of the participants involved in the study. Forty-three (65%) participants were married, while 16 (25%) have never been married. Further investigation revealed that 45% of the participants already have children while 55% are expecting their first child.

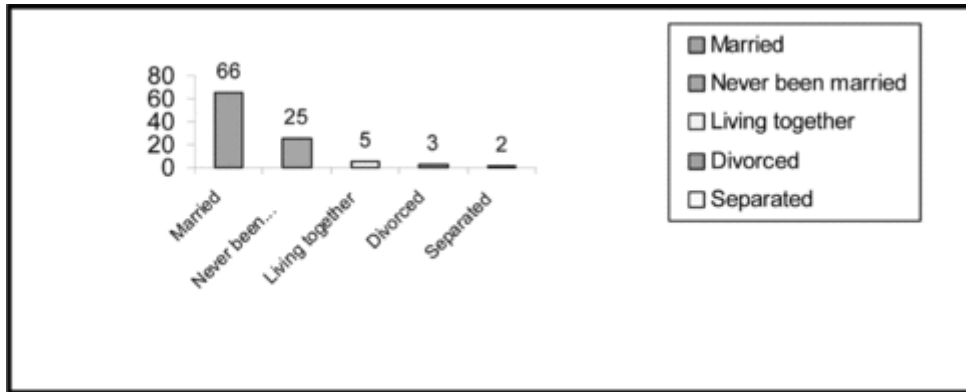


Figure 2. Marital status of participants

Figure 3 represents the work status of the participants. Ninety-two per cent of the expectant fathers involved in the study were employed at the time of the study, while the rest (8%) explained that they were either studying or seeking employment.

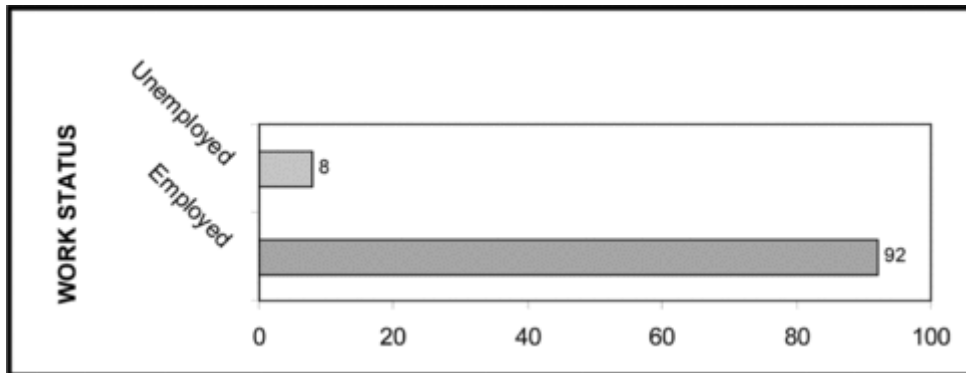


Figure 3. Work status of participants

Respondents' partners' pregnancies

Respondents' partners' pregnancies ranged between all three trimesters, with 6% of them being in the first trimester of pregnancy, 23% in the second trimester and 71% in the third. This might imply that expectant fathers' need for guidance is even greater during the last part of pregnancy, as they get closer to entering fatherhood. For phase two, the ages of the expectant fathers ranged from 24 to 33 years of age. Two of the participants' partners were in the third trimester of pregnancy and each had two children at the time of the study. The third participant's partner was in her second trimester and had one child, while the final participant's partner was in her first trimester and did not have any children.

Figure 4 represent the participants' partners' phases of pregnancy, revealing that the largest percentage of expectant fathers' partners was in the third trimester of their pregnancy (71%) at the time of the study. Twenty-three per cent were in the second trimester, while 6% were in the first trimester.

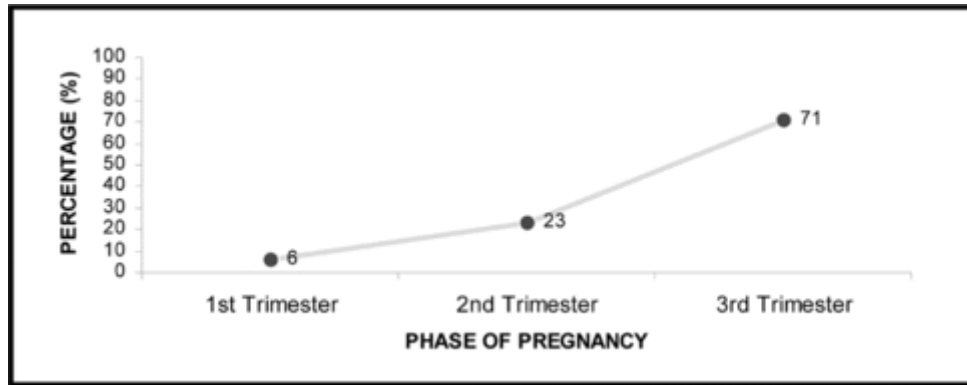


Figure 4. Participants' partners' phases of pregnancy

Sources from which participants obtained information about the study

Participants obtained information about the study from various sources. Twenty-five per cent of them heard about the study via clinics while 17% received the information from midwives. The rest of the group were informed by means of pamphlets (15%), doctors (15%), partners (14%) and friends (14%).

Expectant fathers' need for guidance

The majority of fathers indicated that they do indeed need such guidance (97%). In addition to the type of information that expectant fathers most often require, typical needs of expectant fathers were explored. As indicated in Figure 5, 20% of expectant fathers experience a need for general information relating to pregnancy and the birth process,

15% experience a need for guidance in order to support their partners and 14% indicated the need to understand their role as a father. Only 6% of the respondents indicated that they experienced no needs at the time the survey was conducted.

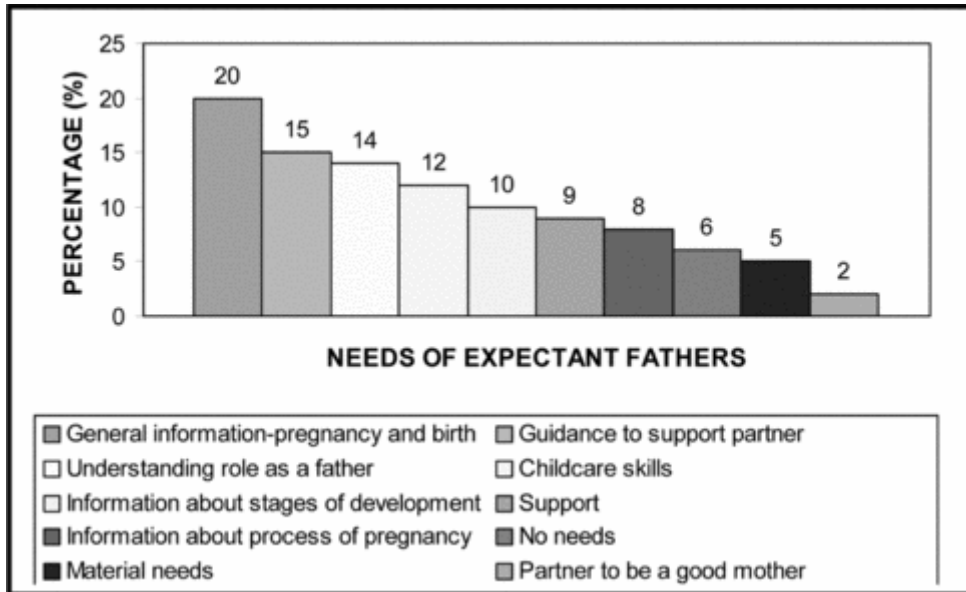


Figure 5. Greatest needs of expectant fathers

Expectant fathers indicated several skills related to pregnancy and childrearing that they would like to be guided on and develop before becoming a father. Forty-four per cent of expectant fathers indicated the desire to attain childcare skills that focus on, for example, handling an infant, changing nappies, feeding and bathing, while 14% of the respondents indicated that they would like to acquire the necessary skills to support their partners. Thirteen per cent would like to learn how to deal with childhood illnesses, complications and common problems. Ten per cent of the respondents wanted to acquire the necessary skills to be a good father.

Using television to guide expectant fathers

Expectant fathers were asked to identify the forms of media they regard as the most suitable for providing guidance to expectant fathers. The results are presented in Figure 6. Inspection of the figure reveals that 83% of the respondents listed television as one of the most suitable media for providing guidance to expectant fathers. Other media that were identified as suitable were books (15%), magazines (15%), newspapers (12%), radio (11%), the Internet (9%) and professionals (6%). Only a small percentage (2%) of the respondents identified DVD/video as a suitable way of providing guidance to expectant fathers.

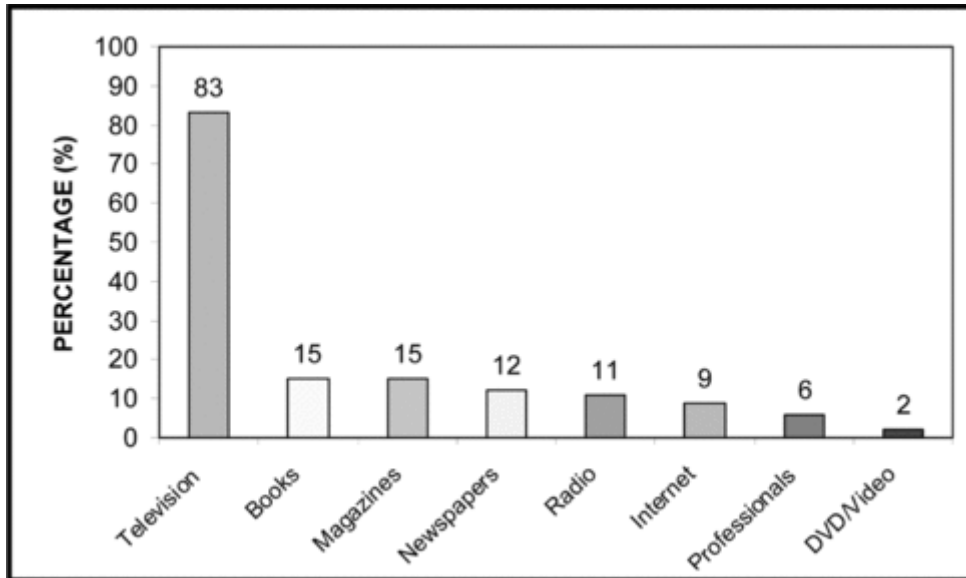


Figure 6. Most suitable forms of media for providing guidance to expectant fathers

Once the respondents had indicated their choice of the most suitable forms of media for providing guidance to expectant fathers, they were specifically asked to provide their views on using television as a means to guide expectant fathers. The results are presented in Figure 7. Eighty-six per cent of the participants responded positively to the application of television as a means of providing guidance to expectant fathers. In addition, 11% of the respondents stated that they would prefer television in combination with an alternative means (e.g. a magazine, Internet site or a talk by a professional), while only 3% did not regard television as an appropriate way of informing expectant fathers.

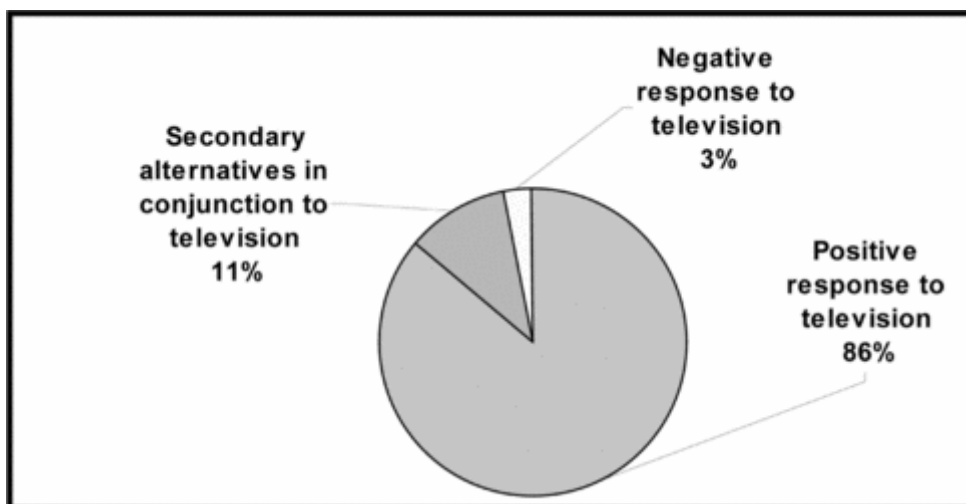


Figure 7. Participants' views on television as a means to guide expectant fathers

Respondents identified certain conditions necessary for the effective use of television as a guidance tool. For example, they stated that a programme for expectant fathers should be appealing, practical and presented at a convenient time. With regard to the most suitable mode of presentation, the highest percentage of the respondents (43%) selected an interactive talk show, followed by 18% who chose a documentary. Twelve per cent of expectant fathers stated a preference for a programme that combined an interactive talk show and a documentary, in order for them to benefit from both modes of presentation.

Inferential statistics

From Table 1 it is clear that a statistically significant association exists between the parental statuses of expectant fathers (whether or not they have children) and the population group (Asian, Black, Coloured and White ethnic groups) ($p = 0.03$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected at the 5% level of significance. We may therefore conclude that a statistically significant association exists between the parental status of expectant fathers (whether or not they have children) and the population group (Asian, Black, Coloured and White ethnic groups). However, the effect size is rather small; therefore the result is not deemed practically significant (Ellis & Steyn, 2003).

Table 1. Contingency table representing the parental status of expectant fathers and the population group (p values for the chi-square test)

Parental status	Population group			p (effect size w for significant value)	
	Rest ^a	Black	Total	Statistic	(one-sided)
Yes (children)	17	22	29	$\chi^2(2)=4.54$	0.03* ($w = 0.26$)
No (no children)	18	18	36		
Total	25	40	65		

^aRest = Asian, Coloured and White. * $p < 0.05$.

According to the results represented in Table 2, a statistically significant association does not exist between the parental status of expectant fathers (whether or not they have children) and the marital status of expectant fathers ($p = 0.338$). The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected at the 5% level of significance. We may therefore conclude that a statistically significant association does not exist between the parental and marital status of expectant fathers.

Table 2. Contingency table representing the parental status of expectant fathers and the marital status of expectant fathers (*p* values for the chi-square test)

Parental status	Marital status			<i>p</i> (effect size <i>w</i> for significant value)	
	Rest ^a	Black	Total	Statistic	(one-sided)
Yes (children)	21	8	29		
No (no children)	22	14	36	$\chi^2(2)=0.916$	0.338
Total	43	22	65		

^aRest = Asian, Coloured and White.

From the results presented in Table 3, it is clear that a statistically significant association exists between the marital status of expectant fathers and the population group (Asian, Black, Coloured and White ethnic groups) ($p = 0.0005$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected at the 5% level of significance. We may therefore conclude that there is a statistically significant association between the marital status of expectant fathers and the population group (Asian, Black, Coloured and White ethnic groups). The effect size is medium, suggesting the possibility that in practice a larger proportion of Black expectant fathers are actually unmarried compared with the other population groups. Enquired about participants' marital status, many of the Black expectant fathers responded that although they were not married and did not live with their partner they still intended to be involved in the pregnancy, birth and childrearing tasks in order to fulfil their role as a father. The participants also commented that they were planning to marry after the baby was born.

Table 3. Contingency table representing the population group and the marital status of expectant fathers (*p* values for the chi-square test)

Population group	Marital status			<i>p</i> (effect size <i>w</i> for significant value)	
	Married	Other ^a	Total	Statistic	(one-sided)
Rest ^b	23	2	25		
Black	20	20	40	$\chi^2(2)=12.12$	0.0005* ($w = 0.396$)
Total	43	22	62		

^aOther = separated, divorced, living together and never been married. ^bRest = Asian, Coloured and White. * $p < 0.05$.

Table 4 shows that a statistically significant association exists between the parental status of expectant fathers and the work status of expectant fathers ($p = 0.037$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected at the 5% level of significance. However, since 50% of the cells had expected counts less than 5, implying that the chi-square test may not be valid, the results of the Fishers exact test were perused. The latter show a statistical significant association between the parental status of expectant fathers and the work status of expectant fathers ($p= 0.046$).

Table 4. Contingency table representing the parental status of expectant fathers and the work status of expectant fathers (p values for the chi-square test)

Parental status	Work status			Statistic	p (effect size w for significant value) (one-sided)
	Employed	Unemployed	Total		
Yes (children)	29	0	29		
No (no children)	31	5	36		0.037* ($w = 0.26$)
Total	60	5	65		

* $p < 0.05$.

Qualitative results

Following the question of whether or not expectant fathers require parent guidance, respondents were requested to define their need in terms of specific themes and topics of interest. Table 5 provides a summary of the themes that were identified in relation to the type of information desired by expectant fathers.

Table 5. Type of information expectant fathers require

Main categories	Subcategories	Percentages of subcategories	Percentages of main categories
Fatherhood	The roles of a father	13	39
	Father's expectations	7	
	Providing support to your partner during pregnancy, birth and childcare	18	
	Places to go for help/information	1	
Pregnancy	The process of pregnancy and related changes	14	22
	Stages of development of a baby	2	
	Basic care during pregnancy	6	
General information	General information regarding pregnancy, birth and childcare	18	18
Childcare	Basic childcare skills	12	14
	Childhood illness, complications and common problems	2	
Labour and birth	Medical procedures and processes	2	8
	Guidelines regarding labour and the birth process	5	
	Premature birth or emergencies related to labour	1	

Inspection of Table 5 reveals that 39% of expectant fathers require information related to fatherhood, including topics such as the role of the father, fathers' expectations, how to provide support to a partner with regard to pregnancy, birth and childcare, as well as information about organisations that offer further guidance to expectant fathers. Twenty-two per cent of expectant fathers would like to obtain more information regarding pregnancy, especially the process and changes that occur during pregnancy, while 18% indicated a need for more general information regarding pregnancy, childbirth and childcare. Other areas of interest include learning more about childcare (14% of the participants), and the labour and birth processes (8%).

Discussion

It was clearly established that expectant fathers require more information regarding the topic of fatherhood and pregnancy to be better prepared at the time when they enter parenthood. In addition, their need for guidance is often based on their desire to develop the basic childcare skills that are needed to fulfil the role as father. Participants indicated the tendency of expectant fathers to often rely on the advice of friends and family, due to a lack of sufficient professional guidance and appropriate role models in society. Furthermore participants emphasised the important role that culture plays in defining the role of the father within the family. Television was regarded as the most suitable medium for providing guidance to expectant fathers. Participants were of the opinion that television might assist them by providing the in-depth information and knowledge they require, thereby directly addressing their needs. Participants perceived television as a potentially effective tool for this purpose, as it can reach many people simultaneously, combine visual and verbal presentations, as well as be interactive - thereby providing the viewers with the opportunity to participate in discussions.

In summary, the two main findings that are clear from this study are as follows. Firstly, expectant fathers seem to experience a definite need for sufficient information to help prepare them for fatherhood. Secondly, they regard television as the most suitable form of media for providing guidance to them.

Numerous idiosyncratic motives as to why expectant fathers need guidance were provided. It seems evident that many men do not have father figures available to guide them on how they should fulfil their roles as fathers, making it difficult for new fathers to acquire the necessary skills to care for an infant. Men learn how to be fathers from role models; when such figures are absent, expectant fathers find it difficult to acquire the expertise necessary for involved fatherhood. These feelings of uncertainty and insecurity may cause them to withdraw, which in turn might have a negative impact on the role fathers play in society. Providing guidance could build their confidence and help expectant fathers to develop needed skills so that they may be more involved in fulfilling their parenting tasks. Besides expectant fathers requiring extensive information on fatherhood and pregnancy, they also wish to acquire practical childcare skills. These findings correlate with the findings of a study conducted with new fathers by Barclay and Lupton (1999), in which men emphasised the fact that there are no guidelines to assist first-time fathers and that only a few men have role models to learn from. Brott and Ash (1995) support this finding by stating that few fathers have role models whom they can learn from in modern times. Moreover they have no one to teach them childcare skills in preparation for fatherhood.

The part that culture plays with regard to the role of the father within the family has emerged as another reason for the need for guidance, outlined by expectant fathers. Mkhize (2004) emphasises this finding by stating that a large majority of men are taught how to fulfil their roles regarding position and power according to the cultural prescriptions of manhood, which in some traditions do not expect the father to be actively involved with childcare and often view it as the primary task of the mother. However,

(post)modern fathers seem keen to be involved in childrearing and need guidelines to prepare them for this task. It is important to keep in mind that the actual roles that fathers perform differ according to time and culture, and also vary from society to society (Popenoe, 1996; Lamb, 1997). In the South African context, this should be kept in mind when focusing on providing guidance to expectant fathers, as each culture views the role of the father within the family differently.

One of the main themes identified during the individual interviews as a reason for the need for guidance is the opinion of expectant fathers that a great deal of negativity exists concerning men in the media, in conjunction with a lack of adequate information available to guide them. This finding relates to Lloyd's view (cited in Moss, 1995) of the media as a powerful and significant source of insight into current ideas about fathers and fatherhood.

The telephone survey indicated that expectant fathers regard television as the most suitable form of media for providing guidance to them. Although fathers have access to other sources of information, such sources are not always regarded as applicable to them and do not always address their needs. They believe that television is the most popular form of medium to convey such information. One reason for this preference is that, by utilising television, information can be conveyed in the form of practical demonstrations. Furthermore, programmes can be interactive, thereby inviting viewers to participate and ask questions on certain topics that are not often discussed or about which little is known. In support of this finding, a survey conducted by the National Childbirth Trust revealed large discrepancies between the information men require on pregnancy, birth and a new baby on the one hand, and the information actually available to them on the other (Singh & Newburn, cited in Cohen, 2001).

Television is regarded as the most appropriate medium for presenting information on fatherhood and pregnancy, especially since it has the potential to address many people at the same time. What is seen can also be heard when watching television, thereby making the demonstration of practical examples possible. Offering guidance to expectant fathers could create a more positive image of the father within the family and also demonstrate the importance of the father's role. Providing guidance to expectant fathers via television may also indirectly benefit other members of the population. For example, older children caring for younger siblings will be able to access the information broadcast and apply it to their families. Furthermore, a television programme for expectant fathers might also be of assistance to expectant mothers, who themselves may need guidance.

Concluding remarks

The information required by expectant fathers might be compiled into suitable content and then presented via television, but also via, for example, literature or radio, enhancing a more positive image of fathers in South Africa, resulting in fathers being recognised as competent caregivers.

Besides relying on television, assistance to fathers may be provided through developing programmes to trained health workers within communities, or creating a centre where expectant fathers could go for information or advice. Trained health workers might be utilised to teach expectant fathers the practical skills they require and provide them with the support they need.

Since there are children in South Africa caring for younger siblings, it might be valuable to explore the development of a curriculum that could be applied in schools to offer these children the opportunity to learn how to fulfil certain roles within the family. Teaching young boys about fatherhood could indirectly be of benefit to society at large, as understanding the roles of fatherhood may both encourage fathers to become more involved in their children's lives and foster a more positive image of fathers.

Implementing television as a means to guide fathers may also create a public awareness about the importance of the first three years of life. As a result, television may indirectly assist in promoting healthy development of young children by involving their families (Simpson, 1997). Developing and implementing programmes for expectant fathers in South Africa could facilitate social change by providing clarity and understanding on the role of the father. This in turn may create a ripple effect by providing guidance to fathers who are willing to be involved in parenting tasks to acquire basic childrearing skills, at the same time promoting the development of self-confidence and sensitivity with regard to these skills.

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