Lived experiences of unmarried young fathers in rural Zambia

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Thesis Submitted to the Open University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2023

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Abstract

Entry of young people into early parenthood is a global phenomenon and continues to be considered an issue for social policy and professional practice internationally. For many young fathers, this transition is rarely planned, and they are often negatively stereotyped as irresponsible, ‘feckless’, uninvolved or ‘deadbeats’, and uncaring fathers. However, a growing body of international qualitative studies has contested such assumptions and found that many young fathers are, in fact, actively involved with their children but face myriad barriers and a raft of challenges in sustaining a parenting role. In Zambia, there is a dearth of critical studies that explore young fathers’ experiences. To address this knowledge gap, this study draws on overlapping bodies of theory: ecological systems theory, transition theory, theories of masculinity and gender roles to explore unmarried young fathers’ lived experiences.

The study employs a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The empirical data is based on 24 in-depth interviews with young fathers and two focus groups: one with young fathers and the other with older fathers. Participant-driven photo-elicitation methods were used as prompts in in-depth interviews and data were analysed using phenomenological-hermeneutic methods and constant comparison analysis.

Findings revealed that young men’s transition to fatherhood was unintentional, and it had both negative and positive consequences for some of them. Young fathers, construed fatherhood primarily in economic provider terms but many of them experienced economic difficulties, albeit these improved as they grew older, and their income improved. In their construction of fatherhood and fathering, they drew on cultural discourses and ideologies of gender, masculinity, and good fatherhood. In addition, the family played an influential role in shaping their fatherhood and paternal behaviour. The findings further revealed that many young fathers were involved with their children but for some, their involvement was interfered with by relational and contextual factors.
Acknowledgments

Firstly, I want to thank God for seeing me through this journey. Special thanks go to my supervisors; Dr Phillipa Waterhouse, Dr Victoria Newton, and Dr Martin Robb for their continuous guidance, critical comments, assistance, and support throughout my research project. I would also like to express my heartfelt and sincere thanks to all the fathers that agreed to take part in this study. Without their openness and honesty, this research would not have been possible. In the same vein, I would like to thank The Open University, which provided the funding that made this research possible. Many thanks too to Professor Lesley Hoggart who was part of my journey at the beginning. To my amazing family, especially my wife Sofia and my son Kondwani, thank you for your patience, support, and understanding during my absence. I know it has been difficult for you. I will forever be grateful for your unconditional love and what you have done. To my mum, brothers, and sisters, I cannot thank you enough for your moral support. Special acknowledgment also goes to Mr. Joseph Tembo, the nursing officer, for his tireless efforts in facilitating access to the local communities and identifying community health workers that helped in identifying participants for this study.
Declaration of Authorship

I declare that the entire work herein contained is my own original work and that I have not previously in part or entirety submitted it for examination or obtaining a qualification at any other university other than currently at The Open University (OU). The thesis is a product of my own original research.
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<th>Description</th>
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<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>Comprehensive Sexuality Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Central Statistics Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERES</td>
<td>Excellency in Research Ethics and Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB</td>
<td>International Review Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCMS</td>
<td>Living Condition Monitoring Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMD</td>
<td>Movement for Multiparty Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHP</td>
<td>National Health Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHRA</td>
<td>National Health Research Authority</td>
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<td>OU</td>
<td>Open University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PF</td>
<td>Patriotic Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIP</td>
<td>United National Independence Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAPs</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Programmes</td>
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</table>
SRH       Sexual and Reproductive Health

WHO       World Health Organisation

ZDHS      Zambia Demographical Health Survey
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study explores the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers through the lens of hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenology. This chapter provides an overview of the thesis. It begins by providing a brief discussion of the origins and motivation of the research, and a discussion on the young fatherhood phenomenon as a focus for this research. This is followed by the aims, objectives, and the justification of the proposed research. The chapter ends by providing a summary of the thesis structure.

1.2 Origins of and motivations for the research

My interest in young parents originates from my 10 years of professional work experience and practice as a social worker in urban Zambia. Over the course of my professional work in HIV/AIDS and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), I witnessed an increase in numbers of young women in their late teen years and early twenties becoming young parents. This became a source of concern for me as a worker in this area and the organisation I worked for, given that these young women attended educational sessions and the SRH services were made available and accessible to all of them. In workplace discussions with colleagues, the focus was often on young mothers. What was absent in our discussions was the fathers. In my further interactions with young mothers in the course of my work, I often learnt that fathers to their children were also young and most of them were unemployed. This made me begin to think about the situation of young fathers. After a critical reflection on my own fatherhood experiences as a married and older working father, I posed a question to myself: how do they manage?

When an opportunity to pursue a PhD with The Open University (OU) presented itself in 2019, my journey began to unfold. A review of the 2016–2021 Zambian national strategy (e.g., Ministry of Gender, 2015; The Committee on Youth and Sport, 2014) revealed that
both the government and the civil society organisations recognise the pressing need for
greater knowledge and further investigations into early child marriages, teenage pregnancy,
and young motherhood. However, young fatherhood remains largely ignored. Even in terms of interventions, attention has been to young mothers while young fathers have remained excluded (see The Committee on Youth and Sport, 2014). A recent study by Mweemba and Mann (2020) also underscored the lack of attention on young fathers in Zambia and the need to examine young fathers’ relationships with their children and how they navigate their roles. Thus, this gap in research on young fathers, coupled with my earlier reflection pertaining to young fathers of the children of unmarried young mothers, motivated me to investigate the phenomenon of young fatherhood in Zambia.

1.3 The young fatherhood phenomenon as a research focus

There is no universally accepted definition of young people in research or policymaking (Belmonte & McMahon, 2019). In research literature, the term ‘young people’ is often used interchangeably with other terms such as adolescents and teenagers. While this is the case, they represent different developmental phases of life or age ranges which sometimes overlap. For instance, the World Health Organisation (WHO) defines adolescents as individuals aged 10-19 years (WHO, 2018a) while the United Nations (2018), defines young people as individuals aged 15-24 years. On the other hand, teenagers are regarded as individuals aged 13-19 years (Sawyer, Azzopardi, Wickremarathne, & Patton, 2018). This suggests that some adolescents and teenagers may sometimes be regarded as young people and vice versa. WHO (2018b) provides a broader encompassing definition of young people as individuals aged 10-24 years. Therefore, due to different terms being used in the literature, I will also use the terms interchangeably when reviewing literature for this thesis.

Young parenthood is a global phenomenon (Van Zyl, van Der Merwe, & Chigeza, 2015; WHO, 2022). However, more than 90% of the global births to adolescents and teenage girls occur in low-and middle-income countries (Ganchimeg et al., 2014). According to the 2019
estimates, 21 million adolescent girls between the ages of 15-19 years become pregnant annually in low-and middle-income countries (Sully et al., 2020). Despite much being known about young mothers, relatively little is known about the men and boys who father their children (Williamson, 2014). However, available research from South Africa, the UK, and US suggests that many fathers of children born to adolescent mothers tend to be approximately 2-3 years older than their partners (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Clark, Cotton, & Marteleto, 2015; Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007; Lewin et al., 2015).

Young people’s entry into parenthood continues to be considered as an issue for social policy and professional practice internationally (Neale, 2016). For young men, Neale and Davies (2016, p. 85) assert that ‘the entry into fatherhood is a major life course transition involving the acquisition of new adult roles and responsibilities. This transition is rarely planned for young fathers, and may involve a range of challenges, not least their capacity to provide materially and financially for their child.’ Generally speaking, young fathers are also not featured as a specific policy area (Cundy, 2012). They remain noticeably absent from many discussions and interventions (Weber, 2012). Often, where debates focus on young fathers, they are recipients of negative stereotypes. This stems from the social problem framework which earlier conceptualised teenage pregnancy and young parenthood as a ‘problem’ and a social threat to society (Bonell, 2004; Duncan, 2007; Holgate, Evans, & Yuen, 2006), with young fathers being viewed as ‘feckless’ and absent from the lives of their children and the mother (Bonell, 2004; Duncan, 2007; Speak, Holgate, Evans, & Yuen, 2006). For instance, research literature from the US and UK indicates that in the media, public discussions, and some political discourses, young fathers are often portrayed as irresponsible, uncaring, uninvolved or ‘deadbeats’, that is, men who are unable to provide economic support or failing to meet the gender expectation for fathering (see Kiselica, 2008; Neale & Davies, 2015; Reeves, 2006; Sillence, 2020). Compared to young mothers, young fathers are still underrepresented in research (Lewin et al., 2015; Reinicke, 2021). However, in the last two
decades also, they have received bourgeoning research attention, especially in the Western countries (Davies & Hanna, 2021; Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014; Lau Clayton, 2016; Tarrant, Ladlow, Johansson, Andreasson, & Way, 2022).

1.4 Overview of the phenomenon of young fathers in sub-Saharan Africa

There is a noteworthy paucity of literature and scholarship in sub-Saharan Africa on young fathers, despite the bourgeoning global interest in young fatherhood (Bhana & Salvi, 2022; Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). In most countries, official statistics on young fathers are often not available. However, based on the analysis of male datasets of Demographic Health Surveys (2011-2014) from three countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Zambia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, Amoo et al. (2018) report that the percentage of men aged younger than 24 years in the surveys, who reported to have ever fathered a child ranged between 6.7% to 11.9%. The highest estimates were reported in Zambia. Nevertheless, these statistics are based on data estimates of only three countries, which cannot be generalised to the entire region. Although these statistics are based on nationally representative surveys, estimates may also underreport the prevalence of young fatherhood because young men may not report children to a survey where they have denied paternity (Madiba & Nsiki, 2017).

1.5 Research aim

The aim of this study is to explore the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers in rural Zambia.

1.5.1 Research questions

i. What are young men’s experiences of the transition to fatherhood?

ii. How do young fathers understand their fatherhood roles and what informs their understanding?

iii. How do young fathers negotiate and deal with differences, if any, between their fathering practices and cultural expectations?
iv. What influences young fathers’ involvement with their children?

1.6 Rationale of the study

In recent years, unmarried young fathers in Zambia have been the subject of negative stereotypes, with some media and public debates portraying them as irresponsible, unsupportive, and absent from the lives of the mother and the child (e.g. Nawa, 2018). A growing body of qualitative studies in sub-Saharan African countries such as South Africa and Western countries such as the US and UK has contested the negative assumptions about young fathers and have found that many of them are, in fact, actively involved with their children (see Kiselica, 2008; Neale, Patrick, & Lau Clayton, 2015; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). However, more critical studies of this nature are non-existent in Zambia.

A review of research literature indicates that, while in the last decade there has been a steady growth of research and literature on child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and young motherhood in Zambia (Bwalya, Sitali, Baboo, & Zulu, 2018; Katowa-Mukwato, Maimbolwa, Mwape, & Mutinta, 2017; Menon, Mwaba, Kusanthan, Zuleta, & Kok, 2016; Nkwemu, Jacobs, Mweemba, Sharma, & Zulu, 2019), young fathers have remained underrepresented in research. Currently, only one known quantitative study has investigated risk factors of young fatherhood (e.g. Amoo et al., 2018) and one qualitative study in the context of child marriage has examined young fathers’ experiences of schooling, work, and domestic life (e.g. Mweemba & Mann, 2020). The point of departure for this study is its focus on unmarried young fathers and their involvement with their children using qualitative methods. The study engages men that have lived or are living the experience of young fatherhood as research participants to elucidate their experiences of fatherhood.

Currently, there is also lack of support in Zambia for young fathers, as much support is targeted at young mothers and young women who want to return to school (The Committee on Youth and Sport, 2014). Lack of research on young fathers has implications for policy and practice. It entails a lack of evidence to build robust policy and practice responses (Neale
and a maintenance of the status quo in terms of support and negative stereotyping of young fathers. Hence, it is imperative that research is undertaken to understand their experiences and critically compare them with the broader representations of unmarried young fathers. Knowing their experiences of fatherhood could frame the beginning of a process of finding ways of helping them (Smith, 2006). It is hoped that capturing their experiences could contribute to better understanding of young fathers, changing narratives about them, and inform the design of appropriate support programmes, effective strategies, and policies to support improved outcomes or relationships of young fathers with their children.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organised into nine chapters. The following is the brief outline and description of each chapter of the thesis.

Chapter 2 presents the research context by outlining the political, demographic, and socio-economic profile of Zambia. It also examines the current legal and policy framework pertaining to involved fatherhood as well as sexual and reproductive health of young people in Zambia.

Chapter 3 presents a review of literature on young fatherhood. It begins by defining the concepts of father, fatherhood, fathering, and involved fathering before engaging in the current discourses and debates about contemporary fatherhood in Western and non-Western countries. Thereafter, attention shifts to a review of the literature on young fatherhood in the Western and non-Western countries. Here, the focus is on conceptualising young fathers and discussing their construction and experiences of fatherhood. The chapter ends with a focus on young fatherhood in Zambia.

Chapter 4 presents the research methodology chosen and its philosophical underpinnings. It also discusses the justification for the research methods that were chosen.
Chapter 5 discusses data collection and data analysis. It outlines the practicalities around ethical approval, recruitment, sampling, and data collection. Also outlined are ethical issues, methods used to analyse data, and data management plans. The chapter also provides the researcher’s reflexivity and positionality.

Chapters 6-8 present the findings together with their discussions. Chapter 6 focuses on young men’s experiences of the transition to fatherhood and its impact on them. Chapter 7 focuses on young fathers’ construction of fatherhood roles and what influences their understanding. It also outlines how young fathers negotiate cultural expectations and masculinity. Chapter 8 focuses on inhibiting and facilitating factors to young fathers’ involvement with their children.

Chapter 9 presents the conclusion and recommendations. It outlines the key research findings and their implications for policy and practice. Also included are the strengths and limitations of this study. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the contribution of knowledge to young fatherhood scholarship and literature in Zambia and sub-Saharan Africa. This chapter ends with a researcher’s reflection on the research process.
Chapter 2: The research context of Zambia

2.1 Introduction

Hermeneutic phenomenology takes cognisance of the individual’s social, cultural, and political context and requires research to take account of their influence on the individual’s lived experiences (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). Against that understanding, this chapter focuses on those facets relevant for comprehending the research context and the lived experiences of young fathers. It discusses the demographic, socio-economic, and cultural characteristics of Zambia. Furthermore, it provides information on the legal and policy frameworks that support and promote involved fatherhood in Zambia. Also discussed are young people’s sexual behaviours and their access to SRH information and services as well as sexual education.

2.2 Demographic and administrative characteristics of Zambia

Zambia is a landlocked country in Southern Africa bordered by eight countries: The Democratic Republic of Congo to the north, Tanzania to the north-east, Malawi to the east, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia to the South, and Angola to the west. Administratively, the country is divided into ten regions referred to as provinces. These are Central, Copperbelt, Eastern, Luapula, Lusaka, Muchinga, Northern, North-western, Southern, and Western. These provinces are further subdivided into districts. This study was conducted in the rural area of Sinda District located in the Eastern Province of the country.

Zambia has an estimated population of 19.6 million people (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022). Young people aged 15-24 years constitute approximately 20.5% of the national population (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, & Population Division, 2022). Approximately, 60% of the national population live in rural areas of the country (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022).
2.3 Socio-cultural environment

2.3.1 Ethnicity and traditional customs

Zambia is a country with rich cultural diversity. It has 73 ethnic groups with seven major languages used. These languages are Bemba, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja, and Tonga in addition to English, which is the official language (CSO, 2016). Sinda District, where the research for this thesis was conducted is occupied by the Nsenga and Chewa-speaking people. These are the two biggest ethnic groups in the region, and they are both matrilineal (Roberts, Williams, & Hobson, 2020).

Although matrilineal societies may not all be the same in every respect in Zambia, they do share a lot of similar social customs and norms. In a matrilineal kinship system, children trace descent from the mother’s side (Mizinga, 2000). Family on the maternal side such as brothers, uncles, sisters, and aunts, play important roles in raising children. Maternal brothers claim extensive right of the children (Evans, 2015). In the past, biological fathers had little authority and control over the children as the children belong to the mother’s kin group (Parpart, 1991; Tembo, 1988). In contemporary times, the role that biological fathers play in their children’s lives is complex. Historically, they have been expected to bear economic and social responsibility towards their sisters’ children (Lowes, 2016). However, in practice, in contemporary Zambian society, biological fathers are also expected to do so for their own children. What is evident within the matrilineal kinship systems in Zambia is that both biological and social fatherhood is a common practice. Social fatherhood relates to social roles performed by men who are not biological fathers to the child (Connor & White, 2007; Van den Berg & Makusha, 2018). In matrilineal societies, men as biological fathers are treated with a lot of respect for begetting children as it maintains the physical continuity of the mother’s line. If a husband fails to give the wife a child, that marriage is likely to be terminated (Katowa, 2013).
Customarily and historically, in matrilineal societies in Zambia, a wife and husband would live in the woman’s village after marriage (Evans, 2015). However, men who occupied positions of authority would request to relocate to their village after offering a service to the in-laws in terms of labour for a year or more (Bruwer, 1958; Evans, 2015). Due to increases in marriages between different ethnic groups, constrained employment opportunities, and fulltime job obligations that require relocation, there is now increased flexibility in residential patterns of married couples (Gordon, 2020; Taylor, 2006).

In many, but not all ethnic groups, a man who impregnates a young woman is expected to accept responsibility and marry her (Mann, Quigley, & Fischer, 2015; Menon, Kusanthan, Mwaba, Juanola, & Kok, 2018). If he does not want to marry her, he is expected to pay for the pregnancy. This payment is commonly referred to as ‘damage’ and consists of money or cattle equivalent depending on the ethnic group (Mann et al., 2015). It relates to compensation for the depreciation of marriage prospects, or loss of future earnings if the young woman was at school and her education has been interfered with (see White, 1971). While society expects one to accept paternity as a sign of being a ‘responsible’ man, sometimes, men deny paternity, especially where there are doubts over the pregnancy. However, the flexibility to pay for pregnancy damages and restrictions varies by ethnic group.

2.3.2 Religion

Zambia is constitutionally a Christian nation (Haynes, 2019) and approximately 95.5% of the people in the country identify themselves as Christians (United States Department of State, 2019). The majority of the Christians in the country identify themselves as protestants (ibid). Other religions practiced in Zambia include Islam, Judaism, Bahá’í Faith, Hinduism, and African traditional religion. The region where this study was conducted is predominantly Christian with protestant churches being the most popular. In most, if not all Zambian religious groups, premarital sex is frowned upon and abstinence before marriage is
advocated. Among Christians, sexual intercourse and childbearing outside marriage is regarded as immoral and all those that commit such transgressions are perceived as sinners. Sometimes, they face immediate consequences, which include being banned from congregation activities, their membership being withdrawn from the church or deregistered from the congregation depending on the transgression committed (Agha, Hutchinson, & Kusanthan, 2006). Only when they have shown repentance or have changed, then they are integrated back in the congregation activities. Nevertheless, the strength of the prescriptions and punishment against such acts among Christians vary by denomination (Agha et al., 2006).

Despite the majority of Zambians being Christians, many still embrace and practise some indigenous cultural values. As such, there exists tension between religious and indigenous cultural values concerning childbearing outside marriage. While both value marriages and expect children to be born within marriage, indigenous cultural values tend to be flexible on how men who father children out of wedlock are treated compared to women. Often, shame and stigma tend to be channelled at women who become pregnant and mothers outside marriage (Menon et al., 2016). In contrast, there are concerns that young fatherhood is glorified (Ministry of Education, 2010) with some seeing that young fathers are treated with respect in their communities. Often, in the Zambian societies, young men who have fathered children are customarily treated as adults and respected regardless of their age by both their peers and wider society (Lundamo, 2017; Mweemba & Mann, 2020). When men become fathers and the child is named, people stop calling them by their first name but instead, call them by their child’s name. For example, if the child’s name is John, people would say ‘Atate bake John in Chiyanya’ or ‘Bashi John in Bemba’, meaning the father to John, which denotes respect. This raises their social status to that of an adult among their peers and the rest of the community. This could, to a large extent, be attributed to parenthood being one of the key events on a young person’s pathway to adulthood (Day & Evans, 2015). Fathering a child is
not only regarded as a marker of achieving an adult status in Zambia but also a source of joy, continuation of the family line, and a demonstration of masculinity and virility (Dover, 2005; Mweemba & Mann, 2020). There are social expectations in Zambian society for men to maintain the family name or line by having children and men who fail to do so, are not well respected and are deemed ‘not man enough’.

2.3.3 Families and Living Arrangement

Historically, the extended family living arrangement has been predominant in Zambia. The extended family refers to a family unit that extends beyond a nuclear family of parents and children to include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins (Fulcher & Scott, 2011; Taylor, 2006). It was only after the arrival of the Christian missionaries and the beginning of labour migration in the 19th century that the notion of a nuclear family consisting of father, mother, and children became more common (Marks & Rathbone, 1983; Taylor, 2006). According to Taylor (2006), extended family members have historically played critical roles in the lives of the children in this enlarged family unit in the Zambian society. As such, it is not uncommon to find that some children in both matrilineal and patrilineal kinship systems are sometimes raised within the extended family environment in Zambia (Mizinga, 2000).

However, the impact of urbanisation or migration, poverty, and HIV/AIDS has to a large extent weakened the extended family system and the care or safety net that comes with it (Foster, 2000). Data estimates indicate that the proportion of extended-family households has fallen from slightly below 60% in the early 1990s to somewhat below 50% in 2010 in Zambia (United Nations, 2019). The decrease in the prevalence of the extended family households in Zambia has not only seen the rise in nuclear family households, but also other forms of family households categorised as ‘no-nuclear’ (Gabrielli, Paterno, & Sacco, 2018). No-nuclear families are ‘households that do not contain any family nucleus [but constitute] single, divorced, or widowed individuals, persons living alone, and co-resident related or not related persons’ (see Gabrielli et al., 2018, p. 4263). However, the extended-family
households remain predominant, especially in rural areas. This entails the availability of possible social and economic support for some young fathers who come from such settings.

2.4 Socioeconomic situation of Zambia

2.4.1 Education situation

Zambia’s education systems comprise of Early Childhood Education (ECE), primary, secondary, and professional or tertiary levels (Ministry of General Education, 2017). The primary level runs from Grades 1 to 7 and the secondary level runs from Grades 8 to 12 while the tertiary education level includes universities and colleges. The provision of ECE is mainly in the hands of the private providers while primary education and above is offered by both the government and private providers (Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education, 2015).

Since 2002, the government has been implementing universal free primary education, which abolished all user fees at primary level (Chrine & Kambikambi, 2020; Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education, 2015). However, examination fees for Grade 7 classes existed till 2022 when they were abolished (National Assembly of Zambia, 2022). At secondary level, all fees existed until 2022 when the government abolished them (ibid). Whilst fees may have been abolished up to secondary school level, families must still bear the cost of transport, uniforms, shoes, boarding, and other school essentials. Research with young people in both rural and urban areas has found that secondary school fees and associated costs were a barrier to school attendance and enrolment (Chaponda, 2016; Day & Evans, 2015; Mweemba & Mann, 2020).

Despite having a defined education system, a significant proportion of young Zambians have low levels of education. It is estimated that 28.2% of men aged 15-24 years have no education or only have some primary education (Zambia Statistics Agency et al., 2019). Among those who do attend secondary school, the completion rate is low (64.2% for boys.
and 41.4 % for girls) (Ministry of General Education, 2017). Mweemba and Mann (2020) assert that these low completion rates among the young people in Zambia do not reflect a lack of interest in schooling but the circumstances that lead to school dropout.

Low school completion rate or school dropout entails that a proportion of young men lack the necessary qualifications to access a good paying job that would allow them to adequately support their children and families when they become fathers.

2.4.2 Economic situation

Between 1964 and 1970s, Zambia had a steady and strong economic growth due to favourable market prices of copper, which is a major export commodity for the country (CSO, 2009; Mphuka, Kaonga, & Tembo, 2017). However, by the mid-1970s when copper prices on the international market plummeted and oil prices were rising, economic growth slumped, and the country started experiencing goods shortages. Many commentators and scholars have also attributed the decline in Zambia’s economic situation to lack of consistency in economic policies for the period between mid-1970s and 1991 (Mphuka et al., 2017; Thurlow & Wobst, 2004). For instance, during this period, seven different donor supported adjustment programmes were adopted (see McPherson, 1995). Whilst these programmes were designed to create conditions for economic stability and growth, the government’s decision to abandon them reinforced an economic decline (Mphuka et al., 2017). The deterioration of the economic situation in the country led the World Bank to re-classify Zambia from a low-middle income to a low-income country, in 1985 (Carlsson, Chibbamullilo, Orjuela, & Saasa, 2000).

After the change of government from a one-party state under the United National Independence Party (UNIP) to multi-party politics in 1991, the new government under the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) abandoned the socialist policies and adopted the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) or policies advocated and supported by the
Bretton-Woods institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) and most bilateral donors (Carlsson et al., 2000). The government undertook reforms in the public sector, liberalised trade, and markets, and introduced tight fiscal policies. This resulted in the state cutting funding of social sectors such as education and health. State-owned companies were also privatised, resulting in extensive job losses in the public sector (Bates & Collier, 1995; Hill & McPherson, 2004). Considering that males dominated the public sector, most of the job losses were to men. The loss of jobs meant that many males could not live up to breadwinner expectations (Evans, 2015, 2016). Thus, there was an increase in forfeiting of household or family norms of male breadwinners and women as housewives in exchange for the financial benefits of female labour-force participation (see ibid). This led to a growing flexibility in gender divisions of labour with some men beginning to engage in unpaid care work (ibid).

Notably, since the transition from a one-party state to multiparty democracy in 1991, there has been some steady economic growth in Zambia. However, despite the country recording steady economic growth during the period 1990-2015, poverty remains the greatest challenge for the country (Ministry of National Development Planning, 2017). The previous government under the Patriotic Front (PF) got into power in 2011 on the premise of pro-poor policies such as lower taxes and social protection. Although they managed to lower national poverty from 60.5% reported in 2010 (CSO, 2012) to 54.4% in 2015 (CSO, 2016, 2018), 40.8% of the national population were estimated to still be living in extreme poverty (60.8% rural and 12.8% urban) (CSO, 2016). Unemployment has also remained relatively high and unchanged. Disaggregation of the unemployment rate by age indicates that unemployment disproportionately affects young people. Youth unemployment rate is estimated at 17.4% (14.9 % for males and 21.2% for females) (Zambia Statistics Agency & Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2022). Youth unemployment rate is relatively the same for both rural
(17.8%) and urban youths (17.1%) (ibid). The employment situation of young males may have implications on the economic support that young fathers can offer to their children.

2.4.2.1 Rural economy and livelihood

Zambia is largely rural with an estimated population of 11.8 million people (representing 60% of the total population) living in the rural areas (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022). Despite a large proportion of the population living in these settings, rural areas are underdeveloped and the majority of households in rural areas live in traditional huts (CSO, 2016). Rural areas in Zambia are characterised by poor infrastructure, poor water and sanitation, lack of employment, limited access to social and economic activities, and they have relatively few economic activities (CSO, 2016; Phiri, 2016; Zambia Statistics Agency, Ministry of Health (MOH) Zambia, & ICF, 2019).

Seasonal, rain-fed, and labour-intensive agriculture is the main economic activity and source of livelihood for most rural households (CSO, 2016; Middelberg, van der Zwan, & Oberholster, 2020; Sebatta, Wamulume, & Mwansakilwa, 2014). Approximately 90% of rural households are smallholder or subsistence farmers, who have limited access to irrigation technology (CSO, 2016; Dlodlo & Kalezhi, 2015; Mulenga, Kabisa, & Chapoto, 2021), financial markets, and face many challenges in accessing financial services (Sebatta et al., 2014; Trevor & Kwenye, 2018). In addition, smallholder farmers in rural areas largely depend on their own labour and hand hoe technology to meet subsistence needs (Ministry of Agriculture and Co-Operatives, 2011; Trevor & Kwenye, 2018). They mainly produce food crops such as corn (maize), sorghum, millet, cassava (manioc), and groundnuts (peanuts) (Ngoma, Lupiya, Kabisa, & Hartley, 2021; Trevor & Kwenye, 2018). However, due to the heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture, rural agriculture activities are vulnerable to many shocks. According to the World Bank (2023), smallholder agriculture

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1 Traditional hut: referred to a housing structure usually made of mud material around the walls and usually has a thatched roof (CSO, 2016).
activities in Zambia are often affected by adverse impacts of climate change such as increased frequency and severity of seasonal droughts, higher temperatures, flash floods, occasional dry spells, and changes in the growing season. Consequently, even when most of the rural households are involved in agriculture activities and derive income from the sale of agricultural produce, production tends to be low, and the revenue realised from agricultural activities for the majority tends to be meagre (Trevor & Kwenye, 2018). This has a negative impact on their living conditions and care responsibility for those who are parents. For instance, it lowers the level of economic support that young men who become fathers can provide for their children.

2.5 Legal and policy frameworks for involved fatherhood

In the last two decades, the Zambian Government has shown a commitment to promoting men’s involvement in the care of children through legal and policy framework formulations. For instance, the 2012 National Health Policy (NHP) advocates for the inclusion of men in antenatal and postnatal care (Ministry of Health, 2012). Despite this attempt, Muloongo, Sitali, Zulu, Hazemba, and Mweemba’s (2019) qualitative case study involving 16 military men, suggests among some groups of fathers, there is still low participation of men in childcare. Other than work schedules and fear of being tested for HIV, which act as barriers to involvement, the study found that some men consider attendance of antenatal care as a ‘woman’s private activity’ (Muloongo et al., 2019, p. 7).

In 2019, the government incorporated paternity leave into the Employment Code of Act. This entitles a male employee who has served the employer for a continuous period of not less than one year to paternity leave of five working days (see The Employment Code of Act, 2019). However, only the small proportion of men who are employed in the formal sector are covered by the Employment Code of Act. Data estimates indicate that only 29.6% of the Zambians aged 15 and over are employed in the formal sector (Zambia Statistics Agency & Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2022).
2.6 Young people, sexual activities, and sexual reproductive health in Zambia

2.6.1 Sexual behaviours among young people

Approximately, 32% of young people aged 15-17 years and 60% of those aged 18-19 are reported to be sexually active in Zambia (Ministry of Health, 2018). According to the 2018 Zambia Demographical Health Survey, the median age of sexual debut for men is 18.5 years while the median age at first marriage is 24.4 years (Zambia Statistics Agency et al., 2019). On the other hand, the median age of sexual debut for women is 16.6 years while the median age at first marriage is 19.1 years (ibid). This suggests that some young men and women initiate sexual intercourse outside marriage. Those in rural areas have been noted to initiate sexual intercourse relatively earlier than their counterparts in urban areas (ibid).

For young men who are the focus of this study, research evidence suggests that the need to prove manhood or achieve an adult status contributes to prevailing sexual behaviours (Dahlbäck, Makelele, Yamba, Bergström, & Ransjö-Arvidson, 2006; Simpson, 2007). Dahlbäck et al.’s (2006) study with young men aged 15-19 years, found that premarital and multiple sexual relationships with agemates was common among their participants. Young men in the study considered these practices as a way to achieve autonomy and the status of adulthood despite pre-marital sex outside marriage being socially unacceptable. Similarly, Simpson (2007) asserts that some young men take the risk of having unprotected sex for speedy ejaculation, which they regard as a key measure of manliness, and multiple sex partners appear to some as ideal for achieving manhood. Such practices often result in some becoming fathers at a younger age. In his small-scale longitudinal qualitative study with young men in their late teens and early twenties, Simpson (2007) found 20 years later that a third of the cohort and their classmates had become fathers or caused pregnancies at a younger age whilst in school. These studies highlight the impact of ideas about masculinity and misconceptions about sex on young men’s sexual behaviours. They predispose them to young fatherhood.
2.6.2 Young people’s sexual and reproductive health

While young people constitute a significant proportion of Zambia’s population, their SRH needs remain underserved (Chirwa-Kambole, Svanemyr, Sandøy, Hangoma, & Zulu, 2020; Chola, Hlongwana, & Ginindza, 2020; Mulubwa et al., 2020). Lack of adequate knowledge makes it difficult for young people to access and utilise SRH services. Simuyaba et al.’s (2021) study in the urban area with young people found that they lacked knowledge of contraceptive services, and the use of modern contraceptives was low among them. Similarly, Menon et al.’s (2018) mixed method study in the rural area with young people found a limited level of knowledge and limited use of contraceptives among study participants.

Research evidence also suggests that where services such as those providing contraceptives are available in health facilities, unmarried young people in Zambia often face barriers, which result in underutilisation of services (Menon et al., 2016; Population Council, UNFPA, Government of Zambia Human Rights Commission, WLSA, & United Nations Zambia, 2017). Common reported barriers include distance to health facilities and stigma and discrimination towards unmarried young people by providers (Menon et al., 2018; Ministry of Health, 2018; Silumbwe et al., 2018). The negative attitudes and behaviours of providers towards unmarried young people seem to be influenced by religious and cultural norms and values of morality that expect young people to abstain from pre-marital sex (Mulubwa et al., 2020; Svanemyr, Moland, Blystad, Zulu, & Sandøy, 2022). Within schools where sexuality education programmes are being implemented, the government has restricted the distribution of any form of contraceptives (Chirwa-Kambole et al., 2020; Mulubwa et al., 2020). The government’s position has been that young people should only seek SRH information and uphold abstinence. Lack of access to information and services puts young people at high risk of unwanted pregnancies and unplanned young motherhood and fatherhood outside marriage.
2.6.3 Sexual education for young people

In Zambia, it is culturally unacceptable for parents to discuss sexual-related matters with their children (Nyimbili, Mainza, Mumba, & Katunansa, 2019). The role of teaching young people about sex has traditionally been the responsibility of same-sex adult family members such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents (Butts et al., 2018; Rasing, 2003). Although this is now changing, especially in urban areas, communication about sexual-related topics between parents and their children is still limited (Butts et al., 2018). Rasing (2003) asserts that even when parents communicate with their children on sexual-related topics, the information they tend to give is rather superficial and consists usually of warnings not to indulge in premarital sex. Peers, who may not have the accurate information, are an important source of information about sex for many young people (Butts et al., 2018). Consequently, some young people may lack appropriate or meaningful information regarding sexual-related matters, which might lead to early sexual debut and not practising safer sex.

As a response to some of the challenges highlighted above, the Zambian Government since 2014 has been rolling out a Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) curriculum aimed at children and adolescents enrolled in Grades 5–12 in schools across the country (Zulu, Blystad, et al., 2019). Nevertheless, young people still have limited access to school-based sexuality education as most schools have not started implementing the programme (Butts et al., 2018; Mulubwa et al., 2020; Rogers et al., 2020). There is also evidence suggesting that where CSE is available, it has not been fully accepted by some community members, including some teachers, as it is seen to be incompatible with local religious and cultural values or norms of morality (Chavula, Svanemyr, Zulu, & Sandøy, 2022; Namukonda et al., 2021; Zulu, Blystad, et al., 2019). Chirwa-Kambole et al.'s (2020) study with teachers and young people found that, whereas most teachers and young people were happy with the programme, some teachers complained that some topics were too sensitive to teach. They
opted to teach some topics such as abstinence and not others. Also, some parents and teachers opposed topics regarding contraceptives as it was against their religious beliefs. Similar findings have also been reported by other studies in Zambia (e.g., Namukonda et al., 2021; Zulu, Blystad, et al., 2019). For instance, Zulu, Blystad, et al.’s (2019) study with teachers in the rural area found that some teachers used their own discretion concerning what and when to teach comprehensive sexuality education. Often, some teachers held back information to teach and only focused on abstinence. These studies provide insights on why young people in Zambia, especially in rural areas, may lack appropriate guidance and information on how to protect themselves and prevent unplanned pregnancies. Considering that teachers are not implementing the CSE curriculum as planned, it can be argued that young people are at risk of misinformation from the peers and some family members who may lack accurate sexual information.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has described the sociocultural, economic, and political context of Zambia where this study was conducted, to situate young fatherhood within the context in which it occurs. The chapter highlighted the tension between religion and indigenous culture regarding childbearing outside marriage. As discussed above, whereas religion tends to shame, stigmatise, and ostracise young people for childbearing outside marriage, indigenous culture tends to be tolerant on men. The chapter indicated that despite childbearing outside marriage being socially unacceptable, men are still accorded the respect by society for demonstrating male reproductive potency (virility).

Importantly, the literature reviewed in this chapter also indicated that young men in rural areas of Zambia initiate sexual intercourse much earlier than their counterparts in urban areas. However, they lack sexuality education and have limited access to SRH information and services. This puts them at a high risk of unplanned young fatherhood outside marriage.
The chapter has also highlighted the economic, political, social, and cultural changes that have taken place in Zambia since 1964. As discussed above, cultural changes that have taken place have made the role of the biological father to become more complex within the matrilineal society. Not only are they now increasingly expected to meet the financial and social needs of their sisters’ children but also their own biological children. Furthermore, the chapter indicated that economic changes have had an impact on gender roles within families with some men participating in unpaid care work.

The chapter also revealed that although from 2011, there has been a reduction in unemployment and poverty in Zambia, rates have remained high, especially among the rural population and young people are disproportionately affected. This may have implications for young men’s experiences of fatherhood. However, there is insufficient research evidence on how poverty and unemployment shape men’s enactment of fatherhood in Zambia. This paves the way to explore how young men in rural areas navigate fatherhood roles within the context of poverty and unemployment.
Chapter 3: A literature review on young fatherhood

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature on young fatherhood including a specific focus on young fatherhood in Zambia. It also includes a discussion of the broader literature on fatherhood generally, to highlight the current debates and discourses within which fathers’ experiences are located and framed. The first part of the chapter focuses on the methods used to search the literature and on the conceptualisation of fathers, fathering, fatherhood, involved fathering, and an understanding of factors that shape fatherhood and fathering. The second part of the chapter discusses the literature on contemporary fatherhood in Western and non-Western countries. This includes a review of fatherhood literature on Zambia. The final part of the chapter shifts attention to the literature on contemporary young fatherhood in Western and non-Western countries including Zambia.

3.2 Literature review methods

This section explains and describes the search methods used in the literature review for this thesis. The review of literature started with a generic Google Scholar search, which revealed a wide-ranging regional literature on young fatherhood. Due to the large volume of articles and books that were generated, it was decided to limit the search for literature that was not more than 30 years old. The literature indicates that interest in young fathers has only grown in the last three decades. So, it was thought that this period would provide more current and relevant literature on the subject. Frequently used and referenced articles and books were taken note of and written down for further search. The initial articles and books that were read, helped to identify the most used terms for young fathers, which helped to construct database searches.
3.2.1 Using a systematic approach to search the literature

A systematic approach was used to search for literature in four major databases relevant to the disciplines of social sciences: JSTOR, Scopus, ScienceDirect and Sage Journal Online. Additional literatures were searched through the Open University Repository (ORO). Grey literature and reports were also used in this study and were accessed from reputable national and international websites including those of UNICEF, WHO, and UN. A systematic search for literature in the databases was conducted using keywords: *experiences AND unmarried AND young AND fathers*, identified from the main research question. To help refine the search, synonyms, or related terms such as unmarried = ‘unwed’; young = ‘adolescent’ or ‘teen’ were used. In all the four databases, advanced search options were used. However, some databases such as ScienceDirect had limited search options. The search generated different volumes of literature as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Keyword search results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword search</th>
<th>Return results by database</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ScienceDirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences AND unmarried AND young AND fathers</td>
<td>4,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences AND unmarried OR unwed AND young OR adolescent AND fathers</td>
<td>64,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences AND unmarried OR unwed AND young OR adolescent OR teen AND fathers</td>
<td>475,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences AND unmarried OR unwed AND young OR</td>
<td>423,466</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the large volume of the literature generated in all the databases, very few articles generated were relevant to the subject. In the first stage, the abstracts of articles were read to identify those that were relevant. Relevance was determined by the aim of this study and the themes around the research questions (barriers or facilitators to involved fatherhood, understanding of fatherhood roles, and masculinity). When reading the articles, details of the title and authors, year of publication, the country, theoretical framework, methodology used, and key findings or relevant themes were taken. These were critical not only for the literature review but also in deciding the methodology and theoretical framework to adopt in the research study.

3.3 Conceptualisation of fathers, fathering, and fatherhood

Fathers, fathering, and fatherhood are interconnected concepts that cannot be understood and explained in isolation but have different meanings. This section defines these concepts.

3.3.1 Who are fathers?

Although conventional wisdom assumes a father to be biologically determined (Morrell, 2006), this may not always be the case. Sometimes, the status of a father is ascribed by society (Clowes, Ratele, & Shefer, 2013). It is a social position that is determined by the man’s responsibility towards the child(ren) (Nsamenang, 1987 cited in Richter & Morrell, 2008). Other than biological fathers, there are social, economic (Engle, 1997 cited in
Morrell, 2006), and legal fathers (Bruno, 2008). Economic fathers are ‘men who contribute to the upkeep of the child, while social fathers comprise men who live with and/or care for children who may not be their offspring’ (Morrell, 2006, p. 14). They include stepfathers and members of the extended family such as the father’s brothers, mother’s brothers, and grandparents, depending on the cultural context. Legal fathers, on the other hand, are men who become fathers by declaration on a birth certificate or resulting from a filiation hearing where the court issues a ruling for a particular man to be given the rights and responsibility over a child, for example, adoption fathers (Bruno, 2008). Therefore, the concept of a father is multifaceted. It cannot be understood only from the biological point of view but also from the sociocultural perspective. The above conceptualisation of biological, social, and legal fathers resonate with how the concept of a father is understood in the Zambian context. Whereas there are different types of fathers as discussed above, the focus of this study is young unmarried biological fathers.

3.3.2 What is fatherhood?

Fatherhood is the role that men play in relation to children or their father status (Morrell & Richter, 2004). It is ‘the cultural coding of men as fathers [that deals with] the rights, duties, responsibilities, and statuses that are attached to fathers as well as the discursive terrain around good and bad fathers’ (see Hobson & Morgan, 2002, pp. 10-11). Significantly, fatherhood is a socially constructed concept (Gillis, 2000; Plantin, Mansson, & Kearney, 2003) whose meaning fluctuates and evolves over time and place (Dick, 2011; Lamb, 2000; Morrell, 2006). For example, according to Lamb (2000), in America, fatherhood has evolved over time with the dominant or defining motif shifting in succession from an emphasis on moral guidance, to a focus on breadwinning, then to sex-role modelling, marital support, and now nurturance.
3.3.3 What is fathering?

While fatherhood is understood in terms of cultural expectations, the meaning of fathering is associated with the behaviour and practices of men towards children (Seward & Rush, 2015; Tereôkinas, 2005). In a broader sense, fathering practices include the provision of moral guidance, protection, support, and the teaching of social and personal skills (Meah & Jackson, 2016), disciplining (Clowes et al., 2013; Datta, 2007), and role modelling (Lesejane, 2006). However, these practices are not universal and fixed, they vary by culture and evolve over time. Dermott (2003) posits that fathering has undergone important changes with the assertions of involved fathering now dominating the literature, especially in Western societies.

3.3.4 Involved fathering

Involved fathering is a complex concept with no obvious agreed meaning (Cannito, 2020; Dermott, 2003). It can mean many things in different contexts and that is why it remains one of the contested concepts in fatherhood scholarship. However, Norman (2017, pp. 90-91) asserts that ‘involved fathering centres on ideas of nurturing, providing, and engaging in care of children’. While undeniably involved fathering centres on these practices, this does not provide the exact meaning of involved fathering. On the one hand, it can mean a father being ‘active’, ‘hands-on’ (directly caring for and being with children), and the sharer of child caring responsibilities (O’Brien, 2005). At the same time, it can mean openness of emotions, the expression of affection, and the building of a close relationship (Dermott, 2003). Lewis and Lamb (2007, p. 3) also argue that the concept of involved fatherhood lacks a ‘clear theoretical perspectives to frame the conceptualisation of fathering as an activity’, while Dermott (2003) argues that the concept is ambiguous and lacks specificity due to the fact that involvement can be interpreted in myriad ways. It allows for the description of all fathers in the same way (‘involved’) despite the significant differences in their situations and
actions. Consequently, there are different conceptualisations and models of involved fathering or paternal involvement such as those presented in Table 3.2 below.

Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1987) were the earliest to conceptualise paternal involvement or involved fathering in terms of three components or models: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. ‘Engagement’ encompasses caretaking, shared activities, and direct contact time with the child, while ‘accessibility’ entails being present and available to the child for interaction. ‘Responsibility’ on the other hand, involves ensuring caretaking and arranging or ensuring resources are available to the child (Lamb et al., 1987; O’Brien, 2005). However, despite Lamb and colleagues’ conceptualisation of involved fathering being the most influential and widely used model in the assessment of a father’s involvement in family life, it has been criticised for the exclusion of breadwinning or economic provision, which is a central aspect of fathering identity for many men (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Flouri, 2005). Thus, the model by Lamb et al. (1987), has been modified and expanded by other scholars such as Palkovitz (1997) to incorporate provision. In addition, other scholars such as Dermott (2008) have found that some of the activities that fathers do cannot fit into the three models by Lamb et al. (1987).

Table 3.2: Examples of models of paternal involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility</strong></td>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>Being there/available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Family time (e.g., eating a meal together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared interests</td>
<td>Intensive time (e.g., playing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Affection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting emotionality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caregiving*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Adapted from Norman (2017, p. 93). Note: * Indicates that it also fits with responsibility, while ** also fits with engagement

Gavin et al. (2002, pp. 268, italics as in original) have also conceptualised involved fathering in ways that are slightly different from the above models, by incorporating the five paternal functions that they suggest being common in many cultures, albeit they acknowledge that the relative importance of each function varies by culture. They state that involved fathering encompasses *endowment*, which entails acknowledging the child as one’s own, including the child being given the fathers’ name; *protection*, which means protecting the child from sources of potential danger and contributing to decisions that affect the child’s welfare, such as involvement in the decision to keep the child; *provision*, which translates into ensuring that the child’s material needs are met such as clothes and giving the mother money for the child; *formation*, which refers to socialisation activities, such as discipline, teaching, playing with the child and talking; and *caregiving*, which involves meeting the physical needs of the child by feeding, diapering, bathing, and so on. Gavin et al.’s (2002) model provides guidance in this thesis in understanding involved fathering or paternal involvement as it was also used to explore young father’s involvement with their children. The acknowledgement of the relevance across cultures made this model preferable for this thesis.
3.4 Contemporary context of fatherhood and changing roles of fathers

This section discusses fatherhood in different parts of the world. Understanding contemporary discourses and debates on fatherhood can provide insight into how men today construe and enact fatherhood.

3.4.1 Contemporary fatherhood in Western countries

Research literature indicates that fatherhood in Western countries such as the UK and US has been a subject of increased interest to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers over the last three decades (Andreasson, Tarrant, Johansson, & Ladlow, 2022; Dermott, 2008; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Dolan, 2014; Edwards, Doucet, & Furstenberg, 2009; Gillies, 2009; Lamb, 2010; Miller, 2011b; Strier & Perez-Vaisvidovsky, 2021). Interest in fatherhood stems from the expansion and changes in gender roles in society and family, in the wake of the second wave of feminism and campaigns for gender equality (Binard, 2017; LaRossa, Jaret, Gadgil, & Wynn, 2000; Robb, 2020), changes to legislation around parental leave and entitlements (Fletcher, 2020), and changing social, economic, and demographic conditions such as the increased participation of women in the labour force and changes in family patterns (Edwards et al., 2009; Fletcher, 2020; Hunter, Riggs, and Augoustinos, 2020). These dramatic changes have made the role of fathers to become complex and, in turn, have prompted increased interest in the nature of the roles fathers play in the lives of their children or in the family (Henwood & Procter, 2003; Robb, 2020).

What seems acceptable in research literature in the Western countries is that contemporary ideals, discourses, and practices of fatherhood have changed (Andreasson et al., 2022; Dermott & Miller, 2015; McGill, 2014; Reinicke, 2020). Fathers are now expected to be more equal partners in parenting, be involved in nurturing children, and perform both interactive and physical caregiving in addition to financial provision (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Hunter et al., 2020; McGill, 2014). Thus, Reinicke (2020) and Andreasson et al. (2022) assert that even the way that fatherhood and masculinity are contemporarily
connected is more about intimacy and engagement than about authority, discipline, and
being a breadwinner, as it was in the past. O'Brien (2005, p. 3) makes the point that ‘a
defining feature of contemporary fatherhood is an emphasis on a father as an active, ‘hands-
on’, sharer of child caring responsibilities, an extension and deepening of nurturing
expectations.’ This reflects the discourse of ‘new fatherhood’ (Henwood & Procter, 2003;
Miller, 2011b). Considering the wealth of research literature on the subject (e.g, Dermott,
2008; Johansson & Klinth, 2008; Miller, 2011b), Dermott and Miller (2015, p. 184) assert
that ‘across much of this literature, ideals of contemporary fatherhoods are no longer
described as ‘new’, but in language that in more nuanced ways conveys men’s emotional
engagement, involvement, and activity, as well as sensitivity and ‘intimacy’ in their fathering
relationships and practices’. Those who claim that fatherhood has changed, argue that the
sole breadwinner role within the family is declining (Featherstone, 2003) and breadwinning
is no longer regarded as a requisite or sufficient to fulfil the requirements of ‘good’ fathering
(Dermott, 2003). Brannen and Nilsen (2006, p. 348) argue that this is a ‘cultural change…
breadwinning is no longer seen to legitimise a form of fathering whereby men are exempt
from active involvement with children’.

However, research in both the UK and US suggests that despite this assumed change, the
notion of economic provision has remained a central aspect of father identity (McFadden &
Tamis-LeMonda, 2013; Williams, 2008). In addition, breadwinning remains as an important
component of the discourse of ‘good’ fatherhood (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Henwood &
Procter, 2003) and men’s identity construction (Cannito, 2020; Dermott, 2008; Fletcher,
2020). What is apparent is that due to the shift in fatherhood expectations, contemporary
fathers are faced with two competing discourses and expectations: taking care of finances
and being highly involved and caring fathers (Crespi & Ruspini, 2015; Stevens, 2015), which
they may struggle to balance. Considering that traditional gender norms, which underscore
distinctive, separate roles for men and women still persist, some men may find it difficult to
balance the competing norms of contemporary fatherhood with traditional masculinity (Petts, Shafer, & Essig, 2018). Consequently, some fathers may gravitate towards and emphasise those roles that they perceive to be most compatible with the aspect of their identity that is most central (ibid). This suggests that the economic provider role is likely to be a key feature of the ‘new’ fatherhood, signalling a ‘hybridised’ fatherhood where men are more involved and intimate with their children while still participating in economic provision (Brannen & Nilsen, 2006; Dermott, 2008; Miller, 2011b).

Studies (e.g., Chesley, 2011; Miller, 2011a; Yarwood, 2011) provide evidence that irrespective of changes in ideals of fatherhood, economic provision (or breadwinning) remains a central aspect of father identity and men’s identity construction. A longitudinal study of middle-class fathers in the UK by Miller (2011a) found that, whereas fathers embraced ideals of ‘new’ fatherhood, such as being a nurturer and involved father, economic provision through paid work remained central to their identity. Following the birth of the child, men were more actively and emotionally involved in caring for their child but soon after the end of paternity leave, they returned to paid work. Miller (2011a) concluded that fathers tend to fall back into gendered practices after the birth of their children. She asserts that men’s choices and construction of fatherhood in her study, were influenced by hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, Chesley’s (2011) study with stay-at-home fathers and their wives in the US found that, while stay-at-home fathers embraced childcare responsibilities, some of them continued working part-time as economic provision was central to their identity. Chesley (2011) noted that stay-at-home fathers struggled with masculine ideals that emphasise men’s financial provision.

There is also some research evidence that suggests, due to ideological shifts in fatherhood, contemporary men who are fathers are now more engaged in childcare and are spending more time with children in ways that are significantly different from the past or their own fathers’ behaviour (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Rubin & Chung, 2013; Wall & Arnold, 2007).
For instance, McFadden and Tamis-LeMonda (2013) assert that in the US, increased number of fathers are investing substantial time in childcare, and some men, albeit a small minority, are taking on the role of a primary caregiver or becoming ‘stay-at-home’ dads. O’Brien (2005) also states that British fathers now have access to paid paternity leave and some fathers are spending more time with their children, although still at a lower level than mothers. Consequently, contemporary fatherhood research literature describes and depicts fatherhood as multifaceted (Gatrell, Ladge, & Powell, 2022; Strier & Perez-Vaisvidovsky, 2021).

Notwithstanding some evidence of change, some scholars and commentators have questioned the plausible shift in fatherhood. Those who have questioned it, argue that the changes are more individual or more localised than universal. Change at individual or local level is insufficient to suggest that a truly significant transformation has occurred (Dermott & Miller, 2015). This is, especially, true for different ethnic groups. Studies (e.g., Hofferth, 2003; Leavell, Tamis-LeMonda, Ruble, Zosuls, & Cabrera, 2012; Williams, Hewison, Wildman, & Roskell, 2013) conducted in the UK and US indicate some variations in the conduct of fatherhood due to economic circumstances and cultural diversity, suggesting that there is no one model of fatherhood (Flouri, 2005). For instance, Williams et al.’s (2013) qualitative study with African and African Caribbean men in an inner-city location in England, found that fathers in minority ethnic communities were still spending little time with their children because of long hours of work. Similarly, a longitudinal study by Leavell et al. (2012), involving low-income African Americans, Latinos, and White Fathers in the US revealed variations in the way fathers were involved with their children. The study found that African American fathers were less engaged in caregiving compared to the other two groups. Leavell et al. (2012), attributed the differences in the paternal behaviour to race/ethnicity, sex of the child, and family circumstances as well as early gendered experiences in the family. Therefore, to claim that both the culture and conduct of fatherhood
has changed would be an overstatement. It could be argued that the actual conduct of fathers has not kept pace with the changes in the culture of fatherhood (Dermott, 2008; Wall & Arnold, 2007).

Research literature indicates that even where fathers are involved with their children, fathers continue to be generally more involved in leisure and outdoor activities than in routine activities (Cannito, 2020; Wall & Arnold, 2007). In addition, whereas some scholars agree that indeed some fathers are spending more time with children, they question the quantity of work they are doing in homes because evidence suggest that mothers still shoulder most of the child-rearing work (Gaunt *et al.*, 2022; McGill, 2014; Wall & Arnold, 2007). This has resulted in fatherhood scholarship delving into defining, conceptualising, assessing, and measuring ‘father involvement’ or ‘paternal involvement’ (Doucet, 2020).

### 3.4.2 Contemporary fatherhood in non-Western countries

Comparatively, Seward and Stanley-Stevens (2014) posit that there is a large discrepancy in the amount of fatherhood research between the Western and non-Western countries. In their review of fatherhood research literature across cultures, they have observed that even within non-Western countries, there are significant variations. There is very little fatherhood literature on sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, it was decided to look more broadly at literature on non-Western contexts, which mainly focuses on Asia, as these settings share some cultural similarities. Although still considered limited, in the last two decades, fatherhood research in Asia countries has significantly grown (Florrie Fei-Yin & Qian, 2019; Ho & Lam, 2019; Ishii-Kuntz, 2015; Li, 2020).

The literature reviewed suggests that historically, social expectations in Asian countries have been that fathers should be good providers (breadwinners), protectors, moral guiders, disciplinarians, and role models (Lam & Yeoh, 2019; Lan, 2022; Li, 2020). To a significant extent, these roles have been heavily influenced by the strong traditional gender norms and
values (highly gendered domestic division of labour), religious values, Confucian doctrines, or teachings on patriarchy in many Asian countries (Ho & Lam, 2019; Li, 2018; Yeung, 2013). However, economic, political, social, and cultural changes that have taken place have reshaped gender roles in families, and this has led to some changes in how fatherhood is construed, expressed, and enacted (Ho & Lam, 2019; Lam & Yeoh, 2019; Yeung, 2013). The roles fathers play in families have been changing and expanding, and contemporary Asian fathers are reportedly becoming more involved in domestic chores and in childcare (Ho & Lam, 2019; Ishii-Kuntz, 2015; Lan, 2022) albeit there are significant variations across Asian countries (Nozawa, 2020; Yeung, 2013). Nevertheless, these changes signify a significant departure from the Confucian patriarchal ideals for many Asian countries where such ideals were predominant (Li, 2020). Research literature indicates that compared to the past, fathers are now spending more time performing housework and childcare and engaging in other nurturing activities (Ishii-Kuntz, 2015; Lam & Yeoh, 2014; Li, 2020). For example, in a mixed-method study investigating the impact of parental migration on children’s health and well-being in Southeast Asia involving 1,034 Indonesians and 1,000 Filipinos, Lam and Yeoh (2014) analysed the changing fathering practices in Indonesia and the Philippines. The study highlights how fathers undertake care activities for children and older members of the family when mothers migrate to other countries for work. The study reveals that as primary carers, fathers are not only in charge of buying food, managing finances, attending school events, and administering discipline but many, are also involved in the intimate or the everyday aspects of care work in relation to their children. Fathers reported being involved in feeding and bathing the children (see Lam & Yeoh, 2014).

Even studies (e.g, Li, 2020; Suratman, 2011) in Asian countries where migration of women for employment is less common, have also reported some changes in the fatherhood role. For example, Suratman (2011) explored gender relations among 10 couples who were professionals in Malaya dual income households in Singapore. She found that couples shared
childcare and housework tasks although sometimes, they were shared with grandmothers and in several cases, tasks were allocated to living-in helpers. She noted that more involvement of fathers occurred in households without living-in helpers. Although fathers participated in childcare and household work, mothers still carried out most of the work with fathers mainly involved in transporting children. Importantly, Suratman (2011) noted that fathers often performed tasks as helpers after receiving instructions from their wives, which may suggest that they did not perceive caregiving as their role as fathers. A review of previous studies on Chinese fathers by Li (2020) also found that, despite the heavy breadwinning responsibility and lack of paternity leave, contemporary Chinese fathers, had become more active in childcare and warmer toward their children than fathers of the past generations. Li (2020) further reports that Chinese fathers were more involved in situations where mothers worked longer hours and worked in prestigious jobs or when mothers supported paternal involvement. However, mothers were still reported to be doing more childcare than fathers. Considering this persistence gap in childcare between mothers and fathers and the gendered way fathers spend time with their children, Li (2020) suggests that fathers’ gender role may have evolved at a pace that is uneven with their parental role.

As illustrated in the discussion above, whilst there have been some changes in the practices of fathers in Asian societies, father’s involvement in caregiving activities remains considerably lower than that of mothers (Shan & Hawkins, 2014; Sriyasak, Almqvist, Sridawruang, Neamsakul, & Häggström-Nordin, 2018; Yeung, 2013). Whereas the findings discussed above share similarities to the findings of research in Western countries, in Western countries more emphasis seems to be placed on emotionally involved fatherhood. In many Asian countries, the breadwinner or economic provider role remains the most important for men’s identity as fathers (Li, 2020; Sriyasak et al., 2018; Yeung, 2013). It is an important constituent of the discourse of good fatherhood (Ball & Wahedi, 2010; Lam & Yeoh, 2014). The contexts of some Asian countries are also unique, with migration of
women due to employment being a driver of a change in the role of fathers. Therefore, despite similarities, we cannot generalise finding from one research context to another. Having discussed literature in Asian countries, in the following paragraphs attention shifts to fatherhood in sub-Saharan African countries.

As earlier indicated, compared with Asian countries, in sub-Saharan Africa countries (except for South Africa), the body of fatherhood scholarship is small (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012; Mncanca, Okeke, & Fletcher, 2016; Rabie, Skeen, & Tomlinson, 2020). However, there are some similarities between Asian and sub-Saharan African countries. For example, the existence of the collective culture, which is contrary to the more individualistic culture in Western countries. Moreover, recent studies (Ampim, Haukenes, & Blystad, 2020; Mubita, 2021; Rabie et al., 2020; Smith, 2014; Townsend, 2013) in sub-Saharan African countries have also suggested that some change regarding fatherhood and fathering practices might be taking place. A qualitative study examining changes in men’s experiences of fatherhood by Smith (2014) found that, because of social changes such as declining fertility and change in family structures in Igbo-speaking South-eastern Nigeria, some fathers have become more directly involved in many aspects of childcare such as cooking and feeding children. Smith (2014) asserts that compared to fathers in the past, some men have adopted the new approach to fatherhood as they are now able to help more with childcare, exhibit greater intimacy with their children, and are treating children in a less authoritarian manner. Similarly, Ampim et al.’s (2020) qualitative study in rural and urban Ghana found that, due to women’s working situation and separation from kin resulting from rural-urban migration, men are becoming more involved in childcare and housework. Ampim et al. (2020) assert that although the male breadwinner ideal is upheld, it is now not enough for a man to be considered a ‘good’ father. In contemporary Ghana, men are increasingly expected to share housework, care for their children, and at times, spend ‘quality time’ with their children, albeit others feel they are constrained from doing so by stigma. Considering that most
spouses of fathers who participated in their study were actively engaged in economic activities outside the home, Ampim et al. (2020), concluded that the women’s working situation might have influenced some men’s participation in childcare and housework. However, fathers in rural Ghana could not publicly perform household chores and care work as it would endanger their masculinity and possibly attract stigma.

In Southern African countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, Townsend (2013) has also observed that although the meanings of fatherhood and cultural expectations for fathers vary greatly across countries, they are changing. For instance, in South Africa, variables including the introduction of policies such as paternity leave and programmes promoting father involvement, women's increased opportunities for paid employment, and the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, have resulted in men sharing household chores and participating in childcare (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Mncanca et al., 2016; Rabie et al., 2020). Makusha and Richter (2014) assert that fathers, particularly from middle-class South African families, are spending more quality time with their children, attending children’s school events, taking their children to health centres, and walking and driving their children to school. In a study examining the experiences of 20 households coping with HIV/AIDS in rural KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, Montgomery, Hosegood, Busza, and Timaeus (2006) found that men were involved with their families and households in a wide range of ways including caring for children, doing domestic chores, and providing emotional support. Irrespective of the changes noted, the economic provider role appears to still be regarded as the most important role and a determinant of a ‘good’ father in many sub-Saharan African countries (Clowes et al., 2013; Van den Berg & Makusha, 2018).

Most of the research on fatherhood in sub-Saharan Africa has been conducted in South Africa. However, there are important differences in the contexts of Zambia and South Africa. That means findings might not be transferable. The experiences of fathers in South Africa are reported to be deeply rooted in and intertwined with the apartheid history, which has
impacted family living arrangements (Bhana & Salvi, 2022; Mkhwanazi & Bhana, 2017). Fathers not living with their children or doing non-resident fatherhood, appears to be a norm in South Africa (Rabe, 2018). Labour migration of both fathers and mothers from rural to urban areas, which has resulted in approximately only a third of children living with both parents and almost an equivalent share living with neither biological parent is common in South Africa (DeRose et al., 2017). Furthermore, norms and values regarding childbearing and marriage also differ between Zambia and South Africa. Compared to Zambia, the prevalence of marriage in South Africa is low and cohabiting outside marriage is more common (CSO, 2016; Maluleke, 2020; Msoore & Govender, 2013; Posel & Rudwick, 2013). In 2015, the proportion of married people (12 years and above) in Zambia was 45.1% and only 0.1% were reported to be cohabiting outside the context of marriage (CSO, 2016). In contrast, in South Africa, the percentage of people aged 15 and above who were married in 2016 was estimated as 28.3% whilst those cohabiting outside marriage was 8.3% (STATS SA 2018). Childbearing outside marriage, and outside non-martial cohabiting, is the norm in South Africa (Hatch & Posel, 2018; Langa, 2020), which is not the case in Zambia as outlined in Chapter 2. These differences in the contexts, provide the compelling case for further exploration of experiences of men as fathers in Zambia, which is a different context.

3.4.3 Contemporary fatherhood in Zambia

While there has been some evidence of bourgeoning fatherhood scholarship in South Africa, a review of the literature indicates that currently, in Zambia, there are very limited studies that have been conducted on fatherhood.

Traditionally, fathers in Zambia are expected to be economic providers or breadwinners for their families, while domestic and care work is perceived primarily as women’s responsibility (Brudevold-Newman et al., 2018; Evans, 2016; Taylor, 2006). Economic provision is intimately linked to men’s sense of self as masculine in the Zambian society (Simpson, 2005). Therefore, it is unsurprising to find that men in Zambia often identify
themselves with economic provision (Brudevold-Newman et al., 2018; Mweemba & Mann, 2020). However, as is the case in other countries, Zambia has undergone social and economic changes in recent years, and these changes have consequences for men’s roles in families. As earlier indicated (see section 2.4), due to job losses or unemployment, some men have lost the breadwinner role of the family and the gender divisions of labour are becoming more flexible. For example, Evans’s (2016) study in Zambia suggests that some men are increasingly participating in unpaid care work. In an analysis of 58 detailed life histories, group discussions, and observations of 200 participants in ethnographic research in Kitwe on the Copperbelt and in rural Luapula of Zambia, Evans (2016) examined why there was a persistence of the notion of women as caregivers and yet there was a decline of the male breadwinner. The study found that the persistence was due to perceptions of unpaid care work as a feminine activity, equating it with ‘doing nothing’ by some men and marital insecurities by some women (see Evans, 2016, p. 1141). Nevertheless, some men were found to be involved in unpaid work, such as helping the wife putting the children to bed and cooking. However, Evans acknowledges that unpaid work is often performed in private spaces. Although her study did not focus on fatherhood, it provides insights into men’s involvement in childcare.

Recent studies (e.g, Brudevold-Newman et al., 2018; Mubita, 2021) also suggest that fatherhood and fathering practices in Zambia are changing to some degree, albeit there are mixed perceptions regarding the extent to which fathers participate in childcare. Brudevold-Newman et al.’s (2018) qualitative study which investigated traditional parenting practices and beliefs in selected villages of Zambia, found that, although fathers are mainly responsible for providing economic support and discipline to the children, a minority of them in the Northern Province of Zambia claimed to have been helping mothers with everyday care activities such as feeding, bathing, and putting children to bed. Similarly, a study by Mubita (2021) involving married women and men in urban areas of Zambia, found that some
fathers were actively involved in childcare and shared housework with their wives. However, such fathering practices were mostly, distinct among the educated and working fathers living in urban areas. What was apparent in Mubita’s study was that the economic provider role was perceived as a non-negotiable role for fathers by both men and women and remained a significant aspect of good fatherhood and men’s sense of masculinity. Notwithstanding these findings, we cannot generalise them to the entire Zambian population, as the findings only represent the experiences of a minority of men or families in the areas where the studies were undertaken. While these findings suggest the possibility of change in fatherhood and fathering practices, it appears some men in Zambia still regard childcare as women’s responsibility and economic provision remains the main feature of good fatherhood and masculinity. The claims in these studies are insufficient to conclude that the culture and conduct of fatherhood has been transformed in the country. More studies are needed to explore and establish how involved fathers have become in contemporary Zambia. The following subsection of the chapter move on to look at what influences men understanding of fatherhood and fathering.

3.5 What shapes men’s construction of fatherhood and fathering

The construction and enactment of fatherhood and fathering is influenced by multiple factors (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Roggman, 2014; Hoffman, 2011; Marsiglio & Roy, 2012; Petts et al., 2018; Plantin et al., 2003). These influencing variables can be individual, interpersonal, or contextual (Cabrera et al., 2014; Macon, Tamis-LeMonda, Cabrera, & McFadden, 2017; Marsiglio & Roy, 2012). This is discussed in following subsections.

3.5.1 Childhood experiences of being parented

According to Maiden (2013, p. 74) ‘the concept of fatherhood among men begins taking root during their childhood through experiences with their own parents and extended family members’. The observations of how their own fathers or primary caregivers do things may influence how they perceive and come to enact their roles with their own children (Paschal,
Sometimes, men may either want to emulate their own fathers’ style of parenting because they admired them or reject it because it had a negative impact on their childhood (Roberts, Coakley, Washington, & Kelley, 2014). For example, Dermott’s (2003) research with 25 working class fathers in the UK, found that some men wanted some aspects of the relationship they had with their own father to be reproduced with their own children and used their negative past experiences to do things differently with their own children.

Dermott’s (2003) study suggests that some fathers may want to construct fatherhood differently, believing that their own parents were bad models. This was also evident in the study by Makhanya and Matthias (2018) with nine young unmarried fathers in South Africa. Makhanya and Matthias (2018) found that for some young fathers, their negative childhood relationships with their own fathers, was a strong motivation to maintain good relationships with their own children. They did not want their children to be exposed to the negative experiences they had. In the same vein, the positive experiences with their own fathers became a source of encouragement for others to replicate the same with their children. Other studies with young fathers in the US and Taiwan respectively, (Paschal, 2003; Sriyasak et al., 2018) have reported similar findings.

### 3.5.2 Fatherhood role socialization by other social network members

Sometimes, fathers come to learn how to enact their roles through interactions with significant role models (Masciadrelli, Pleck, & Stueve, 2006). Their everyday experiences with people within their social network such as peers and other parent figures might influence to a varying degree, their broader sentiments about what it means to be a father (Marsiglio & Roy, 2012) Through observation of other parents’ child rearing behaviours, fathers can learn how to enact their own (Masciadrelli et al., 2006).
3.5.3 Cultural ideologies of fatherhood

Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda (2004) assert that men’s roles as fathers are informed by historical, cultural, and familial ideologies. Some practices and norms are transferred from one generation to another and continue to influence some fathering behaviours (Plantin, 2007). The predominant cultural and family ideals will influence how some men perceive and enact their fatherhood roles. In societies (e.g., patriarchal) where men are heads of families or households, economic provision is dominant and equated to fatherhood. Men are socialised on its importance and later in life, they situate fatherhood roles in breadwinning (Chideya & Williams, 2013). For instance, Chae and Chae (2010) assert that in East Asian cultures, the notion of fatherhood is deeply influenced by the Confucian ideology, which is patriarchal in nature. Considering that men are regarded as leaders of the family, they encounter social pressure to fulfil the role of the successful economic provider, role model, and good family man. To garner respect from their family and social circle, they must meet the monetary and physical needs of their children. Chae and Chae (2010, p. 113) posit that ‘respect and maintaining “face” is central to the traditional Asian paradigm of being an ideal man and father’... and ‘individual autonomy and self-expression are often less valued’. This pressures men to conform to existing cultural ideologies and social norm.

3.5.4 Gender construct and relations

In nearly every society, there are expected norms of behaviour culturally assigned to women and men that prescribe how they should act in different spheres of life (Wienclaw, 2011). These expected norms of behaviours that are termed gender roles, mandate and facilitate different primary activities for men and women (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Gender roles determine what behaviour is believed to be appropriate for women and for men (Blackstone, 2003; Eagly, 2000; Matud, Bethencourt, & Ibáñez, 2014). Importantly, gender roles are culturally bound. They are not static but change over time within a given society or culture (Eagly, 2000; Wienclaw, 2011). Men and women in a particular society grow up being
socialised to differentiate what the society regards as acceptable from unacceptable behaviour so that they act in a manner that is perceived appropriate (Blackstone, 2003; Wienclaw, 2011). Huffman, Olson, O’Gara Jr, and King (2014, p. 775) assert that ‘men are socialised to behave in ways that are traditionally masculine…. such as aggressiveness and authoritarianism.’ Huffman and colleagues make the point that for the past decades, these masculine traits have associated men’s role with high performance at work and financial support for the family until the time when society started experiencing changes in the traditional gender roles with the entry of women in the labour force. They contend that since the emergence of this change in gender roles (at least, in the Western countries, as discussed earlier in section 3.4), fathering roles have expanded beyond the economic provision to include expressing affection towards one’s children and being responsive to their needs (Huffman et al., 2014).

Doucet (2013, p. 297) asserts that ‘fathering… as a set of practices and identities is inextricably tied up…. with gender roles.’ Research literature indicates that in egalitarian societies where there are strong neutral gender expressions, men are likely to be more flexible and engage in both breadwinning and caregiving (Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009; Hoffman, 2011). However, in societies where men’s roles are centred on economic provision, men are likely to remain financial providers and emotionally distant from their children (Šmídová, 2007). Men who violate gender roles in such societies are bound to receive negative reactions from people in their society (Ashcraft & Belgrave, 2005; Eagly, 2000; Fischer & Anderson, 2012). Fischer and Anderson (2012, p. 17) write that ‘men who violate gender role expectations by behaving in stereotypically feminine ways or not behaving in stereotypically masculine ways … may experience prejudice and backlash’.

Studies such as that of Moss-Racusin, Phelan, and Rudman (2010), who conducted research with 232 men and women in the US, have demonstrated how men encounter prejudice when they behave atypically. This mixed method study revealed that men suffer backlash when
they are perceived to violate masculine stereotypes that legitimise the gender hierarchy. As such, Fischer and Anderson (2012) opine that the negative reactions that men as fathers face in the US explains why there might be few men willing to embrace caregiving roles and even exhibit nurturing traits, which are deemed ‘feminine’. The perceived violations of stereotype gender roles that attract backlash, puts the pressure on men to conform to masculine norms and stereotypes roles (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010).

However, when the benefits outweigh the costs of non-conformity, some men do sometimes, violate their gender roles by engaging in roles that are culturally perceived as inappropriate for their gender (Eagly, 2000). They employ different strategies to negotiate cultural expectations, stigma, and masculinity, as discussed later in section 3.7.

3.6 Men, masculinity, and fatherhood

The way in which men construct and enact fatherhood is shaped by social constructions of masculinity. A growing body of fatherhood scholarship (e.g., Andreasson & Johansson, 2016; Dolan, 2014; Magaraggia, 2013; Wall & Arnold, 2007; Williams, 2009) has started exploring how aspects of masculinity shape men’s conceptualisation of fathering and fatherhood. Before discussing how masculinity impacts fatherhood and fathering practices, the next section present theories of masculinity to set fatherhood in a gendered context.

3.6.1 Theories of masculinity

Connell (2002, p. 44) asserts that ‘masculinities are necessarily defined within a conception of gender’. Until the 1970s, the framing of gender as sex roles dominated early studies of masculinity (Berggren, 2014; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Maxwell, 2018). Such conceptions of gender meant that masculinity included conforming to gender roles that is, appropriate behaviours for men and women (Connell, 2002; Demetriou, 2001; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). In this respect, men in general, were bound into the code of conduct or expectations of emotional stoicism, physical toughness, avoidance of femininity, and striving for (status) success and achievement (Berggren, 2014; Kimmel, Hearn, & Connell, 2009).
A departure from these expectations or any entry into a different domain would indicate ‘deviance’ (Demetriou, 2001) and according to Maxwell (2018), it may be a threat to some men’s masculinity. In a way, some men continue to position themselves in line with these traditional masculine norms or ideals.

The essentialist sex role framework was criticised for seeing biology as pre-eminent and failing to acknowledge power in gender relations (Berggren, 2014; Demetriou, 2001; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Although the framework was viewed to be insufficient in accounting for men’s power and structural privileges, its critics to a great extent, agreed with its description of traits commonly associated with masculinity (Berggren, 2014). The blindness to power by sex-role theory led to the formulation of the notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995), which according to Demetriou (2001) grasps the complex nature of femininities and masculinities and power in gender relations. Consequently, masculinity was no longer treated as a trait but as a form of collective male practice, which subordinated women (Demetriou, 2001; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Connell emphasised human action that is, ‘what people actually do, not on what is expected or imagined’ thereby defining gender as a ‘configuration of practice’ (Demetriou, 2001, p. 340).

Although there were many scholars who worked on the theories of hegemony, it is Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity that has been immensely influential (Berggren, 2014; Robb, 2020). According to Connell (1995, p. 77) hegemonic masculinity is ‘the configuration of gender practice, which embodies the currently, accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women’. This suggests that hegemonic masculinity is a set of practices that subordinate women to men to enable patriarchy to continue.

Importantly, Connell recognised the existence of multiple masculinities and viewed masculinity as fluid, hierarchical, and socially constructed (Connell, 1995, 2003; Connell &
Messerschmidt, 2005; Dowd, 2010). According to Connell (1995), multiple forms of masculinity exist in any society or culture: complicit, subordinated or marginalised in relation to hegemonic masculinity, which are defined as inadequate or inferior (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 2016). For instance, complicit masculinity relates to a large number of men who do not act in the way prescribed or embody hegemonic masculinity but still (passively) sustain it and receive the benefit of patriarchy, which is termed the ‘patriarchal dividend’ (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, the benefit is not the same for everyone; it varies by race, class, and age (Hunter, Riggs, & Augoustinos, 2017). Hence, the existence of marginalised masculinity, which is associated with men who are marginalised based on their ethnicity (race), class or age (Charlebois, 2012; Demetriou, 2001). Such men have no access to hegemonic ideals because of some of their characteristics (Huang, 2014).

Subordinated masculinity, on the other hand, is associated with men who exhibit traits and attributes that are opposite to hegemonic masculinity, such as effeminate heterosexual or gay men who are marginalised on the basis of their sexuality or embodied femininity (Charlebois, 2012; Connell, 1995).

Despite the existence of multiple forms of masculinity, at any given time, only one form of masculinity is culturally exalted (Connell, 1995). In this case, hegemonic masculinity embodies the currently most honoured or successful ways of ‘being a man’ (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Liu, 2019). Although across cultures, only a few men may enact it, all other men position themselves in relation to it because they are measured against it. In view of this, the subordination is not only between genders but also within genders (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus, hegemonic masculinity also ‘refers to a social ascendancy of one group of men over others’ (Demetriou, 2001, p. 341). Connell (1995)’s notion of hegemonic masculinity is relevant in understanding how men construct and enact fatherhood.
3.6.2 Consequences of hegemonic masculinity on fatherhood and fathering

Fatherhood is a resource for enacting masculinity and masculinity shapes men’s expression and conduct of fatherhood (Dowd, 2010; Lewington, Lee, & Sebar, 2021; Pini & Conway, 2017). In cultures where economic provision or breadwinning represent the culturally exalted form of masculinity and fatherhood, men feel obligated to adhere to traditional roles or hegemonic masculine ideals (Lewington et al., 2021; Sikweyiya, Shai, Gibbs, Mahlangu, & Jewkes, 2017). As Lewington et al. (2021) posit, expectations surrounding fatherhood can encompass powerful discourses that can affect how men transition into new father roles. Within some households, traditional masculine norms stereotypically dictate adherence to strict gender roles such as economic provision or breadwinning and ‘helping out’ mothers who are perceived as primary caregivers (Cherry & Gerstein, 2021). As a result, when some men become fathers, the need to adhere to a hegemonic masculinity script creates conditions that encourage ‘traditional’ gendered parenting roles (Eerola & Mykkänen, 2015; Lewington et al., 2021).

For men who do not have the means of meeting the economic provider expectations, the impact may be negative. Furthermore, the emphasis within traditional masculinity on adhering to a script of men distancing themselves from anything feminine and being emotionless, becomes an obstacle for them to be involved fathers (Magaraggia, 2013). Research literature suggests that the notion and enactment of the ‘new fatherhood’ or ‘involved fatherhood’ continue to clash with hegemonic ideals of masculinity (see Cao & Lin, 2019; Crespi & Ruspini, 2015; Dolan, 2014; Lewington et al., 2021; Miller, 2011a; Wall & Arnold, 2007; Yarwood, 2011).

What is apparent in the research literature reviewed for this study is that despite contemporary ideals of fatherhood encouraging fathers to be caring and nurturing alongside economic provision, the breadwinning role still remains a central feature of fatherhood and the construction of a ‘good father’ and masculine self (Cao & Lin, 2019; Crespi & Ruspini,
Crespi and Ruspini (2015) posits that many men adopt the traditional position of a breadwinning identity and describe themselves as responsible for financial care.

Studies (e.g., Lewington et al., 2021; Yarwood, 2011) demonstrate how masculinity is inextricably linked to good fatherhood and shapes men’s enactment of fatherhood and fathering. For instance, Yarwood (2011) in the UK studied nine employed first-time fathers and found that breadwinning through paid work, was an important feature of a good fatherhood identity. The men in this study drew on existing traditional hegemonic masculinity, which emphasises a good parent being economically active. Consequently, Yarwood argues that despite fathers being expected to be more than a financial provider, being economically active within the labour market remains linked to the conception of good fathering in the UK.

Similarly, Lewington et al.’s (2021) study in Australia with first-time fathers revealed that, whereas fathers desired to be more involved, most of them limited their roles to the more ‘traditional’ expectations of a father such as being a provider, protector, and career driven. Caregiving was not seen as a primary role but more of ‘helping out’. Lewington and colleagues posit that men’s experiences of fatherhood in their study were shaped by masculine discourses surrounding what it means to ‘be a man’ and what it is means to ‘be a father’.

The above studies demonstrate how traditional hegemonic masculinity encourages men as fathers to prioritise the role of economic provision (Hunter et al., 2020; Roy & Dyson, 2010) and relegate childcare to a secondary role. Based on these studies, it is evident the traditional masculinity ideals that underscore that men must be economic providers and distance themselves from anything feminine, sometimes, become an obstacle for them to be involved fathers (Magaraggia, 2013).
However, Robb (2020) asserts that considering that masculinities are multiple and changeable, they offer possibilities of imagining different roles and the future for men such as becoming more caring and expressive or embracing roles previously associated with women and femininity. Miller (2011a) has linked the emergence of the recent constructions of ‘involved fatherhood’ and the ‘good’ father to a greater recognition of multiple and diverse masculinities. As such, Roy and Dyson (2010) posit that ideals of contemporary fatherhood, which have led to an increase in combining the provider and caregiving roles has given rise to possibilities for new ways of expressing masculinity. Hence, some men are now able to incorporate notions of ‘caring masculinities’ (Elliott, 2016; Miller, 2011a).

3.6.3 Caring masculinities

According to Wojnicka and Kubisa (2023), caring masculinity is a concept of European origin introduced by Gartner, Schwerma, and Beier in 2007 and further theorized by Hanlon (2012). However, it has been popularised by Karla Elliott (2016) through what she has termed as a practice-based framework of caring masculinities. This framework draws on insights from Hanlon’s (2012) work on men and caring, critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM) and feminist care theory (Elliott, 2016, 2020). A caring masculinities framework has in recent past become important to fatherhood research in that it represents an alternative view from which to consider traditional gender practices and roles (Lee & Lee, 2018; Ruby & Scholz, 2018).

Caring masculinities is a gender equality strategy or intervention (Elliott, 2016; Hanlon, 2012). It is argued that caring masculinities do not shame and blame men but instead support and encourage their participation in care work to help promote gender equality and develop nurturing attitudes (Lee & Lee, 2018; Shah, 2023). The caring masculinities framework was founded on the belief that when men engage in caring, changes can occur in their perceptions of the value of care, their relationships with family members, and their masculine identities (Leung, Chan, & Tam, 2019). Therefore, it is regarded as ‘a critical form of men’s
engagement and involvement in gender equality and offer the potential of sustained social change for men and gender relations’ (Elliott, 2016, p. 240). Hence, it is argued that men’s involvement in caring may lead to social change for men and transform gender relations (Leung et al., 2019).

Caring masculinities can be defined as ‘masculine identities that reject domination and its associated traits and embrace values of care such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality’ (Elliott, 2016, p. 240). They relate to men’s actual practices of care (Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Elliott, 2016). Caring masculinities place emphasis on the integration into masculine identities the values of care and characterises that have been traditionally associated with women and antithetical to hegemonic masculinity while rejecting domination traits including emotional stoicism, which are central to traditional hegemonic masculinity (Cunha, Rodrigues, Correia, Atalaia, & Wall, 2018; Elliott, 2016, 2020; Hunter, Riggs, & Augoustinos, 2017). This also entails being ‘disloyal’ to rigid traditional masculine norms (Lee & Lee, 2018) and giving up the privileges and power of hegemonic masculinity and risking social ostracism by not conforming to expected masculine roles (Elliott, 2016).

Another claim of this framework is that ‘caring masculinities recast traditional masculine values like protection and providing into relational, interdependent, care-oriented ones’ (Elliott, 2016, p. 253). Significantly, caring masculinity challenges gender essentialism and emphasises caregiving roles as neither being inherently male nor female (Jordan, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2018). With caring masculinities, Jordan (2020) asserts that caring practices and feminine care values are (re) constructed as masculine and become essential to the construction of being a good man and good father.

Nevertheless, many scholars argue that understanding of caring masculinities requires consideration of the contexts in which they might flourish (Jordan, 2020; Mvune & Bhana, 2023; Tarrant, 2018). Research literature from different cultural contexts indicates that the thriving or the development of caring masculinities is affected by several factors. These
factors include among others, negative stereotyping and societal responses (stigma associated with breaking gender roles), social pressures to conform to socio-cultural ideals attached to hegemonic masculinity (Lee & Lee, 2018; Shah, 2023), social isolation (Lee & Lee, 2018), gender norms (Mvune & Bhana, 2023), men’s refusal to giving up hegemonic privileges, and the powerful role of gender stereotypes, which encourages prejudice and discrimination (Cunha et al., 2018).

Most fatherhood studies that have employed a caring masculinities framework have mainly been conducted with stay-at-home fathers (SAHF) or men who take caregiving in their families whilst on paternal leave (e.g. Beglaubter, 2021; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Gill, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2018; Leung et al., 2019; Liong, 2017; Shah, 2023). These studies have demonstrated how fathers incorporate traditionally feminine values of care and traditionally masculine traits into their new masculine identity, without degrading their masculine status.

For example, Lee and Lee (2018) examined 25 SAHFs in the United States. They sought to investigate how SAHFs perceive traditional masculine identities and norms, construct alternative masculine identities within a non-traditional caregiving context, and navigate the challenges of constructing and maintaining their new masculine identities in a female-gendered world of parenting. SAHFs in their study reported incorporating aspects of masculine and feminine qualities to develop a new masculine identity that best supported their caregiving role and experiences. The study reported increased respect for caregiving, emotional connection with others, and potential change in attitudes and masculine identities among their participants after becoming SAHFs. Lee and Lee (2018) further reported that fathers in their study incorporated caregiving activities into their masculine identities by arguing that caring for one’s children was inherently masculine, holding flexible ideas about what men can do, developing respect for caregiving, and viewing caregiving as legitimate work.
Brandth and Kvande’s (2018) study with heterosexual fathers who stay home alone on parental leave in Norway also confirms this development toward caring masculinities in which values and practices of care are integrated into masculine identities without degradation in masculine status. The study found that SAHFs changed their attitudes about care work and masculine identities as a result of engaging in direct, hands-on caregiving consistent with the caring masculinities framework’s argument that participating in care work helps men develop caring and nurturing attitudes. Fathers in their study also showed respect for caregiving by constructing care work as hard work. Brandth and Kvande (2018, p. 81) assert that ‘when fathers define caregiving as hard work, this may be interpreted as masculine reframing, as work is assumed to be a major basis of masculine identity’.

While studies have been able to demonstrate how fathers integrate traditionally feminine values of care and traditionally masculine traits into their new masculine identity, it has been argued that it would be too simplistic or premature to assume that hegemonic masculinity no longer guides the constructions of what it means to be a father or a man (Hunter et al., 2017; Mvune & Bhana, 2023). Therefore, Hunter et al. (2017, p. 6) argue that caring masculinity should be appropriately understood as ‘broadening of hegemonic masculinity to incorporate roles traditionally performed by women’.

A review of literature for this study indicated a lack of studies with young fathers that have employed the concept of caring masculinities as an analytical framework. However, Mvune and Bhana (2023, p. 1357) assert that ‘caring masculinities opens up the possibilities for understanding young fathers away from dominant stereotypes that position them as uncaring, irresponsible, and reckless’. As posited by Elliott (2020, p. 1), what is evident in the literature is that contemporary ‘young men are to an extent able to adopt more open expressions of masculinity than previously’. Furthermore, based on their study with vulnerable young men from poor socio-economic backgrounds in South African, Morojele and Motsa (2019) contend that when men and boys are involved in care work, they have the ability to embrace
values of care traditionally perceived as feminine performances of gender, such as expressing emotions, caring and nurturing without completely departing from or completely subverting traditional masculinity

3.7 Negotiating cultural expectations and masculinity

3.7.1 Challenging the primacy of providing

The transition to fatherhood can be a challenging experience for some men as they have to deal with the complexities surrounding contemporary and ‘traditional’ notions of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a ‘good father’ (Lewington et al., 2021). Across diverse cultural contexts, being an economic provider is often viewed as central to successful and good fatherhood (Lewington et al., 2021; Shirani, Henwood, & Coltart, 2012). It is also linked to men’s sense of masculine self (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Thébaud, 2010; Williams, 2008). However, many men, especially those who are unemployed, struggle to live up to the economic provider role (Deslauriers, Devault, Groulx, & Sévigny, 2012; Randles, 2018; Strier, 2014). To portray themselves as ‘good fathers’, they try to find an alternative to the ‘traditional’ model of fatherhood or spontaneously reconstruct fathering and masculinity for themselves (Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002). For instance, in the qualitative study by Roy (2004) involving noncustodial fathers in Chicago and incarcerated fathers in Indiana in the US, underemployed and unemployed fathers who were unsuccessful with the provider role, downplayed its importance by problematising ‘providing as a myth that could hide men’s lack of involvement as caregivers’ (Roy, 2004, p. 267). Instead, they created new versions of good fathering that transcend the provider role and emphasised or attached greater importance to ‘being there’ for their children. It appears, ‘being there’ is a discursive resource for men as fathers that ‘assists them in negotiating the gendered expectations of fatherhood, specifically the breadwinner norm.’ (Weber, 2020, p. 46).
3.7.2 Not paying attention to critics and legitimizing and rationalising practices

In trying to deal with backlash for engaging in non-traditional gender roles, Mubita (2021) asserts that sometimes, fathers depict themselves as individuals whose masculine identities remain unscathed by ignoring those that ridicule them when they engage in unconventional practices. Such coping strategies have been reported in studies such as Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, and Scaringi (2008) with stay-at-home-fathers in the US. The study found that most of the fathers were unconcerned and unaffected by others’ judgment for taking up the role of primary caregiver, as they felt their masculinity was unthreatened. They could still do other masculine activities, such as maintain the car and mow the grass alongside caregiving. For these fathers, how others defined their masculinity was not important to them. Therefore, Rochlen et al. (2008), report that men in their study discussed masculinity and gender roles in flexible and self-defined terms and were not influenced by stereotypes and gender norms.

3.7.3 Expressions of gender-neutrality for caring roles

Research literature indicates that the other way men negotiate cultural expectations and masculinity is by regarding caregiving roles as gender neutral (Medved, 2016; Mubita, 2021). For instance, Medved’s (2016) study with stay-at-home fathers in the US, found that at times, men articulated their roles as caregivers in ways that seemed to negate the influence of gender on their decision to parent as primary caregivers. Often, participants expressed that both parents are eligible to fill a caring role. Irrespective of the sex of the parent, they saw care work as a duty of any parent who was at home with the children. Similarly, Mubita’s (2021) study with married men and women in urban areas in Zambia, found that some men reconstructed caring roles as interchangeable, gender-neutral, and suitable for any parent tasked to care for the child’s vulnerability.
3.8 Fatherhood as a time of transition

Becoming a father is a major life transition that leads to new roles, expectations, obligations, social status (Cooper, 2005; Forget, Correa-Velez, & Dee, 2019; Solberg & Glavin, 2018), and new identities for men (Reed, 2005; Wulf, 2015). For instance, the announcement of the birth of the child, changes a man into a father and he becomes respectable in society (Forget et al., 2019). Reed (2005, p. 16) asserts that ‘as a new-born makes its way into our world, a man takes up the mantle of fatherhood and is forever altered’. As such, becoming a father is a ‘status passage’ for a man in the sense of a social and symbolic change marking a transition point in the way he is viewed, understood, or treated by others (Davis-Floyd, 2022; Newton, 2012).

According to Glaser and Strauss (1971, p. 2), status passage entails a ‘movement into a different part of a social structure; or a loss or gain of privilege, influence, or power, and a changed identity and sense of self, as well as changed behaviours.’ Status passage is a transition theory, which has its roots in Arnold van Gennep’s work on ‘rite de passage’. van Gennep was interested in the transitions between stages/statuses (Draper, Sparrow, & Gallagher, 2010). His theory of transitions was further developed by Victor Turner (1969) and Glaser and Strauss (1971). Turner (1969) focussed on the notion of liminality by exploring the quality of relationship people have with each other during the period of change in social status (Davies, 1994), while Glaser and Strauss (1971) moved away from the tripartite phases of transition and focused on the properties of the status passage. The transition theory is relevant to the present study in understanding how young men’s transition to fatherhood is a status passage.

According to van Gennep (1960, pp. 2-3), ‘the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another’. He suggested that the transition individuals make between statuses is marked by three distinctive phases: separation, transition or liminality, and incorporation. According to van Gennep, the
The separation phase is characterised by the removal of individuals from their previous social life (Draper, 2002). In other words, individuals depart from the old ways of life and prepare to assume the new role that society recognises (Jacinto & Buckey, 2015). For men, Draper (2003) asserts that the confirmation of pregnancy may instigate the process of separation from their previous status, and the sharing of the news of the pregnancy and impending fatherhood with family members and friends signals men’s movement toward fatherhood. The liminal phase, on the other hand, is characterised by individuals occupying a non-status, a kind of no-man’s land that is, they neither belong to the previous status nor the next one (Draper, 2002; Turner, 1994). A good example would be an expectant father. At this stage, they view themselves as being betwixt and between social statuses (Draper, 2002; Jacinto & Buckey, 2015; Turner, 1994). Finally, the incorporation phase is characterised by acceptance of the individual transitioning as a member of the inside or subgroup (Jacinto & Buckey, 2015; Newton, 2012) or establishing a new position in society (van Gennep, 1960). For fathers, at this stage, following the birth of the child, they are recognised by society in their new role, and they are celebrated by rites and honoured by family, society, and friends (Draper, 2003; Jacinto & Buckey, 2015). However, the new status they assume comes with expectations. Turner (1969, p. 359) asserts that they are ‘expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions.’ Therefore, at the incorporation phase, men as fathers, adapt to their new roles (Draper, 2003).

Transition theory has been used in health and social care research (Kralik, Visentin, & Van Loon, 2006) and applied to research on the transition of men to fatherhood (e.g. Cooper, 2005; Draper, 2002; Graham, 2007). For instance, in her longitudinal ethnographic study which focused on men’s experiences of pregnancy, birth, and early fatherhood in the UK, Draper (2003) found the transition theory to be a valuable framework within which to describe and understand men’s transition to fatherhood.
3.9 Young fatherhood

This section explores the literature on young fatherhood in Western countries and non-Western countries including Zambia and highlights the research gap in Zambia. It begins by discussing the ecological systems theory as a framework for understanding young fatherhood and father involvement.

3.9.1 Ecological approach to young fatherhood and father involvement

From an ecological perspective, it has been recognised that (young) fatherhood and father involvement does not occur in vacuum but is influenced by several contextual factors (Deslauriers & Kiselica, 2022). According to the ecological systems theory, an individual’s behaviour or social experience needs to be seen in relation to the environmental conditions of the developing person (in the case of this study, a young father) and be understood contextually. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986) ecological framework has been found to be useful in contextualising research findings and understanding human behaviours. A significant advantage of this framework is its ability to provide an understanding of the interfacing of an individual’s development and their sociocultural context. It allows researchers to look beyond the individual’s characteristics or traits to external environmental variables that influence the individual’s social experiences (Deslauriers & Kiselica, 2022).

The ecological framework has been employed in several studies examining the lives of young fathers in different cultures (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Deslauriers & Kiselica, 2022; Gavin et al., 2002; Maiden, 2013; Paschal, 2003; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). For example, Paschal (2003) explored African American adolescent fatherhood and found the ecological framework to be useful for understanding the participants’ family lives, their obligations, and their decisions in terms of their social, cultural, and structural environments. The framework played an important role in providing insights and understanding of what shaped the participants’ conceptualisations of fatherhood and influenced their fathering behaviours. Paschal’s (2003) study highlighted how hegemonic norms in participants’
society influenced the conceptualisation of fatherhood and how young fathers’ relationships with others impacted on their parenthood experiences. Similarly, Swartz and Bhana (2009) employed the ecological framework to examine and analyse the experiences of impoverished young fathers in South Africa. The framework helped them to account for the influence of various individual, relational, and context variables on young men’s experiences of fatherhood. Swartz and Bhana’s (2009) study highlighted how cultural practices, young men’s relationship with their child’s mother and her family, their relationship with their own families, and their financial situation influenced their involvement in the care and upbringing of their children. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) theorised the ecological environment in which young fatherhood occurs as a collection of structures or ecological systems that are nested and the individual as a part of these fluid systems. He originally stated that there are four levels of environmental systems: micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems and later revised the models to include the chronosystems.

The microsystem refers to the most proximal setting or immediate environment in which the developing person frequently interacts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The interactions that occur in this setting help determine the course of development of the individual (Cabrera et al., 2014). The microsystems are characterised by social and dyadic relationships, which are reciprocal (Volling et al., 2019). For example, the father-child dyad and the father-mother dyad. Bronfenbrenner acknowledged the influence of the characteristics of all the individuals present in the immediate setting in which interpersonal interactions occur on social experiences of the developing person (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). An example of the microsystems would be the young fathers’ home (family), neighbourhood, peers, and the home of the child’s mother (maternal family).

The mesosystem is defined as a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This entails that a mesosystem is a system of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) and what happens
in one microsystem can result in reactions in a second (Cabrera et al., 2014). For unmarried non-residential fathers, the mesosystems include the relationships connecting their home and the home of their children and co-parent (Volling et al., 2019). The young fathers’ relationship with the child’s mother and the maternal family members such as the child’s mother’s parents, brothers, and uncles, all of whom influence his involvement with the child, is another example of the mesosystem.

The exosystem according to Bronfenbrenner, contains one or two external environmental settings and other social systems that indirectly affect the developing person. Although the developing person is not an active participant, he or she is still impacted by events that occur in those settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). The events that occur in those settings indirectly influence the processes of the immediate environment (microsystem) in which the developing person lives (Volling et al., 2019). This system encompasses broader social and economic institutions, which determine young fathers’ access to social services, economic resources, and employment opportunities.

The macrosystems pertain to the economic conditions in which somebody lives and the belief systems or ideologies, norms, values, customs and practices of an ethnic group or society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These broader ‘cultural-scripts’ and economic conditions influence all the lower order systems: micro-, meso-, and exosystems (Pleck, 2007; Volling et al., 2019). Bronfenbrenner regarded them as ‘blueprints’ that guide people’s behaviour within the same social environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Examples of the macrosystems for young fathers include cultural ideologies, norms and beliefs about fatherhood, masculinity, and gender as well as cultural practices in their society. This also include the poverty and unemployment levels of their society, all of which influence young fathers’ understanding and conduct of fatherhood and their involvement with children as fathers.

Finally, the chronosystem, which was not part of the original model developed by Bronfenbrenner, was only included in the later stages of his work to underscore the
significance of time on an individual’s development. The chronosystems pertain to changes or constituencies over time in the characteristics of the individuals and the environment in which individuals live (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These changes could be historical or life events or transitions that might impact on the individual’s development (Cabrera et al., 2014; Volling et al., 2019). Bronfenbrenner (1986) distinguished these changes or transitions as normative (expected) and non-normative (unexpected) and termed them ecological transitions. Examples of the chronosystems include changes in the financial situation or employment status of young fathers, changes in marital or romantic relationship status between the young father and the child’s mother, changes in place of residence, and changes in the relationship and marital status of the child’s mother, all of which influence young fathers’ involvement with their children.

3.9.2 Young fatherhood and father involvement in Western countries

Young fatherhood has received increased research attention in the last two decades in Western countries such as the US and UK (Andreasson et al., 2022; Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Davies & Hanna, 2021; Lau Clayton, 2016; Weber, 2013). Reeves, Gale, Webb, Delaney, and Cocklin (2009) assert that this could be attributed to the realisation that young fathers have a significant role in the care of their children. However, much of the existing research evidence regarding young fathers is based on quantitative data from (longitudinal) large-scale surveys (see Berrington, Cobos Hernandez, Ingham, & Stevenson, 2005; Berrington, Diamond, et al., 2005; Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Jackson, Choi, & Preston, 2015; Kiernan, 2006; Landers, Mitchell, & Coates, 2015; Mollborn, 2007; Rhein et al., 1997). Whilst evidence from such large-scale surveys has been useful for policy direction, it has been viewed to be ‘problematic’ for its potential to reinforce or perpetuate and exacerbate the negative stereotype depicting young fathers as delinquents, risky, selfish, uncaring, or indifferent to caring responsibility and cause of poverty (Kiselica, 2008; Neale & Patrick, 2016; Tuffin, Rouch, & Frewin, 2010, 2018). Most of the early quantitative
research on young parenthood began with the assumption that teenage childbearing is a
problem (Duncan, 2007; Furstenberg, 2003). Hence, they largely sought to delineate the
risk factors and possible negative consequences of young parenthood (Bunting & McAuley,
2004; Furstenberg, 2003; Tuffin et al., 2018). Additionally, they delved into economic,
psychological, and social challenges connected to becoming a young parent rather than
presenting a more optimistic and positive image of young parents (Johansson & Hammarén,
2014). The identified risk or demographic factors have to a large extent informed the deficit
model often used to theorise young fatherhood (Tuffin et al., 2018).

Furthermore, prior to 1990s, most of the quantitative studies were characterised by
methodological problems such as selection bias. Furstenberg (2003) asserts that these studies
seemed to support the contention that young parenthood was a social problem and young
parents, and their children were not faring well. Observations made indicated that data
analysis did not always compare those of similar background (Duncan, 2007; Furstenberg,
2003; Tuffin et al., 2018). Tuffin et al. (2010) contend that comparing young fathers who
fare badly with childless peers contributes to pathologising them as boys from flawed
backgrounds making tragic mistakes in the same way young mothers were pathologised.

Given the importance and legitimacy attached to large scale survey by policy makers
(Graham & McDermott, 2006; Ellis-Sloan, 2019), the typical profile presented, or negative
stereotyping of the young fathers sometimes become part of orthodoxy of professional and
public understandings of young fathers as well as a policy response (Duncan, et al., 2010;
Neale & Patrick, 2016).

Additionally, most of the quantitative studies prior to 1990s failed to account for selection
effects or factors. Consequently, they overestimated the risk factors or adverse impacts of
young parenthood (Furstenberg, 2003). What is apparent in research literature is most of
these studies assumed correlation for causation. Whereas young parenthood correlates with
several factors, correlation is not the same as causation (Arai, 2009; Duncan, 2007). Prior
studies that predicted catastrophe for young people and young parenthood as a cause of negative or poor outcomes, have been challenged by those that have accounted for selection effects (Duncan, 2007; Duncan, Edwards, & Alexander, 2010). These studies have found that some of the poor outcomes were a result of pre-existing problems (Furstenberg, 2003).

Other than selection bias, much of the previous views on young parenthood were often gathered from the perspective of the young mothers (Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014; Paschal, Lewis-Moss, & Hsiao, 2011; Reeves, 2006) or young fathers being recruited through contact with the child’s mother or service providers (e.g. Glikman, 2004; Lemay, Cashman, Elfenbein, & Felice, 2010). Gathering information on young fathers through the lens of young mothers can sometimes be problematic. Responses may be biased towards the circumstances of their relationship (Reeves, 2006) and their views have the potential for misrepresentation and overstating the situation or lack of young fathers’ involvement with their children (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007). Furthermore, recruiting young fathers through contact with the child’s mother excludes or neglects substantial proportions of young men who may no longer be in relationship with or may have a fragile relationship with the child’s mother, making it difficult to build an accurate representation of young fatherhood (Neale & Patrick, 2016; Osborn, 2007). Hence, the need to engage with young fathers directly for a more balanced view. The growing research evidence from qualitative research (e.g Andreasson, Tarrant, Johansson, & Ladlow, 2022; Glikman, 2004; Kiselica, 2008; Neale, Lau Clayton, Davies, & Ladlow, 2015; Neale, Patrick, & Lau Clayton, 2015; Paschal, Lewis-Moss, & Hsiao, 2011; Reinicke, 2021; Weber, 2013, 2020) with young fathers in the last two decades has also proven beneficial and offered an alternative or positive view of young fathers (Maiden, 2013; Tuffin et al., 2018). Paschal (2003) posits that the use of qualitative methods has allowed young fathers to be understood in their own term while Tuffin et al. (2018) and Maiden (2013) assert that it has helped to challenge long held negative stereotypes and advanced the definition of fatherhood to include a generative
perspective that was missing in earlier works. Despite being relatively limited, qualitative research has allowed for an in-depth understanding of the experiences of young fathers and an accurate depiction of young men whose stories are now heard (Glikman, 2004).

3.9.2.1 Young fathers’ construction of fatherhood roles

As discussed earlier in section 3.4, contemporary discourses of fatherhood underscore fathers as active carers and providers. However, research literature indicates that notwithstanding the shifting ideals of fatherhood in the Western countries, young fathers consider economic provision to be the most important aspect of fatherhood (Neale & Davies, 2016; Neale & Lau Clayton, 2011; Tarrant et al., 2022; Weber, 2013). Deslauriers et al. (2012) assert that many young fathers consider being a good provider as a primary role of fathers, and failure to do so heightens the internal conflict they feel when they realise that they may not live up to the expectations society places on them.

Studies (e.g., Neale & Lau Clayton, 2011; Paschal et al., 2011) exemplify how many young fathers consider economic provision as the most important and primary role of a father, although they also value ‘being there’ for their children. ‘Being there’ relates to fathers being available and accessible for their children (Osborn, 2007) or ‘providing emotional support to children, spending “quality time” with them, and being involved in care-giving activities’ (Paschal et al., 2011, p. 70). In a qualitative longitudinal study of young fatherhood involving 31 young fathers in the UK, Neale and Lau Clayton (2011) found that, while young fathers valued ‘being there’ in a loving and personal relationship with a child, their accounts underscored the importance of fulfilling the economic provision for their children as this was central to their father identity. Similarly, Paschal et al.’s (2011) qualitative study which examined the perceptions and lived experiences of 30 African American teen fathers, found that whereas 27% of the young fathers in the study construed fatherhood in terms of nurturance, the majority (53%), conceptualised fatherhood primarily in economic provider terms.
Although young fathers consider economic provision as the most important role and tend to identify with the notion of breadwinning, many of them struggle to fulfil it and often they rely on their parents (Cundy, 2016; Neale & Lau Clayton, 2011; Weber & Schatz, 2013). Some of those who view themselves as inadequate providers often disassociate from the responsibility to mitigate their feeling of failure (Deslauriers et al., 2012). For others, because of the significant challenges they encounter to provide financially and materially, they try to conceptualise fatherhood in term of ‘being there’, as it becomes an alternative way for them to define good fatherhood in achievable terms (Weber & Schatz, 2013).

3.9.2.2 Barriers and facilitators to involvement with their children

While young fathers may desire or have good intentions of being involved with their children, they face myriad barriers that prevent them from making contact and being involved with their children (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Lau Clayton, 2016). A review of US and UK literature indicates that some young fathers struggle, or stop being involved with their children due to financial and employment issues and conflict or deteriorating relationship with the child’s mother and the maternal grandparents (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Lau Clayton, 2016) as discussed below.

The quality and status of relationships with the child’s mother and maternal grandparents has been found to predict or determine father involvement (Fagan, Barnett, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2003; Johnson, 2001; Roberts et al., 2014). Studies (e.g., Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Lau Clayton, 2016) indicate that a poor or conflicting relationship between young fathers and the child’s mothers and maternal grandparents leads to limited father involvement with the child or the lack thereof. When there is antagonism or tension, both the child’s mother and the maternal grandparents often, tend to act as ‘gatekeepers’ (Roberts et al., 2014). Considering that the child’s mother and maternal family often have custody of the children of unmarried young fathers, it gives them leverage to play a gatekeeping role when things are not going as expected. This situates them in the role of either facilitating or

For example, in a longitudinal study involving 31 young fathers in the UK, Neale et al. (2015), found that, for some young fathers who were in a fragile relationship with the child’s mother, contact with the child was either restricted or blocked. For these young men, fulfilling their roles as fathers was a challenge. On the other hand, using data from the same study, Lau Clayton (2015) reports that irrespective of the romantic relationship status, having a positive relationship with the child’s mother facilitated meaningful involvement of young fathers with the child as they were able to spend time with the child away from the mother.

Similarly, Gavin et al. (2002), conducted a quantitative study with 109 young, disadvantaged fathers in the US and found the quality of relationship with the child’s mother and maternal grandparents to be a predictor of father involvement. The study found that young fathers were more involved with their children in households were there was a positive relationship with the maternal grandmothers, especially those who had higher levels of education. Gavin and colleagues claim that educated grandparents may be more tolerant and flexible than those with lower levels of education and may be more concerned with the benefits of having an involved father. Furthermore, the study found that being in a romantic relationship with the child’s mother was central to father involvement. For these reasons, Gavin et al. (2002) makes the point that it is not surprising to find that when the romantic relationships breakdown between young men and their child’s mother, some young fathers experience limitations or are not involved with their children.

Another variable that has been found to contribute to father involvement is the employment status of a father (Fagan et al., 2003; Gavin et al., 2002; Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009). Unemployment constrains fathers from fulfilling the role of an economic provider (Fagan et al., 2003; Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009). Fagan et al. (2003) claim that young fathers who are unemployed are less likely to be involved. Research literature suggests that young fathers
are likely to have poor socioeconomic status, lower educational attainment, and fewer employment opportunities (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Johansen, Nielsen, & Verner, 2018; Weinman, Smith, & Buzi, 2002). Consequently, they ‘may have fewer social and economic resources for their children or the mother of their children’ (Sigle-Rushton, 2005, p. 735). As such, Bunting and McAuley (2004, p. 299) opine that ‘lack of money may lead to disinterest and uninvolveinment in other aspects of fatherhood.’ This is corroborated by research such as that undertaken by Speak, Cameron, and Gilroy (1997) with 40 young single non-residential fathers from disadvantaged backgrounds in the UK. The study found that financial constraints limited contact of some young fathers with their children. Speak and colleagues underscored that financial constraints impacted on young fathers’ self-esteem, and this resulted in some of them avoiding contact with their children for fear of being asked for money, which they did not have.

### 3.9.3 Young fatherhood and father involvement in non-Western countries

Compared with Western countries, the literature reviewed for this study indicates a significant research gap on young fatherhood in Asian and sub-Saharan African countries. The limited research on Asian countries has predominantly been conducted in China where focus has been on issues of masculinity in the era of neoliberalism and the rise of the national discourse of the ‘China Dream’. In sub-Saharan African countries, the majority of scholarship on young fatherhood has been conducted in South Africa. Nevertheless, young fatherhood research in South Africa has also been described as only emerging (Bhana & Salvi, 2022; Mkhwanazi & Bhana, 2017). The proceeding subsections, focus attention on how young fathers construct fatherhood roles and discuss their involvement with their children.
3.9.3.1 Young fathers’ construction of fatherhood roles

It has been argued that the notion of a father as an economic provider or breadwinner is predominant in young father’s construction of fatherhood in non-Western countries (Cao & Lin, 2019; Chideya & Williams, 2013; Madiba &Nsiki, 2017; Sriyasak et al., 2018).

In Asian countries, studies (e.g, Cao & Lin, 2019; Lin, 2019; Sriyasak et al., 2018) have provided evidence that young fathers understand fatherhood primarily in economic provider terms and the provider role remains central to their masculine and father identity. For example, Sriyasak et al.’s (2018) study with 25 Thai teenage fathers found that they construed fatherhood in economic provider or breadwinning terms. The study revealed that whereas young fathers were involved in childcare and housework, greater emphasis was placed on the breadwinning role. The study reports that most of the young fathers felt a societal pressure to be breadwinners and worked hard to provide financial support for their family. Caregiving was mainly treated as a secondary role, and fathers wanted the child’s mother to take care of the child and manage the household economy. These findings suggest that caregiving was not construed as a father’s role among Thai young fathers. Similarly, Cao and Lin’s (2019) study with 30 Chinese young men in Shanghai and Shenyang found that for young men providing economically was the fundamental element of a father’s role. Thus, the study found that young fathers conformed to prevailing and dominant constructions of ideal fatherhood and strived to provide a stable material life or construct positive prospects for their children, as this represented a masculine role for fathers in their cultural context.

In sub-Saharan African countries, studies (e.g, Chideya & Williams, 2013; Madiba &Nsiki, 2017; Ufashingabo, 2017) have also shown that many young fathers’ construction of fatherhood roles mainly revolve around economic provision. For instance, in a qualitative study with ten adolescent fathers in Cape Town, South Africa, Chideya and Williams (2013)
found that, although young fathers understood fatherhood in terms of being providers, nurturers and being a role model to their children, majority of them identified themselves with the provider role. They make the point that adolescent fathers in South Africa grow up in a patriarchal society, which emphasises and socialises them on the importance of the provider role and that this impacts on their views of fatherhood roles. Similarly, in Rwanda, Ufashingabo’s (2017) study with young fathers, highlighted how young fathers construed fatherhood only in terms of provision. However, many of them were reported to be struggling with the provider role because of extreme poverty and their unemployment circumstances.

The findings of the studies discussed above support the assertion that despite a shift in ideologies in fatherhood and irrespective of their socioeconomic status, the economic provider role remains central to young men’s father identity and their sense of a masculine self.

3.9.3.2 Barriers and facilitators to involvement with their children

The literature reviewed for this study revealed a lack of research on young fathers’ involvement with their children in Asian countries. Therefore, this section is based on the review of studies conducted in sub-Saharan African countries. The reviewed young fatherhood studies in sub-Saharan Africa showed resemblances to the US and UK literature in term of barriers to young fathers’ involvement with their children. The major difference in barriers to involvement is the influence of cultural and institutional expectations, highlighted only in South African studies, where extensive studies with young fathers have been conducted.

For instance, the quality and status of the relationship with the child’s mother and the maternal grandparents has also been found to be influential to fathers’ involvement in a qualitative study by Swartz, Bhana, Richter, and Versfeld (2013). Swartz and colleagues examined the experiences of 27 young black African and coloured fathers living in resource-
constrained settings in South Africa. They found that a poor relationship with the child’s mother, limited the ability and desire of some young fathers to enact their fathering roles.

Similarly, young fathers’ socioeconomic status is another barrier to father involvement that has been highlighted in South African studies. Madiba and Nsiki’s (2017) study with teen fathers in a rural district in South Africa, for example, demonstrates how unemployment and lack of financial resources create a feeling of shame in some young fathers, causing them to distance themselves from engaging with their children. The inability to provide financial support precluded them from being there for their children. Importantly, this study underscores how young fathers equated fathering with aspects of economic provision.

Lastly, as earlier stated, the influence of institutional and cultural expectations in some sub-Saharan African contexts is the major differentiating factor in barriers to young fathers’ involvement with their children from the findings in Western countries. For example, in South Africa, both by law (Children’s Act) and culture, for unmarried men to acquire rights to the child they are first expected to pay either money or cattle equivalent for damages relating to virginity, the child and marriage. Failure to meet such cultural expectations impacts on the father-child relationship. For example, Makhanya and Matthias’s (2018) study with nine young unmarried fathers in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, found that failure to meet cultural expectations, such as paying pregnancy damage, deterred some young fathers from being involved with their children. Makhanya and Matthias (2018) explain that unmarried men are expected to pay for damages as compensation for disrupting the education and marriage future of the young woman and disgracing the family by impregnating the young women outside marriage. Failure to pay for damages results in being denied access to their child by the maternal families. This cultural practice is similar to that practiced in Zambia as discussed in Section 2.3. However, there is lack of research evidence on how it impacts young fathers’ involvement with their children in Zambia. Hence, the
current study considers the influence of cultural practices on young unmarried fathers’ involvement with their children in rural Zambia.

3.9.4 Young fatherhood and father involvement in Zambia

A review of literature on Zambia indicates that there is a paucity of research on young fatherhood and more so, research with young unmarried fathers. While in the last decade there has been a steady growth of research and literature on risk factors of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and young motherhood (Bwalya et al., 2018; Katowa-Mukwato et al., 2017; Menon et al., 2016; Nkwemu et al., 2019), there has been lack of attention on young fathers. Mweemba and Mann (2020) assert there is a dearth of evidence on how young fathers navigate their new roles and relationships, including experiences of parenting. The only known qualitative study with young fathers in Zambia is that by Mweemba and Mann (2020). However, it examined young fathers’ experiences of schooling, work, and domestic life in the context of child marriage. Nothing is known about the experiences of young unmarried fathers in Zambia, especially in a rural setting where teenage pregnancy is reportedly high.

3.10 Conclusion and the research gap

This chapter has reviewed a body of literature on fatherhood in general and young fatherhood from Western and non-Western Countries. The review of the literature demonstrated that fatherhood is socially constructed and is influenced by multiple factors. This necessitated the consideration of ecological systems theory as a framework for understanding young fatherhood and father involvement in this study.

In Western countries, the chapter demonstrated that extensive studies on fatherhood have been conducted and ideals of fatherhood have changed. The literature reviewed in this study indicates that there is an increased involvement of men in childcare and household chores. However, there seems to be tension between traditional norms of masculinity and ideals of
involved or new fatherhood. Whereas an increased number of men are embracing childcare and sharing housework, they still attach greater importance to economic provision through paid work and mothers still perform most of the care work. This has led to some scholars questioning if there is indeed change or it is just a media ‘hype’ (Palkovitz, 2002, p. 93).

In non-Western countries, although literature suggests that fatherhood and fathering practices are changing, there is insufficient evidence to establish the extent of change. A review of literature showed that there is limited research on this subject in non-Western countries. Particularly, in sub-Saharan African countries, except for South Africa, studies of fatherhood in general and young fatherhood are still very limited and non-existent in some countries. Most of the information on fatherhood originates from the experiences of fathers in Western countries which may not be applicable to the local context due to the differences in culture or context. Therefore, culturally contextualised studies become imperative. In Zambia, there is a dearth of research on fatherhood in general and particularly, young fatherhood. Whereas there has been increased attention on child marriage, teenage pregnancy and young motherhood, there has been a lack of attention on young fatherhood, which necessitates the present study.
Chapter 4: Methodology and research methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods of the study. Specifically, the chapter discusses the philosophical and theoretical assumptions, beliefs, and the rationale for adopting hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenology as a methodology. Furthermore, it discusses the justification for the chosen research methods. As earlier indicated, the aim of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers in rural Zambia. To realise this aim, the study addresses the following questions:

i. What are young men’s experiences of the transition to fatherhood?

ii. How do young fathers understand their fatherhood roles and what informs their understanding?

iii. How do young fathers negotiate and deal with differences if any, between their fathering practices and cultural expectations?

iv. What influences young fathers’ involvement with their children?

4.2 Research paradigm, philosophical, and theoretical assumptions

The researchers’ approach in each study is significantly influenced by their epistemological and ontological position (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ontology is the researcher’s beliefs about the world and is concerned with the nature of reality or (existence) being (Ataro, 2020; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2013). Epistemology, on the other hand, is a theory of knowledge, which is concerned with the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019; Ormston et al., 2013). It is also concerned with the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The epistemological stance a researcher takes is critical in that it dictates what kinds of knowledge they perceive as legitimate, adequate, and possible to acquire through the
research process (Gray, 2019; Maxwell, 2018). This, in turn, shapes the methods a researcher adopts (Marsh & Furlong, 2002).

Ontologically, this hermeneutic phenomenological study is grounded in the belief that phenomena exist to be explored and are accessible (Cuthbertson, Robb, & Blair, 2020; Symon & Cassell, 2012). We can access the phenomena by means of our being-in-the-world (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Realities or phenomena are constituted in lived experiences and they are experienced contextually, temporally, and historically through being-in-the-world (Dasein) (Kruger-Ross, 2015). Importantly, the experience of being is subjective and people (participants) are self-interpretive beings (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2009; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Hence, social reality or a phenomenon is interpreted, constructed, and experienced through interaction with others and the world (Armour et al., 2009; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; Tuli, 2010).

Regarding its epistemological foundations, this study adopts an interpretivist stance, which holds that knowledge is subjective, culturally, and historically situated or socially constructed based on people’s interpretation of their experiences of and in the world (Hiller, 2016; Ryan, 2018). Interpretivists look for ‘culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). They believe that knowledge is gained through subjective experiences (Mack, 2010). Thus, they are interested in participants’ subjective interpretations of their experiences of the phenomena (Chen, Shek, & Bu, 2011). Interpretivists acknowledge the important role of the researcher in the process of arriving at understanding through dialogue and interpretation (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). By adopting the interpretivist epistemology, this study departs from previous studies such as Amoo et al. (2018), on young fatherhood in Zambia, which have mainly taken a positivist stance and have sought to examine the trends, determinants, and health risks of young fatherhood. In contrast to interpretivists, positivists believe in objective reality and assume that it is possible to acquire value-free knowledge (Gray, 2019; Ormston et al., 2013). They
proclaim that ‘scientific method’ is the best approach to discovering social reality or value-free knowledge (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Ormston et al., 2013). However, findings from such an approach do not provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena and often fail to take into account the sociocultural contexts of the participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Todres & Holloway, 2010). Plager (1994, p. 67) asserts that positivist approaches remove the research participants from the context of the situation, such that the meaning of their life world, ‘their lived experience, their situatedness, their concerns, and what matters to them are left out of the picture’. Consequently, they give the reader only a snapshot of the situation (Rahman, 2017). Considering that the lived experiences of young fatherhood are descriptive and subjective and can only be understood within the cultural context in which they occur, and from the perspective of the people that subjectively experience them, it was deemed appropriate to adopt the interpretivist epistemology for this study. In keeping with the interpretivist epistemology, qualitative methods that allow participants to share their interpretation of their experiences of the phenomena were used in this study.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory provides the main lens through which to understand the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers in this study. The ecological framework is based on the premise that the environmental system in which the individual grows and interacts, significantly influences his or her experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It provides insight to this study on how young fathers’ experiences are affected by multiple interacting systems within their sociocultural context (Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004). The ecological framework resonated with the interpretivist paradigm and the hermeneutic phenomenology; a qualitative research approach adopted for this study. They all underscore the importance of sociocultural context.

4.3 Research approach and rationale

Within the qualitative framework, hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology was deemed appropriate to facilitate the exploration of the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers.
However, in the initial stages of conceptualising this study, three other research methodologies were considered. Specifically, grounded theory, discourse analysis, and ethnography.

Grounded theory is concerned with constructing or developing a theory grounded in data from research relating to a particular phenomenon under investigation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Under this approach, social processes are important to a researcher as they define how interactions unfold and shape the meaning that comes from them, so as to offer an explanation of why certain things happen that way or develop theory (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). It seeks to discover social relationships and behaviours of groups (Crooks, 2001). In this study, grounded theory would have helped to uncover the social relationships and behaviours of young fathers. However, its inclinations to group understanding (social processes) over individuals (Crooks, 2001; Willig, 2013) made hermeneutic phenomenology, which underscores the subjective experience of participants the most suitable approach for this study.

In the same way, discourse analysis was considered. Discourse analysis is concerned with analyses of the use of language (Hodges, Kuper, & Reeves, 2008; Wertz et al., 2011) and power relations in society (Fairclough, 2013). While discourse analysis would have helped in understanding how young fathers use language to construct versions of their fatherhood experiences, this study did not intend to deconstruct and critique language use and the social context of language usage (Salkind, 2010). Hence, discourse analysis was found not appropriate for this study.

Lastly, ethnography was also considered. Ethnography is the study of culture or subculture (Holloway & Todres, 2010; Ladner, 2016). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015) assert that ethnographic researchers are interested in cultures, cultural understanding, meaning making, and looking at the culture from the inside view. Ethnographers also pay particular attention to the language practices of a given setting. Ethnography could have been a good fit as it
also takes cognisance of the influences of historical and cultural contexts on social interactions and require researchers to be reflexive, accounting for their own assumptions and presuppositions to strengthen the findings (Jones & Smith, 2017). However, ethnography was deemed not suitable for this study as it is more interested in analysing cultural behaviours, culture-sharing groups, and organisational patterns (Creswell, 2007). This study did not aim at observing and analysing how young fathers interact with each other and with their environment to understand their culture as is the case with ethnography (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015).

Despite all the methodologies considered for this study sharing some commonalities in the general processes of research (Creswell & Poth, 2018), hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen over the other approaches because it was felt that it was much stronger in its potential to uncover the lived experiences of young fathers. Significantly, hermeneutic phenomenology is interested in the individual’s subjective experiences and takes cognisance of the individual’s social, cultural, and political context and requires researchers to be aware and account for their influence on the individual’s experience of being (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Neubauer et al., 2019). The subsequent sections of this chapter discuss the phenomenological approach and its philosophical underpinning.

4.4 Phenomenological approach

In keeping with the interpretivist epistemology, this study used one of the phenomenological approaches to investigate the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers. Phenomenology is primarily concerned with the conscious, subjective meanings of human experiences (Langdrige, 2017; Zahavi, 2017) and ‘gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Researchers that employ phenomenology focus on examining subjective human experience to inform, or even re-orient, how we understand that experience (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Neubauer et al., 2019). They seek to describe the meaning of the lived experience in terms of what was experienced.
and how it was experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019). Emphasis is placed on exploring a phenomenon from the perspective of those who are living it or have experienced it (Mapp, 2008; Neubauer et al., 2019).

There are two main streams of phenomenology: descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology. The subsequent subsections discuss their philosophical underpinnings and explicate why hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen for the present study.

4.4.1 Descriptive phenomenology

Descriptive phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Dowling (2007, p. 132) asserts that for Husserl, phenomenology entails a ‘rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear in order to arrive at an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience’. Husserl believed that the aim of phenomenology is to return to the life-world (Lebenswelt), ‘the things themselves’, and describe the essence of a phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004; Langdrige, 2017; Nigar, 2020) or ‘describe things as they appear to consciousness’ (Moran, 2002, p. 6). By essence, Husserl meant the common features that represent the true nature or meaning of the phenomenon (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Lopez & Willis (2004) contend that Husserl believed that there are characteristics that are common to any lived experience. He suggested that to access the essences of a phenomenon, researchers must withhold or put aside their presuppositions and prior knowledge through a phenomenological reduction practice called epoché or bracketing. Bracketing is the process of suspending our prejudgments, biases, preconceived ideas, and beliefs about a phenomenon (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Laverty, 2003). Husserl suggested that reality is objective and independent of history and context (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Consequently, researchers should strive to understand the important features of a phenomenon as free as possible from the cultural context (Dowling, 2007).
Researchers that subscribe to Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology espouse the idea that both the subject and object are inseparable and interdependent (Groenewald, 2004; Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, & Dowling, 2016). Therefore, researchers should endeavour to suspend their personal prejudices or preunderstanding when investigating any phenomena (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011). Although bracketing has been rejected by Heidegger and others, Husserl believed that it was possible for researchers to put aside their own experience, preconceptions, and theoretical leanings with the aim of leading them back to the ‘things themselves’ or discovering the essence of the phenomenon (Zahavi, 2017).

Notwithstanding its rigorous exploratory technique and the capacity for uncovering the ‘thick description’, descriptive phenomenology, like other approaches that were considered for this study as earlier discussed, was also deemed inappropriate. The aim of this study was to understand or interpret unmarried young fathers’ lived experiences and not just describe them. Furthermore, descriptive phenomenology overlooks the importance of socio-cultural context. For the present study, understanding the contextual forces that shape the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers was key to choosing the approach to use (Bynum & Varpio, 2018). Furthermore, in the current study, both the researcher and the participant were regarded as pertinent to the study (Patton, 2020) as they are co-creators or co-constructors of knowledge something that does not resonate with descriptive phenomenology. Not only that, the researcher’s prior knowledge or preunderstanding was also considered as key in enhancing the interpretation of the research finding (ibid). In the following subsection, hermeneutic phenomenology and its underlying assumption is discussed.

**4.4.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology is influenced by the interpretivist paradigm (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). It is one of the streams of phenomenology that was developed by Martin Heidegger who was Husserl’s student (Neubauer et al., 2019) and later advanced by scholars such as Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Max Van Manen, and
Paul Ricoeur (Langdridge, 2007). Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with understanding and interpreting human experiences as they are lived (Pope, 2006; Tuohy et al., 2013).

In contrast to Husserl who was concerned with ‘pure description’ of the essence of the phenomena (Walker, 1994), Heidegger was interested in interpretation with focus on deriving meaning from ‘Being’ (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018; Tuohy et al., 2013). He employed hermeneutics to understand the individuals’ ‘lifeworld’ or lived experiences for he believed that the essence of human understanding is hermeneutic (Mapp, 2008; Reiners, 2012). Hermeneutics is a word that originates from the Greek word hermeneusin, a verb, meaning to understand or interpret (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009; Moran, 2000). Heidegger ‘believed that humans are hermeneutic (interpretive) beings capable of finding significance and meaning in their own lives’ (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 174).

Unlike Husserl who was focused on consciousness, of importance to Heidegger was the concept of Dasein (being-in-the-world) (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Laverty (2003, p. 24) contends that Dasein means the ‘mode of human being’ or ‘the situated meaning of a human in the world’. Heidegger devised the concept of Dasein to stress that individuals cannot withdraw from various contexts that influence their choices and give meanings to their lived experiences (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). He believed that it was not possible a person could be separated from the world for he was already in the world (Mackey, 2005). Therefore, he suggested that researchers should focus on understanding the meaning of ‘Being’, which Heidegger conceptualised as being-in-the-world (ibid). He took cognisance that people’s realities are influenced by the world they inhabit and that as researchers we should understand that human experiences cannot be separated from their socio-cultural contexts (Flood, 2010; Neubauer et al., 2019). It is for this reason that Heidegger rejected the idea of epoché or bracketing, and instead espoused the idea of the subject and object being inseparable (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). He believed that it was impossible or
inconceivable for researchers to bracket their personal experiences, preunderstanding, biases, and assumptions. He saw prior understanding or fore-structure being an essential part of research in enhancing interpretation (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). In doing this, he was cognisant that incorporating our own past experiences and existing knowledge into data analysis contributes additional dimensions to the interpretive process (Bynum & Varpio, 2018).

Heidegger believed that consciousness cannot be separated from the world (Nigar, 2020) and assumed that conscious awareness equated with knowledge (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). He believed that consciousness was a formation resulting from the individual’s historically lived experiences that includes the history and the culture in which individuals were brought up (Neubauer et al., 2019; Nigar, 2020). As such, hermeneutic phenomenology takes cognisance that an individual’s subjective experiences are inextricably linked with social, cultural, and political contexts, and requires researchers to be aware and account for their influence on the individual’s experience of being (Flood, 2010; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Neubauer et al., 2019).

In this study, I found myself being drawn to Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology because young fathers do not father in isolation, but in multiple contexts (Rubin & Chung, 2013). I questioned and rejected the idea of bracketing and embraced prior knowledge or pre-understanding and presupposition in interpreting the experiences of unmarried young fathers reflexively. Laverty (2003, p. 24) argues that ‘pre-understanding is not something a person can step outside of or put aside, as it is understood as already being with us in the world.’ Similarly, van Manen (1990, p. 47) questions Husserl’s idea of suspending preunderstanding and presuppositions by asking ‘but how does one put out of play everything one knows about an experience that one has selected for study?’. van Manen finds this to be impossible to do and argues that even ‘if we try to forget or ignore what we already ‘know,’ we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our
reflections’ (ibid). Therefore, instead of bracketing (epoché), hermeneutic phenomenology endorses the notion of researchers engaging in a process of self-reflection (reflexivity) and becoming open to explicitly claim the ways in which their positionality impacts the research process and how their experiences relate to the phenomena under investigation (Langdridge, 2007; Laverty, 2003). van Manen (1990, p. 47) suggests that ‘it is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories’. Consequently, throughout the study, a research (reflective) diary was kept to record my reflections. This was important as I am a father and man researching fellow fathers and men. In addition, by drawing on the notion of Dasein, I was influenced to ensure that participants’ narratives were interpreted in relation to their sociocultural context (Neubauer et al., 2019). Furthermore, when analysing what being a father is for young men, I considered how the experiences of young fatherhood were shaped and influenced by the world in which they live.

Significantly, Heidegger recognised the role of both the researcher and participant in meaning making. Researchers are understood to be part of the research and they are seen as 'being-in-the-world' of the participant. He believed that the researcher and the researched were co-constructors of knowledge or meanings. Thus, he developed the concept of co-constitutionality, which ‘indicates that the meanings that the researcher arrives at in interpretive research are a blend of the meanings articulated by both the participant and researcher within the focus of the study’ (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730). Gadamer termed this blending using the metaphor ‘fusion of horizons’ (ibid). This influenced my decision to choose research methods that allowed for the co-construction of meaning (knowledge).

Important also to hermeneutic phenomenology is the concept of the hermeneutic circle. The focus of the hermeneutic circle is to understand, explicate, and interpretate the relationship between the parts and the whole text to turn them into explications of each other (Holloway, 2005). Heidegger regarded interpretation to be a circular process that involved moving between the part and the whole text as a reflective, ongoing process. Burns and Peacock
(2019, p. 3) explain by citing Heidegger (1953/2010) that this is a ‘circle of understanding where meaning is influenced by and inextricably linked to ‘fore-structures’ or preunderstandings of being’. It is a reciprocal process that involves moving back-and-forth, questioning or re-examination of propositions, which leads a researcher to ascertain the meaning of being or discover the true meaning of the experience (Laverty, 2003; Tuohy et al., 2013). Thus, the notion of hermeneutic circle shaped the process of analysing data in this study.

Having discussed the rationale for choosing hermeneutic over descriptive phenomenology, the subsection that follows, discusses some of the shortcomings of hermeneutic phenomenology.

4.4.2.1 Limitations and weaknesses of hermeneutic phenomenology

Like many other qualitative approaches, the perceived limitation of hermeneutic phenomenology relates to the sample size. Armstrong (2010) posits that policymakers have a tendency of giving low credibility to phenomenological studies due to the usage of small samples and failure to predict outcomes. They tend to favour studies that use large samples as findings from such studies are purported to be a representation of the general population. Nevertheless, the aim of the current study was not to generalise the findings.

Hermeneutic phenomenology has also been criticised for its failure to offer an explanatory framework or develop theory (Armstrong, 2010; Bynum & Varpio, 2018). Armstrong (2010) asserts that critics claim that, instead of offering explanations to the meaning of things, the data collected and analysed is just used to develop ideas. However, as earlier discussed, this study did not intend to develop a theory but to understand lived experiences.

Finally, phenomenological research has been criticised for generating extensive data, which tends to remain unutilised (Armstrong, 2010). There is a greater feeling that the extensive work that investigators put in, may be deemed somewhat wasted (Ziakas & Boukas, 2014).
Furthermore, Hickman (2015) opines that the abundant amount of data that has to be analysed in phenomenological studies could be a disadvantage in itself. It is time-consuming and expensive (Armstrong, 2010).

Despite these possible shortcomings, I nevertheless chose to use hermeneutic phenomenology because of its ability to uncover deeper understanding of participants’ interpretation of their lived experiences, which are culturally situated.

4.5 Rationale for choosing the methods for the study

Hermeneutic phenomenology aims at accessing the depth rather than the breadth of participants’ experiences (McGovern, 2017). It underscores gathering in-depth information about each participant’s lived experience of the phenomena (Mercer, 2012). Therefore, to explore the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers, research methods such as in-depth interviews that invited participants to offer a rich, detailed, and first-person account of their lived experiences were chosen (Larkin, Shaw, & Flowers, 2019; Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010). However, because of the weaknesses associated with conventional interviews with young people, such as power imbalance, which is intrinsic in the researcher-researched dyad, it was decided to combine it with alternative methods. It was felt that the strength of one method would offset the weakness of another method.

Leonard (1994) asserts that hermeneutic phenomenology embraces a multiplicity of methods. Therefore, photo-elicitation methods were integrated in in-depth interviews as props and combined with focus groups to allow the researcher to enhance quality, interpretation, and maintain a commitment to depth (Bennett, 2014; Larkin et al., 2019). The following subsections discuss the methods in detail.

4.5.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were chosen for this hermeneutic phenomenological study for several reasons. Phenomenological investigations support the use of in-depth interviews (Converse,
2012; Lopez & Willis, 2004). In-depth interviews can be understood as interactions based on dialogue, which is a form of conversation in which a researcher facilitates a participant in an extended discussion (Curtis & Curtis, 2011b; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Wheeler, 2021). This dialogical nature of in-depth interviews makes them the most suitable and important research methods in hermeneutic phenomenological research because it allows for the co-creation of the meaning of participants’ experiences between the researcher and the participants (Reiter, Stewart, & Bruce, 2011). In hermeneutic phenomenology, ‘the goal of the investigator is to co-create the findings with the participant through an engaged conversational process’ (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011, p. 370). Furthermore, the dialogical nature of in-depth interviews encourages the expression and clarification of the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1990). In-depth interviews also have the ability to generate deeply contextual accounts of participants’ experiences and their interpretation of them (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Seidman, 2006).

Wheeler (2021) claims that in-depth interviews are one of the most useful methods for those that seek to explore a sensitive issue. They are suitable for use with participants that have direct experience or expertise of the topic of interest or under review (Morris, 2015). Given that young fatherhood is a sensitive subject, it was felt that in-depth interviews would be appropriate for gathering data regarding young fathers’ lived experiences.

Despite the strengths that come with in-depth interviews, they have several potential disadvantages (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017). In-depth interviews have the potential to increase the power imbalance in the research process, specifically, when working with young people, given that the researcher-researched dyadic relationship is not power-free (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Van Auken, Frisvoll, & Stewart, 2010).

Furthermore, research literature such as Sopcar, Mayan, and Skrypenk (2015) suggests that men tend to circumvent engaging in research concerning personal experiences of their private lives or sphere, such as fathering. Thus, Oliffe and Mroz (2005, p. 275) have
described interviewing men as ‘a daunting task’ particularly, when it comes to ‘private matters’. For young men, the situation may be difficult as they may experience stigma for becoming fathers at a younger age. This may make sharing their experiences difficult and undesirable, consequently, affecting the quality of data collected in research (Sopcak et al., 2015). Thus, as a mitigation measure, Robb (2021) recommends the use of an open-ended, narrative approach rather than interview schedules packed with pre-determined questions.

Moreover, it is not always that in-depth interviews will create an environment that promotes self-disclosure (Macnaghten & Myers, 2006; Sopcak et al., 2015). Sometimes, interviews can put a great deal of pressure on participants (Macnaghten & Myers, 2006), which may cause discomfort (Sopcak et al., 2015). This, coupled with the effects of power imbalance inherent in the interview process (Belzile & Öberg, 2012), can affect the quality of data collected.

Thus, the weaknesses and challenges associated with interviews, raised the awareness of the need to be mindful of the distress interviews can cause and the impact of power imbalance between the researcher and the researched. They also influenced my decision to consider innovative and complementary methods such as photo-elicitation and focus groups, which promote and enhance dialogue in co-construction of knowledge and help in reducing the power imbalance (Bates, McCann, Kaye, & Taylor, 2017).

4.5.2 Integrating photo-elicitation methods in interviews as a stimulus

Photo-elicitation can be a useful method as it enables a collaborative meaning-making process between the researcher and participants (Bates et al., 2017). The collaboration that photo-elicitation method brings into the interpretive process is consistent with the theory of interpretation known as the hermeneutic circle employed by hermeneutic phenomenology (Duara, Hugh-Jones, & Madill, 2022). According to Copes, Tchoula, Brookman, and Ragland (2018, p. 476), ‘photo-elicitation is a qualitative interview technique where
researchers solicit responses, reactions, and insights from participants by using photographs or other images as stimuli’. Photo-elicitation can be used alone or in combination with other research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups (Duara et al., 2022). There are two main approaches to photo-elicitation methods: researcher-generated photo-elicitation and participant-generated photo-elicitation (Raby, Lehmann, Helleiner, & Easterbrook, 2018; Richard & Lahman, 2015). For this study, it was decided to adopt participant-generated photo-elicitation and use it in tandem with in-depth interviews as a stimulus. Participant-generated photo-elicitation is a process that involves a researcher asking research participants to take photographs that represent aspects of their lives in relation to the subject under investigation and then, using these photographs as points of discussion in subsequent interviews or focus group discussions (Raby et al., 2018; Richard & Lahman, 2015). This approach has been described as useful, as participants might bring content that is unique and regarded as important by them (Raby et al., 2018).

Participant-driven photo-elicitation was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, photo-elicitation has the ability to facilitate the elicitation of richer accounts from participants (Bennett, 2014; Shaw, 2013), thereby enhancing the quality of data being collected (Sopcak et al., 2015) and adding depth to the interview data (Teachman & Gibson, 2018). Photographs carry special meaning that is only revealed to us by participants through dialogue. As the researcher and participant engage in a dialogue discussing the selected photographs during the interview, it has the potential to evoke memories and facilitate verbal expressions and insight into the experiences of participants (Mott, Tummons, Simonsen, & Vandermau, 2020; Sibeoni et al., 2017). Glaw, Inder, Kable, and Hazelton (2017, p. 4) posit that ‘photographs have been found to give extra depth to the interview content by adding richness and depth and revealing more than would have been revealed if only an interview had been conducted’. Secondly, it helps to address issues of power that are inherent in the researcher-participant relationships during in-depth interviewing (Armstrong-James, Cadogan, Williamson, Rumsey, &
When using participant driven photo-elicitation, participants assume an active role and take greater control over the interview agenda or process, which, in turn, can minimise the power imbalance between the researcher and participant (Mott et al., 2020; Sibeoni et al., 2017; Van Auken et al., 2010). Taking a lead in taking photographs and selecting which photographs to talk about, empowers participants to determine the important aspects of their experiences to share (Burton, Hughes, & Dempsey, 2017).

Furthermore, the introduction of photographs into the interview process is argued to have the potential to increase comfort of research participants (Sopcak et al., 2015). Banks (2018) asserts that an additional benefit of photo-elicitation is that it can minimise the awkwardness associated with participants’ feeling like they are being put on the spot and grilled by the researcher. Banks explains that when photographs are introduced during an interview, the attention shifts to the photographs as a kind of neutral third party. Therefore, it was felt that photo elicitation method would provide an opportunity to enhance the interview process and facilitate the collection of richer data.

Despite the strengths that are associated with photo-elicitation, its ability to eliminate power imbalances remains questionable. Lapenta (2011) claims that photo elicitation does not eliminate all power relationships completely or sequential rules of discourse from research interviews because researchers may still manipulate the order or arrangement of selected pictures by participants during the discussions. This influenced my decision to consider participant driven photo-elicitation over researcher generated photo-elicitation.

Photo-elicitation has previously been used in phenomenological studies with young people in health and social research (e.g. Bennett, 2014; Liebenberg, Ungar, & Theron, 2014; Raby et al., 2018; Sopcak et al., 2015). Therefore, it can be said that the use of photo-elicitation in phenomenological research is not new. This makes the application of photo-elicitation methods to this study with young fathers relevant and suitable as in other studies. For
instance, Sopcak et al.’s (2015) study with young fathers aged between 15 and 25, found the use of participant driven photo-elicitation to be effective in making participants comfortable and promoting an active engagement of participants during interviews, thereby facilitating the gathering of rich and quality data than they achieved using conventional interviews alone. Therefore, Sopcak et al. (2015) recommend the use of alternative data collection strategies to engage young fathers in research. Based on these experiences and recommendation, it was felt that integrating photo-elicitation as a stimulus during the interview process, would enhance the process of collecting rich data in this study (Glaw et al., 2017).

4.5.3 Focus groups

Focus groups rely on group interaction to generate data (Morgan, 2019). It is argued that the interactive nature of the group leads to the gathering of deeper and richer data (Rabiee, 2004). Liamputtong (2011, p. 3) asserts that ‘focus groups permit researchers to uncover aspects of understanding that often remain hidden in the more conventional in-depth interviewing method.’ According to Creswell (2007), they are one of the data collection methods that align with the phenomenological research design. However, it is acknowledged that there is debate in the literature bordering on the compatibility or congruence of focus groups with phenomenology (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, & Irvine, 2009; Palmer et al., 2010; Ranse & Arbon, 2008; Webb & Kevern, 2001). Webb and Kevern (2001, p. 800) assert that ‘a phenomenological approach requires that an individual describes their experiences in a relatively ‘uncontaminated’ way and, therefore, a group method of data collection involving the interaction between several participants is not compatible with phenomenological research.’ Those who say that focus groups do not align with the phenomenological methodology argue that group influence leads to loss of the individuality or that it masks the idiosyncrasy of individual position underscored in interpretive phenomenology (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010). In contrast, Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009, p.
argue that focus groups are congruent with phenomenological research in that they ‘support the notion of collaboration and dialogue as being part of the phenomenological endeavour’. Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009, p. 666), further argue that ‘Heideggerian phenomenology is not concerned with attempting to collect ‘uncontaminated’ participant accounts... [but is] concerned with interpretation.’

Despite the lack of consensus on the use of focus groups in phenomenological research, focus groups were chosen for this study given that individual lived experiences can still be preserved within a group setting (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009). In particular, focus groups containing homogenous participants with shared experiences have the ability to generate rich experiential content ‘because the group context can encourage personal disclosure’ (Mercer, 2012, p. 16). Participants in a group may feel empowered, more comfortable, and less inhibited in the co-presence of peers (Bloor, 2001). During a group discussion, censoring or reluctance to share certain information may diminish as participants become familiar with their colleagues and the researcher (Acocella, 2012; Peek & Fothergill, 2009). Therefore, group interaction can assist in eliciting richer or more sensitive data as the researcher can help participants such as young fathers bring to the fore, significant details about things they may be reluctant to talk about (Morrison-Beedy, Côté-Arsenault, & Feinstein, 2001).

Focus groups were primarily chosen for the purpose of gaining contextual understanding of cultural issues related to the experiences of young fathers. It was felt that focus groups would allow for the elaboration and clarification of cultural issues. Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008, p. 293) assert that focus groups are suitable in studies that seek to ‘clarify, extend, qualify, or challenge data collected through other methods.’ Gaining contextual understanding and clarity was deemed significant for the purposes of interpretation given that in hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher is expected to interpret the experiences of the participants within a given sociocultural context (Dibley, Dickerson, Duffy, & Vandermause, 2020).
Focus groups have previously been used in phenomenological studies as a means of enhancing credibility, clarifying dialogue among the participants, confirmation and completeness, and enhanced interpretation of the phenomenon or for triangulation purposes (e.g. Dormire, Gary, Norman, & Harvey, 2021; Groenewald, 2004; Nikitara, Constantinou, Andreou, Latzourakis, & Diomidous, 2021; Yuksel-Arslan, Yildirim, & Robin, 2016). Therefore, it can be argued that the use of focus groups in phenomenological studies is not a new phenomenon. Furthermore, studies with young people such as Glaister (2017), have found focus groups to be an effective way of eliciting a range of young people’s perspectives with experiential content emerging. Glaister found that in focus groups, young people engaged enthusiastically with discussions of the issues arising from their culture, and a range of strong views and emotions were expressed, and personal accounts were shared. This suggests that within focus groups, there is still an ‘appreciation for subjectivity’ (Peek & Fothergill, 2009, p. 54). Therefore, it is still possible to gather rich experiential data from focus groups.

Significantly, focus groups have the potential to reduce the power imbalance in researcher-participant dyadic relationship (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2014; Liamputtong, 2011). In focus groups, the researcher assumes the role of the facilitator who poses questions to a group of participants and leaves the debates to them (Curtis & Curtis, 2011a). This allows participants to take greater control over the topic of conversation and lessen the researcher’s control which, in turn, help to redress some of the traditional power imbalances inherent in the interview process (Large, 2015).

However, focus groups can also have disadvantages. Firstly, having a large number of participants in a focus group can be problematic as some participants may be reluctant to contribute (Large, 2015). In addition, it may be hard to manage dynamics of focus group interactions as participants can talk over each other, making it difficult during transcription to know who made a particular contribution to the discussion (Mansell, Bennett, Northway,
Mead, & Moseley, 2004). An additional issue with focus groups has been their suitability of investigating sensitive topics. For instance, Robb (2004) asserts that when discussing a sensitive issue, which is related to masculine identity and the researcher is also male, some participants may be reluctant to pursue certain lines of questioning. Robb (2004, pp. 402-403) makes the point that the ‘need for men to prove their masculinity in social interactions is greater when both parties to the encounter are male’. He claims that participants may not openly talk about emotional issues for fear of risking their masculine self. However, as earlier discussed, reluctance to share during focus groups is argued to diminish as participants interact with peers, which allows for self-disclosure as was the case in Glaister’s (2017) study with young people.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the philosophical and theoretical underpinning of this study. It has justified why hermeneutic phenomenology was considered more suitable to explore the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers than other approaches. Furthermore, it has discussed how the theoretical underpinning of hermeneutic phenomenology influenced the choice of research methods and process of data analysis. It has also provided the rationale for the choice of methods for this study.
Chapter 5: Data collection and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

As indicated above, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach offered a suitable lens to explore and understand the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers for this study. Although van Manen (1990) suggests that there is no fixed set of methods to conduct hermeneutic phenomenological research, choosing this approach as an exploratory framework entails aligning the research methods with the research methodology. The previous chapter presented the philosophical underpinning of the study and the hermeneutic phenomenology methodology. Furthermore, it discussed the rationale for the choice of methods adopted. This chapter discusses the application of hermeneutic phenomenology as a means of exploring and understanding the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers. It provides detailed descriptions of the research site, participants’ biographies, and strategies employed to select a suitable sample for the study. Furthermore, the chapter describes the practicalities considered prior to data collection such as how access to the site and participants was negotiated. Following this, is the discussion of the procedures followed to collect empirical data. Specifically, the chapter explains how in-depth interviews were combined with focus groups and how photo-elicitation methods were integrated into interviews for this study. The chapter also addresses ethical issues that arose and how they were managed, and how data was protected and stored. Thereafter, it explains the procedures followed to analyse interview and focus group data. The chapter ends with a discussion of how rigour was ensured, how reflexivity was observed, and how the researcher positioned himself in this study. Considering that the study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, the research methods and procedures were adapted.

5.2 Study site

This study was conducted in Sinda, a rural district located in the Eastern region of Zambia. The region has an estimated population of 2,454,788 people (49.3% males and 50.7%
females), which represent approximately 12.5% of the national population (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022). Approximately, 9% (213,762) of the regional population resides in Sinda District (ibid).

Similar to the region, the main economic activity in Sinda District is agriculture and subsistence farming forms an important part of household livelihoods (Zambia Statistics Agency et al., 2019). According to the 2015 Living Condition Monitoring Survey (LCMS), approximately 70% of the population in the region live in poverty, with 55.9% of these living in extreme poverty (CSO, 2016).

Sinda District was chosen as an area of study firstly, for pragmatic reasons. I am familiar with the social cultural context of the region, having done my primary and secondary education there. Additionally, because I am fluent in most of the native languages used in the region, this was the best site to avoid the challenges of using an interpreter and negotiating access. Moreover, I had already established contact with a local gatekeeper there, which was key to accessing the hard-to-reach population. Secondly, the Eastern region is among the three highest ranked regions in the country in terms of the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and childbirth. According to the Zambia Statistics Agency et al. (2019), the percentage of women aged 15-19 who have begun childbearing in the Eastern region is estimated to be around 40%, with the highest percentage (41.2%) being reported in the Western region.

5.3 Study population: sampling, and inclusion criteria

5.3.1 Inclusion criteria

Hermeneutic phenomenology is interested in participants who have the relevant lived experiences and are willing to share their experiences, and they are diverse enough to enhance the possibilities of rich and unique stories of a particular experience (Laverty, 2003). Therefore, participants who had common shared experiences of the phenomena that is, they
were living or had lived the experience of young fatherhood, were targeted, and selected (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Steen & Roberts, 2011). This was important in that, it allowed me to capture and interpret the commonality of their experiences (Alase, 2017).

Research with young people involves negotiating numerous ethical issues. Therefore, participants aged 16 years and above were purposively targeted for this study because 16 is the minimum legal age of giving consent in Zambia. This eliminated the consent challenge associated with doing research with young people below the age of 16 years (Zulu, Sandøy, et al., 2019). On the other hand, 35 was chosen as the age upper limit for participants due to possible recall bias and relevance to the study (becoming father before the age or 21 year and having lived the experience of young fatherhood). Parenting experiences and perspectives may also vary according to the age of the child (Oluseye, 2021). It was felt that slightly older fathers (25-35) would add an important and different dimension to the study given that they have been fathers for longer period. This enables them to reflect back more on their experiences. Whereas it is acknowledged that it may be harder to recall experiences/events longer after they happened, my experience with slightly older fathers in this study was different. They were able to provide more reflective accounts of fatherhood compared to those who were younger and had recently become fathers. Perhaps, the fact that older fathers had been fathers for long time and have had more time and experience, it enabled them to provide some significant and reflective hindsight. In the present study, while a few younger participants who recently became parents were able to provide clear accounts of their experiences of barriers to involvement with their children, they seemed to struggle compared to older fathers to articulate their roles as fathers. Moreover, the older fathers included in this study fall within the age range (15-35) which is defined as young people or youths in the Zambian context according to the National Youth Policy (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2015). Therefore, the inclusion criteria for the study were:
Men who were aged between 16 and 20 when the child was born and were aware of the child’s birth.

Those that were unmarried and non-residential with the child’s mother at the time when they became fathers.

Those who were biological fathers to the children.

At the time of interview, they were aged 35 and below.

One exception was made for the older fathers who were recruited for one focus group. These were over 35 years. The incorporation of older fathers who were senior members of the community and community leaders was meant to obtain contextual data to complement and enhance data sourced from young fathers. It was felt that given their cultural experiences, older fathers were well situated to clarify, comment, and elaborate on cultural issues arising from young fathers in interviews.

5.3.2 Sampling strategies

This study sought to recruit participants with specific attributes as discussed above and not to have a representative sample as phenomenological research does not seek to generalise findings (Mapp, 2008). Therefore, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling refers to a selection of participants that have rich information concerning the subject under investigation with a view to answering the research question (Schreier, 2018).

In this research study, I was also cognisant of the fact that access to young men as fathers can be a challenge as they are often regarded as a ‘hard to reach’ group (Bhana & Salvi, 2022). Specifically, it can be problematic when research concerns a sensitive subject (Bagheri & Saadati, 2015; Robb, 2021). This is not to suggest that all the young fathers are inaccessible, or they do not have the desire to be engaged. Sometimes, they may be difficult to access because of the stigma they experience for becoming parents at a younger age (Mniszak, O’Brien, Greyson, Chabot, & Shoveller, 2020; Mvune & Bhana, 2023; Weber,
As a way of managing stigma, as was the case in the present study, some men may sometimes conceal their identity as young fathers.

While young fathers are often portrayed as a ‘hard to reach’ population or group and the term is commonly used, it has been contested (Davies, 2016; Flanagan & Hancock, 2010; Osborn, 2006, 2015). Recent studies (e.g. Davies, 2016; Mniszak et al., 2020; Osborn, 2015) have argued that young fathers are not ‘hard to reach’ but instead, many services and support are actually ‘hard to access’ for them. For instance, Davies’s (2016) study which explored service provision for young fathers in the UK found that lack of knowledge about available services made it hard for young fathers to effectively search for them. This was compounded with failure by providers and practitioner to use effective strategies of engaging young fathers. Therefore, Davies (2016, p. 317) argues that rather than perceiving young fathers as ‘hard to reach’, we should ‘consider that many services are actually hard to access’.

What is evident in existing research literature is that the continued depiction of young fathers as a ‘hard to reach’ group has the potential to perpetuate the exclusion and isolation of young fathers from services (Osborn, 2015) including research and reinforce the disinterested, irresponsible and ‘absentee’ stereotypes (Duncan, 2007; Mniszak et al., 2020). Young fathers may also risk being continuously viewed as a risk to their children (Davies, 2016; Mniszak et al., 2020), difficult to work with as men (Davies, 2016), and also being blamed instead of service providers or practitioners for their failures (Davies, 2016; Osborn, 2006). As result, Osborn (2015) urges service providers and practitioners to stop labelling young fathers as ‘hard to reach’ and take the necessary steps to reach them.

Because of the reported challenge associated with accessing young fathers, purposive sampling was combined with snowball sampling technique (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak, & Crann, 2015; Simons, 2009). Young fathers who were interviewed in the early phase of the research fieldwork, were asked to refer acquaintances from their network who met the
inclusion criteria (Guthrie, 2010; Mehl & Conner, 2012). Snowball sampling proved to be very helpful as it facilitated the recruitment of seven participants.

Despite snowball sampling offering real benefits of accessing difficult to reach population of young fathers, as a method of recruitment, it has the limitation of selection biases (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Snowball sampling is often dependent on the subjective choices of respondents, such that the samples tend to be biased towards the inclusion of individuals with more inter-relationships (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Bagheri & Saadati, 2015). This entails that those outside the social network have potential to be missed out. Therefore, to minimise these biases, referrals were limited to one per participant.

5.3.3 Research participants

The study intended to recruit a sample of 25 young fathers and 5 older fathers. Despite the difficulties in accessing some participants due to the Covid-19 restrictions and the disruption of interview appointments because of election events in the month of August in Zambia, a total of 24 young fathers were recruited and interviewed. The initial plan was to complete data collection by June. However, the delays to start fieldwork due to covid lockdowns meant that part of the fieldwork had to be done in August, making it difficult to avoid the election month. Therefore, the final sample of this study comprised 24 young fathers and five older fathers.

A primary sample of 24 young men is sufficient to undertake in-depth investigations of young fathers’ experiences and gather enough data required for a hermeneutic phenomenological study. The use of a small sample is justifiable, as this is a phenomenological study, which does not require large samples (Mapp, 2008). Various research scholars (Creswell, 2007; Klenke, 2008; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012) have all recommended the use of small samples in phenomenological studies. For example, Smith and Shinebourne (2012) suggest that the use of eight participants
is large enough to satisfy the demands of a PhD project, while Klenke (2008) and Creswell (2007) recommend a sample size of 25 or less.

Similarly, a sample of five participants per focus group was sufficient to gather the needed views and opinions regarding cultural issues related to young fathers’ experiences in focus groups. It falls within the recommended size of the sample for focus groups considering that fatherhood is a sensitive subject. Krueger and Casey (2010) recommend the use of five to eight participants for sensitive topics. The five older fathers were recruited specifically for one of the two focus groups, while the five young fathers for the second focus group, were selected from the cohort of 24 young fathers recruited for the interviews.

5.3.3.1 Characteristics of young fathers

The 24 young fathers were aged 18-33 years at the time of the study. The majority (n=13) were 21 years old and below and only one was above 30 years. Regarding education, 62.5% (n=15) of the young fathers reported not having completed schooling while two stated that they were still in high school. The majority (n=9) of those who dropped out of school, said they did so at the secondary level of education while six, said they stopped school at the primary level of education. Only 29.2% (n=7) of the young fathers stated that they completed secondary education, though none had tertiary qualifications. At the time of the study, the majority (n=13) were unmarried, one was divorced, and only ten were married. Economically, half of the young fathers said they relied on seasonal, labour intensive, rainfed agricultural activities as a source of income. They described themselves as subsistence farmers because of the nature and scale of farming they engaged in. Additionally, six of the young fathers expressed that they were engaged in low paid casual work while two said they relied on bricklaying for their income. Only two young fathers explicitly spoke of being unemployed as the other two said they were doing some small businesses as a source of income. Table 5.1 below, is a summary breakdown of the biographical information of the young fathers (the names are pseudonyms).
Table 5.1: Young fathers’ biographical information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Living arrangement</th>
<th>Age at birth of first child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Chewa</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with both parents and siblings</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with both parents and siblings</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Banda</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Lives with mother and stepfather</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Ngoni</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with grandma, wife and son</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with wife, sister, and daughter</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kota</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>Lives with elder brother</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Emmanuel</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Chewa</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
<td>Lives with wife and child</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Xigo</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with wife and child</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Masauso</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Ngoni</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>Lives with both parents and siblings</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
<td>Lives with wife and son</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Chewa</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with the mother and siblings</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Lives with both parents and siblings</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Phade</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Chewa</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with the mother and siblings</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Payani</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with wife and child</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Casual worker</td>
<td>Lives with both parents and siblings</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Enaerst</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farming</td>
<td>Lives with wife and two children</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Casual worker</td>
<td>Lives with the mother and siblings</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Mwape</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bemba</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with wife and child</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Casual worker</td>
<td>Lives with parents, wife, and child</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Chewa</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with wife and child</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Zaire</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with parents and siblings</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Jattumoya</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Casual worker</td>
<td>Lives with parents and siblings</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Paulo</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Chewa</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Casual worker</td>
<td>Lives with wife, child and dependent</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Casual worker</td>
<td>Lives with both parents and siblings</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.3.2 Older fathers

The five older fathers that participated in this study were aged between 43 and 60 years. These were community leaders and senior community members who were culturally competent to clarify and comment on cultural issues that were raised by young fathers and other related subjects to the study. Except for one who was divorced, all the older fathers reported that they were married at the time of the study. In terms of education and economic activities, the older fathers shared similar characteristic with the young fathers. Only one reported that they had completed secondary education. Two dropped out school at the secondary level education while two did so at primary level of education. Like the young fathers, none of them had tertiary qualifications and agriculture was their major economic activity and source of income. Table 5.2 below, provides a summary breakdown of the biographical information of the older fathers.

Table 5.2: Older fathers’ biographical information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Living arrangement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nsato</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Chewa</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with wife and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syd</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with both parents and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nzuulu</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with wife and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKB</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with wife, children, and grandchild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FK-Busy</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Lives with wife and children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4 Ethical approval

This study received ethical approval in a two-fold way. The initial favourable opinion was received from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the Open University (OU) in the UK (Ref No. HREC/3807/Mvula). This was followed by approval from the local ethics committee in Zambia: The Excellency in Research Ethics and Science (ERES) Converge
International Review Board (IRB) (Private REB) (Ref No. 2020-Dec-004). Following ethical approvals, the study was registered with the National Health Research Authority (NHRA) (Ref No: NHRA00009/23/12/2020) in Zambia in accordance with the national guidelines.

5.5 Recruitment process

The process of recruiting participants in this study involved negotiating access at different levels as discussed in the subsequent subsections.

5.5.1 Gatekeepers and negotiating access to the research site and participants

Coming to the community where the study was conducted as an outsider, not known by the community members, meant that identifying suitable participants was going to be challenging. The route to gain access to young fathers in this study was complex and multi-layered (Reeves, 2007). It involved simultaneously negotiating and building relationships on many fronts with gatekeepers such as a local nursing officer, leaders of social clubs, and community health workers who were also community leaders. In addition, I had to negotiate access through the Chieftainess who controls the chiefdom where this study was conducted.

Despite Zambia being predominantly patriarchal, within some ethnic groups, women also ascend to positions of authority. Other than administrative demarcations discussed in Chapter 2, Zambia is also divided into chiefdoms, which are headed by hereditary Chiefs and Chieftainesses. These are senior most leaders and custodians (gatekeepers) of the people who live in their chiefdoms. They regulate and control access to their territory, land, and their people (Baldwin, 2014, 2016). In their operations, Chiefs and Chieftainesses are supported by a group of traditional community leaders called headmen/women. Despite the headmen and headwomen having authority over their subjects as gatekeepers, the ultimate power and authority lies with the Chiefs or Chieftainesses who make final decisions. Access to the Chiefs and Chieftainesses is often through appointments, which are facilitated by a headman/woman, or a traditional police officer called ‘Kapaso’ who controls access to the
palace. Therefore, I conformed to the local cultural norms and values by seeking permission from the Chieftainess to conduct this research study.

The process of negotiating access to the research site and participants started six months prior to the fieldwork. At the preparatory stage, I established contact with a nursing officer who worked at Nyanje Mission Hospital, which is the biggest referral hospital situated in Sinda District. The hospital is located within Chieftainess Nyanje’s chiefdom. The nursing officer helped to assemble a team of two community health workers, who were also local community leaders in the research site, to help with recruitment. As a result, in the early stages of fieldwork, I drew on the experience, knowledge, and skills of these local gatekeepers in navigating the research site and negotiating some of the cultural practices I was not familiar with (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012; McAreavey & Das, 2013). These three gatekeepers facilitated the process of gaining a speedy formal access to the research site (McAreavey & Das, 2013). This included meeting the Chieftainess as per tradition to ask for permission to gain access to her subjects as my research participants. The Chieftainess was very welcoming, and she had no objection to the proposal to undertake the study in her chiefdom.

The benefits of using gatekeepers in recruiting participants were many in this study. Working with gatekeepers enhanced community acceptance of the research project (Sixsmith, Boneham, & Goldring, 2003). Furthermore, it facilitated easy and quick access to participants as well as saved time, as the gatekeepers I worked with were individuals who were socially connected, well-respected, and trusted by the community members (Joseph, Keller, & Ainsworth, 2016). They also played a key role in building trust, confidence, and establishing field working relations with the senior local leadership in the area and the participants. Overall, access to the research site and young fathers was less problematic due to working closely with gatekeepers.
5.5.2 Gaining access to young fathers

In this study, I hoped to access young fathers through gatekeepers in schools, communities, and social clubs. This worked very well as access was granted in most sites. Prior to the contact with young fathers, I had two meetings with the nursing officer and the two community health workers identified to help with the recruitment of research participants. During the meeting, the details of the study were discussed, and I requested the community health workers to help with the identification of participants. The community health worker expressed interest in the study as part of their work at the Mission Hospital involved working with young people and running youth-friendly corners. Youth-friendly corners are safe zones or places where all young people can meet and find safe, respectful health care, such as sexual and reproductive health care (Ipas, 2015). However, for them to proceed working with me as gatekeepers, there was need for me to negotiate with the Ministry of Health at the district level for permission, which was granted.

Furthermore, considering that this study was conducted in unusual circumstances when the world was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, I also had to negotiate access to participants for the focus groups and use of public space through a government institution that is, Sinda District Council, which granted permission (see Appendix G).

Having gained both written and verbal permission for the study, I held another meeting with the community health workers where further details on the procedures of the research project were given. Specifically, they were informed of the numbers of participants required and the inclusion criteria was emphasised.

While the use of community gatekeepers can be helpful in accessing participants, it has its own disadvantages as well as practical and ethical issues. Ethical implications are discussed in section 5.7. Nevertheless, one disadvantage of using community gatekeepers is that the success of the research project might be contingent upon their goodwill, as they determine whom you can speak to (Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). The literature reviewed such
as Sixsmith *et al.* (2003), suggests that sometimes, gatekeepers might act to block access to some participants. However, this did not appear to happen for this study. Other than determining access to participants, their recruitment might be characterised by biases as they may only engage with those whom they know or have a good relationship with and fits their own definition of good research participants. Sixsmith *et al.* (2003, p. 583) assert that gatekeepers ‘could attempt to influence the research process with their own version of “reality” by indicating only participants “approved of” by themselves’. This has the potential to disenfranchise other valuable people from participating in the research study (Turner & Almack, 2017). In the present study, I had little control on how gatekeepers presented the study to potential participants and whom they decided to refer. However, prior to the recruitment deliberate steps to mitigate the situation were taken. I had two meetings with the gatekeepers to ensure that they thoroughly understood the study purpose and eligibility criteria (Archibald & Munce, 2015).

Whereas access to participants and recruitment worked well in the community and social clubs, access to participants via schools was unsuccessful. Despite holding discussions with teachers in two schools concerning the research project, so that they could help recruit participants, it proved to be an exercise in futility. I only managed to recruit participants from the same schools through the community health workers. Later, during interviews, it was learnt that young fatherhood outside marriage was a sensitive issue within the study site because of the stigma attached to it among peers. White (2017) asserts that research participants can be hard-to-recruit if the study concerns a sensitive topic. Fear of being ridiculed coupled with an imagination that participating in the study might lead to self-disclosure of one’s identity of being a young unmarried father to the school, might have discouraged some of young men from participating in this study when teachers tried to identify them. Other studies such as Turner and Almack (2017) have also reported facing similar challenges in recruiting participants on sensitive topics via schools.
Generally, the benefits of using gatekeepers in the recruitment process outweighed its disadvantages given that I was an ‘outsider’ to the study community (Banks, 1998). Kennan, Fives, and Canavan (2012, p. 280) contend that ‘the use of gatekeepers is often necessary for purely pragmatic reasons given the group in question are hard to reach’.

5.6 Data collection procedures

Data for this study was collected over a period of six months from March to August 2021. The data was collected using in-depth interviews, photo-elicitation methods, and focus groups. The subsections that follow, describe the procedures used to collect data.

5.6.1 Developing the interview guide

The interview guide for this study was developed in line with the aims and objectives of the study. Oerther (2021) asserts that in hermeneutic phenomenological research, the interview guide should summarise the aims of what the researcher is trying to reveal. Therefore, questions were designed in such a way as to reveal fatherhood as lived by young fathers through their lifeworld stories (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). The guide contained two levels of questions: main themes and follow-up questions. The order of the main themes was progressive and logical (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). The guide started with easier to answer questions in the introduction section such as: *tell me something about yourself? (age, marital status)* before moving onto more difficult and sensitive topics, such as pregnancy responsibility and fatherhood roles (see interview guide in Appendix E). The main questions in the guide were supported by prompts and probing questions, such as *tell me more, how does that influence you? Has this affected your involvement? In what ways (probe relation at conception, at the time when the child was born and now and, also with maternal family)*. Prompts and probing questions were used to encourage dialogue to elicit rich information and more detailed accounts of young fathers for further understanding of their lived experiences (Kallio et al., 2016).
Key to the development of the interview guide was a review of literature on young fatherhood experiences. The review of literature provided insights on how previous studies phrased questions on similar subjects. A few questions that were in line with the objective of the current study were adapted for relevance to this study. Throughout the guide, efforts were made to ensure that all the questions were open-ended, clear, and avoided leading language (Kallio et al., 2016).

For rigour, the interview guide was subjected to scrutiny by my supervisors who provided feedback. Furthermore, the guide was subjected to what Kallio et al. (2016, p. 2960) call ‘expert assessment’. This involved exposing the initial interview guide to a critique by specialists who were not part of the research team to assess the appropriateness and comprehensiveness of the interview guide contents in relation to the aims and the subjects of the study. Kallio et al. (2016, p. 2961) argue that this allows the researcher ‘to discuss the relevance of the questions and gain valuable guidance about the wording and the arrangement of the questions.’ The initial interview guide was shared with colleagues who are experienced qualitative researchers interested in topics related to young people in Zambia. These individuals were asked for their opinions regarding the clarity of the wording, the suitability of the language with respect to the target population, and local context (Jayanthi & Nelson, 2002). Their feedback led to the restructuring of some sections and rewording or refinement and confirmation of questions for the interview guide.

5.6.2 Piloting the interview guides

Considering that this study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic and involved ‘hard to reach’ population, the testing pilot of the interview guide was conducted with the first four participants during fieldwork. After a reflection with my supervision team, it was decided that no further changes or re-formulation of questions in the guide was needed.
5.6.3 Conducting in-depth interviews with young fathers

All the interviews were conducted by myself, in Nsenga, the native language. Preceding the date of the interview, each research participant was given an information sheet (see Appendix C) that explained the research aim, participants’ rights, expectations of the study, and details of the interview. This included the use of photographs and the need to avoid capturing identifiable individuals for ethical reasons. During the first meeting with each participant where information sheets were shared, only verbal consent was sought from those that expressed willingness to participate in the study. This was done to reduce the ethical burden on participants. After discussing the details of the study and its expectations, those that agreed to take part in the study were given five days to take five photographs with their phone or identify existing photographs that represented their fatherhood experiences.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, interviews were held either at the hospital or school premises. These premises had outdoor spaces and facilities that guaranteed privacy and confidentiality of the participants, while also allowing for safe physical distance. Participants chose one of the available venues they were comfortable with. Most of the participants were familiar with the venues having either attended the school or attended meetings at the hospital during the youth-friendly corner events.

On the day of the interview, participants were given the information sheet again and for those who were unable to read, this was read and explained to them. Participants were also required to sign a consent form and photo selection form (see Appendix D).

Photographs were introduced midway through the interview, after background information of participants such age, marital status and occupation was collected. Before the participants were asked to discuss their photos, a question about being a father was also asked. As participants were being interviewed, notes on recurring themes from the meaning units presented by participants were recorded in a field diary. All the interviews were audiotaped and lasted between 40 and 65 minutes.
During the interview, I reminded participants that they could choose not to answer a question if they did not want to and asked them if they wanted to take a break during the interview. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to be open and to let the me know if they did not understand the questions, so that I could repeat or paraphrase the question. This was imperative for effective communication with participants. Particular attention was also paid to participants’ verbal and nonverbal reactions. Nevertheless, no participants in the study exhibited signs of distress throughout the interview.

There were variations in the way that participants articulated their experiences. Older fathers provided more detailed account of their experiences compared to those that had recently become fathers. This could be attributed to the fact that older fathers had been fathers for long time and had more time and things to reflect on. This was also apparent for a small number of younger fathers. They struggled to articulate things at the beginning of the interview as they gave short answers, and this called for more probing. But as the interview progressed, their responses got longer. Overall, the process of interviewing young fathers was fascinating and a learning experience. Each interview ended with thanking participants and giving them an opportunity to ask questions or share anything important they felt might have not been captured during the interview.

5.6.4 Experience of using photo-elicitation method with young fathers

Whereas the plan was for participants to capture new or identify five existing photographs, many participants only brought three or less photographs to the interviews. Photo-elicitation proved to be an effective way of enhancing the collection of in-depth data with young fathers. The photographs shared allowed me to visualise what they do as fathers. The use of photographs allowed me to explore sensitive topics such as denial of pregnancy, which had not been revealed previously by some participants in the interview. For instance, when Payani was asked about how he reacted to the news that he was going to become a father, he only mentioned being scared, worried, confused and banned from school. It was only
revealed that he initially rejected the pregnancy when discussing the photographs, as demonstrated by the extract below:

**Researcher:** How did you react to the news that you were going to become a father?

**Payani:** I was scared because this was the first time it was happening to me. It really confused me and started wondering what would happen to me given the crime that I had committed. I was worried about what would happen. I was told by my family that what I had done was wrong and the maternal family were going to charge me for the pregnancy. I was worried about what my parents would do. So, that’s how my school journey ended.

**Researcher:** Tell me about the first photograph. What does this tell me about you as a father?

**Payani:** When I look at it (Payani 1), it makes me think about a better future. But mostly, it reminds me of what was going on in the past. For example, at first, I rejected her. I denied responsibility of the pregnancy though later, I accepted. I realised that I was just making a mistake denying the responsibility because this child has now grown. So, I am just waiting to see how things will turn out in future. This taught me to know what is good and bad. I have witnessed different problems and I have learnt one or two things because of what happened concerning the same child. When I look at the photo, it reminds me that this is the child that I tried to deny.

As with many young fathers, the use of photographs evoked memories of Payani’s past experiences. My experience of using photo elicitation techniques resonated with the assertion by Bates et al. (2017), that using visual stimuli within interviewing changes the tone of the dialogue between the researcher and the participants, with the potential to prompt emotional connections to memories and provide more meaningful accounts. Even for the young fathers that gave short responses at the beginning of the interview, the photographs seemed to help them talk about their experiences, and they appeared to grow in confidence.
in the discussion. Photographs stimulated the conversations as we transitioned to new themes that were more sensitive during the interviews (Copes et al., 2018; Meo, 2010). Participants took an active role in the interview process, and this allowed the elicitation of richer accounts of their experiences of young fatherhood (Bennett, 2014).

Other than stimulating conversation, the inclusion of photo-elicitation methods helped in reducing power imbalance in the interviews (Leonard & McKnight, 2015). Giving participants power to use and choose any photo of their choice seemed to empower them. Participants took control of the discussions as they interpreted the images shared during the interview.

The use of photo elicitation method was not without challenges. While all the participants consented to share photographs with myself as a researcher, it raised some concerns for two participants. The concerns were about suspicions surrounding the use of photographs and the two participants sought further clarification and explanation before we could proceed. The concern shared by the first participant was that he overheard some people in the community saying people who get other people’s photographs, sometimes, use them for witchcraft rituals. The apprehension that the second participant had was, previously he heard that people use shared photographs for business, as they sell them to those that produce magazines. I took time to reassure these participants that photographs would only be used for research purposes. I explained that photographs shared electronically would be destroyed as per information sheet, and that they had a right to withdraw from the study. After comprehending the purpose and use of photographs, both participants opted to continue their participation. This experience highlights how rumours can impact the research process in different ways and why researchers need to be culturally sensitive when conducting research.

In this study, not all participants owned smartphones. Some of them had non-smartphones that had cameras with a provision of an SD-card which is a data storage device, while some of participants relied on their friends’ and relatives’ smartphones. Participants were not
provided with disposable cameras due to a lack of film processing services within the region where the study was conducted. Some participants who had non-smartphones, had some photographs they had stored in their phone SD cards. However, some SD cards were corrupt and could not function to allow participants to share photographs. This made it difficult to access some of the photos that participants wanted to share. Similar challenges have also been reported by Raby et al. (2018), where they had challenges accessing pictures on participants’ phones, tablets, and laptops. This experience highlighted the shortcomings of photo-elicitation methods when working with populations in low-income countries. It suggests the need for researchers to carefully think through and plan when embarking on using certain methods in certain settings.

Overall, integrating participant driven photo-elicitation in the interview process proved beneficial for this study, as it enabled me to collect richer data that taps into the perspectives of the participants close to the time of the experience (Smith, Gidlow, & Steel, 2012).

5.6.5 Conducting focus groups

Two focus groups were conducted for this study. One was with young fathers and the other with older fathers. The focus groups were conducted in Nsenga, the native language and lasted between 50 and 65 minutes. All the discussions during focus groups were audiotaped after obtaining permission from the participants. None of the participants refused to be recorded in this study. At the beginning of each focus group, participants signed the consents forms and then, the group rules were set out. This included requesting participants to maintain confidentiality. The following subsections discuss how each focus group proceeded.

5.6.5.1 Focus group with young fathers

During in-depth interviews, young fathers raised cultural issues relating to paying of pregnancy damages, stigma surrounding fatherhood outside marriage, and participating in
caregiving that required further elaboration, understanding, and clarification. Focus groups provided an opportunity to explore these issues in-depth for context.

Once participants for the focus groups had been recruited from those who had taken part in the interview stage of the research, they were contacted to schedule the time and discuss the two available venues. O.Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, and Mukherjee (2018, p. 23) state that after participants have been identified for focus groups, ‘researchers must take into consideration participants’ comfort, access to the venue, and levels of distraction [and] they should be in a normal and familiar setting’. As decided by participants, the focus group with young fathers was held within the premises of the hospital. During the focus group, a guide (see Appendix H) that contained open-ended questions on two major themes: fatherhood roles and cultural expectations, and barriers and facilitators to involvement with children, was used to facilitate the discussions.

Young fathers that took part in the focus groups knew each other either from the community, church, or school. This was revealed at the end of the focus group during our informal conversation. Overall, I felt that the young fathers were comfortable and actively engaged in the discussions. As one spoke, it evoked ideas in others and prompted them to contribute to the discussions. Participants were able to use their personal experiences they encountered in the community to strengthen their arguments and views. During the focus group, I felt that the close relationships participants showed, and the shared commonalities such as young fatherhood status, gender, age, and culture, facilitated self-disclosure for participants as they spoke freely and shared in-depth insights during the discussions. This was evidenced by the way they interacted, commented, and laughed together, as one member of the group shared his views and experiences in the community.

The focus group with young fathers did not have many disruptions except for one who forgot to put his phone on silent even after the group agreed to do so. The focus group ended with me asking participants if they had questions or anything that they wanted to talk about before
thanking them for their time and contributions. When asked how they felt after the focus group, there was positive feedback from the participants, as many expressed gratitude for being part of the study. They indicated that they felt like they did not just contribute towards the study, but also gained some knowledge from the interactions with their fellow participants.

5.6.5.2 Focus group with older fathers

The second focus group was composed of five older fathers. None of them took part in the interviews and they were recruited by the community health workers. Most of these older fathers had experience of sitting in the council of community leaders that resolve community problems and interpret cultural customs and practices in their respective communities. They were, therefore, experienced in engaging with group discussion on topics related to the community. The focus group with older fathers was held at the same venue used with young fathers and followed the same procedure and guide as with young fathers. The venue was chosen by participants following a discussion regarding privacy, Covid safety, and centrality of the place for everyone taking part. Overall, the focus group with older fathers went well, without interruptions and provided valuable information. I felt that the experience and cultural competence of older fathers added something extra to what young fathers provided. The use of real case scenarios by older fathers when responding to questions during the focus group, provided clarity and enhanced understanding of some of cultural issues raised by young fathers.

5.7 Ethical consideration

Despite ethical issues being important for all research, Liamputtong (2007) and Dickson-Swift (2005) encourage those researching sensitive issues to be more cautious about the confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity of their participants. In this study, the conventional ethical standards such as anonymisation, informed consent, and voluntary participation of research participants were followed. For instance, in citing participants’ contributions, and
in participants’ biographies, pseudonyms are used (Dickson-Swift, 2005; Liamputtong, 2007). Participants were asked to choose their own pseudonyms. To facilitate voluntary participation, research participants were given information about the study via the information sheets (see Appendix C and F). The information sheet provided participants with details of their rights to withdraw from the research at any point of time, approximate duration of the interview, Covid-19 protective measures, and the use of data and their photographs. Furthermore, permission to audiotape the proceedings and consent to take part in the study were sought and granted by all the research participants. All the participants in this study were able to write, therefore, written consent was obtained using the consent forms (see Appendix C and F).

5.7.1 Conducting interviews in outdoor space

As this study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, public health guidelines were adhered to. Interviews were conducted in outdoor spaces, as it reduced the chances of transmitting the Covid-19 virus as advised by public health experts. However, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) expressed concern on how I would ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants. Indeed, whereas the use of outdoor space of schools and hospitals premises was beneficial as a Covid-19 prevention measure, to some extent, it compromised the privacy and confidentiality of participants. During data collection, I experienced some interruptions in three of the interviews with young fathers. The first interruption was at the hospital site by a spouse of one of the participants. When she came to the interview site, the interview had to be paused twice so that he could attend to his wife. It was impossible to maintain total privacy in such circumstances as the wife was aware of his whereabouts and saw what we were doing, albeit she did not hear what was discussed. The other two experiences of disruption were due to random inspections of facilities by the public health workers. However, for the most part of the research, privacy
was observed and throughout the research process, confidentiality was maintained, as those that monitored facilities did not hear anything being discussed.

5.7.2 Recruiting participants using gatekeepers

Recruiting participants using gatekeepers raised ethical issues related to privacy, confidentiality, power differences, and voluntary participation. Firstly, HREC expressed concern about how I would ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants. To protect participants, interviews were held in private spaces only known by the researcher and participants. These spaces were not situated inside the villages where the community leaders resided. This prevented community leaders from knowing who was being interviewed at a particular time and who had not taken part after recommendations. Secondly, the use of community gatekeepers presented a significant challenge to ethical research practice, as there was a likelihood of inequalities in age and status between gatekeepers and participants (Goredema-Braid, 2010). HREC was also concerned with how the participants would be made to feel comfortable if they wanted to refuse to participate in the study, especially, if they were aware that the community leaders suggested that they take part in the study. Although it was difficult to control the level of interaction between the community leaders and research participants within their communities, interviews were held privately. Additionally, the signing of consent forms was done in the absence of community leaders (gatekeepers). Moreover, there was no reporting back to the community leaders of who had or had not participated in the study. Importantly, participants were made aware of this before taking part in the study and this allowed them to feel free and make an informed decision either to take part or not. Participants were further informed of their right to refuse or accept to take part. This promoted voluntary participation. However, I acknowledged that it was practically impossible to eliminate power imbalances completely.
5.7.3 Using photographs in research

The use of photographs in social research presents a set of ethical challenges relating to consent, confidentiality, copyrights, and anonymity (Bennett, 2014; Copes et al., 2018). Most of these challenges are associated with using photographs in which research participants and other people are identifiable or possibly identifiable (Copes et al., 2018). Holm (2014) asserts that there is no confidentiality if a photograph includes a person’s face. To ensure that confidentiality was maintained, participants were requested not to take or bring pictures of themselves or other people that showed faces. They were also advised to ensure that before taking photographs that included other people, consent was sought. Despite putting a great deal of emphasis on this when they were debriefed, it proved a challenge as some participants still shared some pictures with identifiable features of people, such as their family members. Holm (2014) acknowledges the challenge of maintaining confidentiality when using photographs in research by asserting that, although clear instructions about the purpose of the research and the photographs are given, participants often still deviate from those instructions.

Another common legal issue in research using photographs relates to people’s rights to the ownership or copyright of photographs (see Tinkler, 2014). Since photographs in this research were produced by participants, it implied that they were the legitimate owners of those photographs. Therefore, I was required by law to ensure that for any use of those photographs, consent was sought from the participants (Copes et al., 2018). Specific advice was sought from the library support team at the OU who offer training on copyright matters to ensure that the use of photographs from the participants did not breach copyright laws (Church & Quilter, 2021). Therefore, consent was sought from participants for the photographs supplied to the researcher using the consent form and photo selection form (see Appendix D). However, the photographs shared by participants were not used for any other reasons than facilitating dialogues during interviews.
5.7.4 Remuneration of participants

Sansom *et al.* (2020), and Swanson and Betensky (2015) posit that providing compensation for participants in research is a well-established practice. However, determining the fair and appropriate amount remains a challenge and debatable. Reimbursement of costs that participants incur due to taking part in a study, relating to transport, subsistence, and accommodation as well as compensation for time and burden, is acceptable provided it does not coerce a participant (Sansom *et al.*, 2020; Swanson & Betensky, 2015). However, when research is conducted with and among vulnerable populations, it can potentially be exploitative and consequently, unethical. Therefore, during the application process of ethical approval, it was explicitly stated that participants would be compensated for their time. Given that the data for the study was collected during the farming season, when participants were expected to be harvesting their farm crops and raising money for their families, they were compensated for their time with gifts in kind of £5 equivalent in Zambian Kwacha. Consultation was made with the local gatekeepers in the study area on the nature of gifts participants should be given. Consequently, culturally sensitive gifts in the form of staple food were provided in accordance with the recommendations.

5.8 Data protection and storage

This study adhered to data protection regulations and guidelines. In accordance with the university requirement, this research project was registered with the OU information rights team for data management (reference No. 3306104).

During data collection, participants’ personal information such as names and contact details were protected by recording them separately from other documents and were stored on a password-protected laptop and secure OU server (OneDrive). Interviews and focus groups recordings and photographs shared electronically were backed up on a password protected laptop and university server. For data anonymity, each interview, focus group, and photograph was assigned a code such as, FY0001JAM for interview participants.
During data collection, all consent forms signed by participants, together with the audio recorders, were stored in a lockable backpack that was used during fieldwork. Upon returning to the UK after completing the fieldwork, all the interviews and focus groups data transcribed were stored electronically on a password protected laptop and university server together with all the scanned copies of the consent and photo selection forms. Any identifying information for participants was later deleted, once the analysis had been completed, in accordance with data protection regulations.

5.9 Data analysis

Data for this study were manually analysed. The process of analysis started during data collection. The analysis of data continued throughout the different stages of the research project post fieldwork. This section of the chapter presents details of how empirical data were processed and analysed. It begins with how interviews and focus groups were transcribed and translated from the Nsenga, the native language, to English the study language. Following this are the details of how interview data were analysed using the phenomenological-hermeneutic method and how focus group data were analysed by combining constant comparison analysis with techniques of the phenomenological-hermeneutic inspired methods.

5.9.1 Initial data analysis

5.9.1.1 Transcribing data

The initial data analysis involved converting audio data into text. This process started within days of interviews whilst conducting fieldwork in Zambia. The transcribing of remaining data was completed after returning to the UK. All the interviews were manually transcribed verbatim. The transcription of data resulted in a total of 26 transcripts, each with seven to twelve pages of generated data. Twenty-four (24) transcripts were based on the in-depth interviews, while the other two were generated from the focus groups.
To ensure quality and data accuracy, the data generated was cleaned by cross-checking the interview and focus group transcripts with the original recording. The audio recordings were repeatedly listened to, and transcripts were read line by line. In the process, typographical errors and missing words were identified and corrected. Thereafter, all the transcripts were subjected to proofreading to correct grammatical errors. This process allowed me to familiarise myself as a researcher with the data and identify initial meaning units as well as developing a naïve understanding.

5.9.1.2 Translation of transcripts

All the interviews and focus groups were conducted in Nsenga, a native language used by participants. Therefore, research data had to be translated into the English language for data analysis, interpretation, and dissemination.

Regmi, Naidoo, and Pilkington (2010) advocate for the translators of research data to be individuals that are acquainted with and comprehend the language, social context, and culture of the setting within which the research takes place. This includes an understanding of the interview context. It is also recommended that a translator must be conversant with the research project, including the purpose of the study (Chen & Boore, 2010; Choi, Kushner, Mill, & Lai, 2012). Furthermore, it is imperative that the individual that is given the task of translating is fluent in both the source (native) language and study language (Chen & Boore, 2010). This helps to reduce the potential threats to the validity of the data (Choi et al., 2012). Based on these recommendations and having conducted the interviews and being fluent in both Nsenga and English, I decided to transcribe and translate the interviews and focus groups myself. This meant I was able to immerse myself in the data and start developing a naïve understanding of the data.

There are no agreed upon standards of translating research data in qualitative research as guidelines relating to translation of research, are seldom discussed (Al-Amer, Ramjan, Glew, Darwish, & Salamonson, 2015; Chen & Boore, 2010). Consequently, researchers must adopt
best practices available in data translation to achieve their objectives. The most common approach used in cross-cultural research is to translate data from the native into the study language without first transcribing them in the participants’ native language (Choi et al., 2012). In this study, research recordings were translated direct from Nsenga to English. This was a time-consuming process.

Translation is associated with different issues. It may alter the original use of the concepts, words, and the structure of the participant’s use of language (Squires, 2009). This may lead to loss of ideas, feelings, and concepts, cultural relevance, and meaning in the participant’s words in the process (Birbili, 2000; Regmi et al., 2010; Squires, 2009). In this study, I had difficulties finding the conceptual equivalence for certain words like ‘kusamilia’ during translation. When literally translated to English, it would mean ‘to care’. However, the concept encompasses multiple things, including providing economic support and physical care for the child. Al-Amer et al. (2015) assert that in phenomenological research, the use of the exact word is important to maintain the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data. Therefore, it was decided to maintain some concepts in their original or indigenous form. In addition, I could not directly translate ‘ng’omwa’. When translated, ng’omwa, would mean a man who has infertility problems and cannot father a child. In the participants’ culture, the word ng’omwa, is a negative label or associated with stigma. Thus, to maintain cultural relevance, it was decided to keep it in its original form within the text. In some cases, it was difficult to translate words verbatim to English, as some sentences would mean something different. Therefore, some words required reordering for the sentence to carry the meaning.

To ensure rigour and quality of transcribed data, people of the local area who are bilingual were consulted about the use and meaning of certain words that appeared problematic or complex. Furthermore, I discussed two transcripts and their audio recordings with an independent person who is conversant with the native language used in the interviews, to
verify the accuracy of the translation. Having looked at how the narrative texts for this study were created, attention now turns to how the text was interpreted.

5.9.2 In-depth analysis of interviews

In hermeneutic phenomenological research, interpretation is central to the process of understanding (Laverty, 2003). To interpret the text generated from the participants’ stories of their lived experiences of young fatherhood, the phenomenological-hermeneutic method inspired by Ricoeur (1976, 1992) and developed by Lindseth and Norberg (2004) was used. The phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis consists of three dialectically interrelated steps: naïve reading, [thematic] structural analysis, and comprehensive understanding.

1. Step one: Naïve reading

According to Lindseth and Norberg (2004), naïve reading involves reading the interview text to familiarise yourself with it to reach an initial understanding or acquire a general sense of the text as a whole. Therefore, to gain or formulate the naive understanding of how participants experienced living as young fathers, I read the interview text or transcripts alongside reflection notes in my research journal several times (Karlsson, Bergbom, & Forsberg, 2012; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). For example, the ‘naive reading’ of the text, generated the following initial impression:

*The interview text revealed that being a young father involved becoming a father in unplanned circumstances and at unexpected age. It meant having a child, taking up the responsibility of supporting the child financially, teaching, and guiding the child. It also meant becoming responsible and an example to the child. I got an impression that many young fathers experienced difficulties meeting the child’s needs. To be a good father, it meant working hard to become independent and be able to support the child financially and materially. Young fathers understood their roles as providing financially and materially, being an example to the child, teaching the child morals,*
taking the child to the clinic, and sometimes, helping the child’s mother. Becoming a father also meant accepting the responsibility for the child and being involved in the care and upbringing of the child. The experience of being a young father was marred by barriers to involvement with the child. It meant that being involved with the child required negotiating cultural practices as well as relationships with child’s mother and her family, including one’s own family.

2. Step two: [thematic] structural analysis

This stage of analysis involves identifying meaning units from the text read, bringing them together, and grouping them into themes and subthemes (Karlsson et al., 2012). To achieve this, anchor codes were first developed. According to Adu (2019), anchor codes are labels which are generated to represent the questions you are trying to address. As no special software was used in this study for analysing data, anchor codes were developed to facilitate data organisation and grouping in Microsoft Word when doing further data analysis. For example, from the question: What would you say is your role as a father in the life of your child? ‘Father’s role’ was generated as an anchor code. During data condensation, each anchor code was followed by a descriptor of the condensed meaning unit (see in Figure 5.1 below) and this made it easier to sort out data and group similar meaning units together.

Figure 5.1: Example of anchor codes and condensed meaning units from interview
After developing the anchor codes, the text (transcripts) was read line by line to identify the meaning units that conveyed the meanings of young fathers’ lived experiences. In keeping with the notion of the hermeneutic circle, meaning units were reflected on against the background of the naïve understanding. This reflection in part (meaning units) and the whole (naïve understanding) allowed understanding to be enlarged and deepened (Geanellos, 2000).

Thereafter, the identified meaning units were condensed by attaching a descriptor, or code (label) to each of the meaning units as shown above in Figure 5.1. Condensed meaning units were then tallied to examine the frequencies of condensed meaning units prior to grouping them into subthemes and main themes (see Figure 5.2 below).

![Figure 5.2: Example of grouping and tallying condensed meaning units](image)

Father’s role: Kusamalila the child (4)
Father’s role: Providing for the child (25)
Father’s role: Supporting the child (9)
Father’s role: Taking care of the child (6)
Father’s role: Taking the child to school (7)
Father’s role: Teaching the child (4)

Thereafter, the condensed meaning units were repeatedly read and reflected on to identify similarities and differences by constant comparison techniques. Similar meaning units were
then brought together and grouping into subthemes and main themes were generated, as exemplified by Tables 5.3 and 5.4 below.

*Table 5.3: Example of structural analysis of being a father*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condensed meaning units</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Main themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Having a child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being capable of reproducing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Able to take care of the child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Able to provide for the child</td>
<td></td>
<td>Identity and status of a father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being grown up/adult</td>
<td></td>
<td>Being a father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being responsible of looking after the child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Able to support the child</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 5.4: Example of a Structural Analysis with Meaning Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning units</th>
<th>Condensed meaning units</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Main theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Researcher:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you say is your role as a father in the life of your child?</td>
<td>Providing financial support for the child</td>
<td>Providing economic support</td>
<td>Construction of fatherhood roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respondents:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Banda:</strong> Providing money to the mother so that they buy clothes, soap, lotion, and food for the child</td>
<td>Providing material support for the child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Isaac:</strong> My biggest role is to provide food and clothes so that the child should be looking good. So, I have to provide food, buy clothes, soap and lotion for my child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kota:</strong> I need to send my child to school, so that when he completes secondary school, I take him to college so that his life can be better, not to suffer the way I have suffered as his father.</td>
<td>Providing the means for the child to be in school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fred:</strong> I also have a responsibility of ensuring that my child starts school so that she can acquire education and not turn out like me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, the themes developed were later reflected on in relation to the naïve understanding and assessed to determine if they validated or invalidated the naïve understanding (Karlsson et al., 2012; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Where the [thematic] structural analysis invalidated the naïve understanding, the whole text was read again, and a new naïve understanding was formulated and checked by a new structural analysis. For example, after conducting the structural analysis of the text, the initial naïve understanding was revised as follows:

Having read the text again, I got the impression that being a young father involved becoming a father in unplanned circumstances and at an unexpected age. It meant having a child, growing up, becoming an adult, demonstrating male potency, and manhood, being respected, and improved social status, taking up the responsibilities of providing support for the child financially and materially, taking caring of the child as well as teaching and guiding the child. It also meant becoming responsible and an example to the child. The text also revealed that many young fathers experienced difficulties meeting the child’s needs financially. To be a good father, it meant being able to support the child financially and materially. Young fathers understood their roles as providing financially and materially, being an example to the child, teaching child morals, taking the child to the clinic, and sometimes ‘helping out’ the child’s mother. Becoming a father also meant accepting responsibility for the child and being involved in the care and upbringing of the child. The experience of being a young father for many, was marred by barriers to involvement with the child. It meant that being involved with the child required negotiating cultural practices as well as relationships with the child’s mother and her family, including one’s own family.

This process was repeated until a sense of satisfaction was reached to ascertain that the naïve understanding was indeed validated or confirmed through the structural analysis. Therefore, interpreting the text meant entering the hermeneutical circle (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).
3. **Step three: comprehensive understanding**

Comprehensive understanding is the final step in the process of the phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis adopted in this study. According to Lindseth and Norberg (2004), comprehensive understanding involves summarising and reflecting on the themes pertaining to the research question and the context of the study. The themes that emerged from the structural analysis were summarised into three main themes: Being a father; construction of fatherhood roles and negotiating cultural expectations; and barriers and enablers: young fathers’ involvement with their children.

In keeping with the fundamentals of hermeneutic phenomenology, throughout the process of data analysis and interpretation, the researcher was constantly in the hermeneutic circle. Thus, a comprehensive understanding was achieved by repeating the reading of the text and reflecting on the generated themes relating to the lived experiences of young fathers.

Considering that hermeneutic phenomenology rejects the notion of bracketing, my pre-understanding based on my knowledge of previous studies on young fatherhood played an important role in the process of interpreting data at this stage. Engaging with the research literature on young fatherhood enhanced the interpretation of the text and the phenomenon (Morgan, 2021). To further enhance the interpretation of young father’s accounts of their lived experiences of fatherhood, I drew on overlapping bodies of theory: masculinity, gender roles, transition, and the ecological systems theory as applied to different chapters of the findings. The next subsection describe how focused group data was analysed.

### 5.9.3 In-depth analysis of focus groups

Focus group data was analysed by combining constant comparison analysis with the techniques of the phenomenological-hermeneutic inspired method. Due to group interactions, focus group data is different from interview data (Smithson, 2000). Therefore, it calls for use of different approaches to data analysis. In addition, Doody, Slevin, and Taggart (2013) assert that constant comparison analysis is suitable if there are several focus
groups within the same study. Considering that focus groups were conducted with two different groups (young and older fathers), it was deemed a suitable method of analysis.

As with analysis of the interview data, analysis of focus group data began during data collection as observations and reflection on focus groups were recorded in a research journal. Two focus groups of five people were audiotaped and later translated and transcribed. After transcription, the data was reviewed and cleaned by both listening to the audio and correcting the missing words and phrases in the transcripts. Thereafter, audio recordings were listened to, and transcripts were read in their entirety several times to familiarise myself with the data and develop a naïve understanding. This included reading notes of observations and reflections written after each focus group. Rabiee (2004, p. 657) posits that the familiarisation exercise allows the researcher ‘to immerse in the details and get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts.’

After developing a naïve understanding, data analysis continued with the application of the constant comparison analysis method (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). Constant comparison analysis is an iterative and inductive process of reducing the data through constant recoding (Fram, 2013). It has its roots in grounded theory research developed by Glaser and Strauss (Doody et al., 2013; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Fram (2013, p. 3) asserts that in constant comparison analysis, ‘incidents or data are compared to other incidents or data during the process of coding.’ Thus, a constant comparison of data from the focus groups with young fathers and older fathers was conducted to develop themes that supported the final themes derived from the interview data. According to Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), in constant comparison analysis, there are three stages involved: open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

a. **Stage one: open coding**

At this stage, data was divided into small meaning units and condensed by attaching a descriptor, or code (label). I identified meaning units in form of sentences, short phrases,
concepts, or paragraphs from the text read. As with the interview data, to ensure that meaning units were easy to organise at a later stage of data analysis, anchor codes were assigned. For example, from the questions: Tell me, what does it mean to be a father in your community? ‘Being father-meaning’ was generated as an anchor code. When condensing data, each anchor code was linked to a descriptor of the condensed meaning unit (see Figure 5.3 below).

![Figure 5.3: Example of open coding from focus groups](image)

**b. Stage 2: axial coding**

At this stage, condensed meaning units were tallied and brought together and grouped into subthemes as shown in Figure 5.4 below.
Figure 5.4: Example of grouping and tallying condensed meaning units from focus groups

The grouping or sorting of meaning unit at this stage involved cutting and pasting similar quotes together. Krueger and Casey’s (2000) practical steps for managing and sorting out data was adopted in this study. Meaning units from participants’ accounts were constantly compared, whilst reflecting on the questions asked. Similar meaning units were grouped together and those that did not answer the questions were assigned to appropriate categories of the questions they answered. Those that seemed not to answer any research questions but sounded relevant, were put aside for later consideration. Finally, participants’ quotes were then mapped and interpreted. The interpretation involved making sense of individual quotes, while minding group dynamics to allow for an experiential focus to remain central (Palmer et al., 2010). Table 5.5 below, illustrate how focus group data was sorted during analysis and subthemes were developed.
Table 5.5: Example of sorting data and theme development from focus groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning units</th>
<th>Condensation of meaning units</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what does it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean to be a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father in your</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vincent</strong>:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be a</td>
<td>Being respected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father or once</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you become a</td>
<td>Identity and status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father, you</td>
<td>of a father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>begin to be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ernest</strong>:</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, when you</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have a child</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>that’s when</td>
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<tr>
<td>you become a</td>
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<tr>
<td>father and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>start respecting you.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ernest</strong>:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>but again,</td>
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<td>when they say</td>
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<tr>
<td>a father,</td>
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<tr>
<td>it means</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone that</td>
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<tr>
<td>has a child.</td>
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<td>So, when you</td>
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<tr>
<td>have a child</td>
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<td>that’s when</td>
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<tr>
<td>you become a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Paul</strong>:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be a father,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you need to be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone who</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>has a child,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>and ...Then,</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>they will say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you are a father.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Third stage: selective coding

This stage involves developing one or more themes that express the content of each of the groups. Themes that emerged from the focus groups with young fathers were compared with those from older fathers (see Appendix J for the two sets of themes derived). The themes were also reflected on in relation to the naïve understanding and were assessed whether they
validated or invalidated the naïve understanding. Table 5.6 below present a summary example of analysis of focus group data from young fathers.

**Table 5.6: Example of data analysis from a focus group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning units</th>
<th>Condensation of meaning units</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does it mean to be a father in your community?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Respondents:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vincent:</strong></td>
<td><em>To be a father or once you become a father, you begin to be respected</em></td>
<td>Being respected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ernest:</strong></td>
<td><em>So, when you have a child that’s when you become a father and people start respecting you.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ernest:</strong></td>
<td><em>but again, when they say a father, it means someone that has a child. So, when you have a child that’s when you become a father</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paul:</strong></td>
<td><em>To be a father, you need to be someone who has a child, and...Then, they will say you are a father.</em></td>
<td>Having a child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity and status of a father</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Being a father</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.10 Rigour or Trustworthiness

Noble and Smith (2015) assert that there is no accepted consensus about the standards by which qualitative research should be judged. Research rigour or trustworthiness is ‘the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study’ (Connelly, 2016, p. 435). To ensure rigour in this study, strategies by Noble and Smith (2015) and Shenton (2004) were drawn on. These included accounting for personal biases; record keeping regarding decisions; including rich and thick verbatim descriptions of participants’ accounts to support findings; triangulation; adoption of research methods which are well established, frequent debriefing sessions with the supervision team, peer scrutiny of the research project; and reflexivity.

In keeping with the fundamentals of hermeneutic phenomenology, I ensured reflexivity and reflection on my own perspectives (Noble & Smith, 2015; Shenton, 2004) by keeping a research journal where key decisions made in the research process were recorded. This helped me to maintain cohesion between the study’s aim, design, and methods (Noble & Smith, 2015). Secondly, my work was reviewed by my supervisors, which enhances credibility. At every stage of the research, I held frequent debriefing sessions with my supervisors and feedback was provided. The research project has also been subjected to peer scrutiny through presentations at students’ forums. Thirdly, all the interviews and focus groups were audio recorded to allow for repeated revisiting of the data to check emerging themes remain true to participants’ accounts of their lived experiences. In presenting the findings, rich and thick verbatim extracts from participants’ accounts are used to ensure that the interpretation of data reflected participants’ perspectives or remarks. Finally, triangulation enhances the credibility of this study. In-depth interviews, focus groups and photo-elicitation have been used to facilitate the production of a more comprehensive set of findings (Noble & Smith, 2015).
5.11 Reflexivity and researcher positionality

Reflexivity is a core element of hermeneutic phenomenology (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). It entails the process by which a researcher becomes conscious of and reflective about the ways in which their methods, questions, assumptions, social background, and beliefs might impact on data gathered or knowledge produced in a research study (Langridge, 2007). Positionality, on the other hand, relates to power relations between the researcher and the researched (Fenge, Oakley, Taylor, & Beer, 2019; Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020) or the level of relatedness in terms of their social categories and dimensions (Cuevas-Parra, 2021). It can also refer to the position the researcher takes in relation to the social and political context of the study, that is, the community or the participant group (Cuevas-Parra, 2021; Rowe, 2014). Depending on the research context, researchers can simultaneously be insiders and outsiders or one of the two in each research project (Fenge et al., 2019; Hayfield & Huxley, 2015; Rowe, 2014).

In this study, all the interviews were conducted by me, a male PhD researcher and a married father who had no experience of being a young unmarried father. This made the study fascinating so that I could learn from those that became fathers at a younger age. However, I approached this study with a conscious mind as I was aware that my identities, personal assumptions, beliefs, prior knowledge, and social class could influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Therefore, I maintained reflexivity and openness. Throughout the research process, a research diary or journal was used to reflect on my personal observations, feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and interpretations of data. During analysis and writing, I ensured that the interpretation of data reflected participants’ accounts. Additionally, in keeping with the hermeneutic phenomenology and method of analysis, my preunderstanding was acknowledged as part of the research process and was used to enhance my interpretation of the findings (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).
Many dimensions positioned me both as an insider and outsider in this study. Considering that this study was conducted in Zambia, my home country where I was born and raised, I was conversant with the sociocultural context of the participants. In this way, I felt I was an insider (Asselin, 2003; Clift, Hatchard, & Gore, 2018; Galam, 2015). I was able to speak and understand Nsenga, the native language the participants speak fluently in the research area. This made it easier for us to understand each other during interviews and focus groups. Research literature also suggests that people tend to gravitate toward those with whom they relate with or share a great deal of commonalities (Dervin & Benjamin, 2015; Esteves, 2018). I felt that my insider status made it easier for me to negotiate access (Merriam et al., 2001) and persuade gatekeepers to help with recruiting participants as well as participants accepting to be part of the study. I also felt that being able to speak the native language facilitated the building of rapport and trust with the participants and gatekeepers.

Furthermore, given that I came to this study as a man and a father, it situated me as an insider (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). I felt that being a man conducting the interviews with my fellow men and disclosing my identity as a father to participants, provided a common ground for interactions, enhanced acceptance, and openness among the study participants. I felt that participants showed more willingness to share their experiences, perhaps due to an assumption of understanding and shared distinctiveness (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) or based on shared gender identity (Robb, 2021). At the same time, coming to the study as a father, I was aware that I had my own experience and assumptions about what it means to be a father. Consequently, during analysis of data, I kept my assumptions in check and allowed participants’ accounts to reveal their meanings. I believe that the interpretation of the findings represented the perspectives of participants.

Considering that I was older than many of the participants, I had no experience of being unmarried young father, I did not grow up in the community where the research took place, and belonged to a different ethnic group, I, therefore, felt that I was an outsider (Banks, 1998;
Clift et al., 2018; Merriam et al., 2001). Therefore, I positioned myself as a learner to participants and regarded participants as experts of their own experience. Hence, we were co-constructors of knowledge in this study. I felt that being open to participants about my lack of experience and knowledge of being unmarried young father, allowed them to take control and educate me about their experiences.

My position as an outsider was also apparent given that I was someone who came from the city and was a PhD student at a university in the UK. I felt that this influenced some participants as to how they perceived me, thinking of me as a journalist, and as someone of a different social status or class. This, in turn, reinforced some power dynamics and hierarchies. Desai and Potter (2006, p. 34) assert that ‘whenever working across cultures, or within their own culture, power imbalances between the researcher and the researched are commonplace’. For participants that had concerns, I clarified to them that I was there as a researcher and not a journalist. This allowed us to proceed with the research study. I felt that working with local gatekeepers helped to enhance trust between participants and myself. Furthermore, I tried to dress casually and persuade participants to call me by my first name as an attempt to reduce power imbalances. Despite all these efforts, I felt power imbalances and hierarchies persisted and these were noticeable during the interviews as some participants could occasionally call me ‘sir’ as a sign of respect. This, in part, could be due to strong cultural norms and the high value attached to education in the Zambian society. Cultural values and norms demand that those who are young show respect to anyone who is older than them (Mvula, 2014) and people with higher education are accorded a high status in Zambian society (Chirwa, 2017). This taught me that it is impossible to eliminate power imbalances completely. Notwithstanding this, in the end, I felt that this did not have a negative effect on the quality of data collected and interactions I had with the participants. Participants did not show signs of feeling pressured as if they were being coerced, but
instead, they often expressed gratitude for being considered for the study to share their stories.

5.12 Conclusion

This chapter has described the procedure followed in data collection for this hermeneutic phenomenological study of unmarried young fathers’ lived experiences in rural Zambia. It has discussed how photo-elicitation methods were integrated into in-depth interviews and in-depth interviews were combined with focus groups to generate richer and deeper data about the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers. The chapter has also discussed how interview and focus group data were analysed, how research rigour was maintained, and how data was stored and managed. The chapter has also provided a reflection on the ethical issues associated with using gatekeepers in recruiting young people as research participants and using photographs in research. Also included in this chapter is a reflection on the researcher’s own positionality in this study. Having discussed how data for this study was collected and analysed, Chapters 6-8 present the findings from the analysis of unmarried young fathers’ accounts of their lived experiences of fatherhood in rural Zambia.
Chapter 6: Being a father

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to answer the research question: what are young men’s experiences of the transition to fatherhood? The chapter begins by analysing the circumstances in which young men became fathers to establish if entry into fatherhood was unintentional or accidental. Furthermore, the chapter discusses how young men responded to the news of the pregnancy and impending fatherhood. In the section that follows, the chapter looks at changes in the identities and statuses of young men resulting from the birth of a child. Of importance also is how young men felt about being young fathers and how these changes impacted them, their children, and their families.

6.2 Becoming a young father: intentional or an ‘accident’ and a ‘mistake’?

Analysis of the interviews for this study indicated that becoming a father was unintentional for all the young fathers. When asked if becoming a young father was something they planned, Enerst and Emmanuel, for example, said:

No, I didn’t plan it. It was just like playing, then, by mistake, it happened that I impregnated her. It was just an accident, without knowing. It was unexpected that it could happen.

Enerst (father at 20 years, interviewed at 33)

I did not plan it. It was just like a mistake. Let me say it was a mistake because I did not follow the procedure that is followed when someone wants to marry. I just used to go out with the ‘girl’, and it happened like a mistake.

Emmanuel (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

Like other young fathers in this study, Emmanuel and Enerst described the pregnancy as either a ‘mistake’ or an ‘accident’ to signal that it was unintentional. Whereas the pregnancy
was said to be unplanned by all young fathers, none of them expressed that the child was unwanted. However, the remarks by Emmanuel also suggest that the circumstances in which pregnancy happened were outside the expected norms and values around marriage and childbearing in their society. The findings of this study correspond with previous studies in other cultural contexts such as South Africa and the UK (e.g., Chili & Maharaj, 2015; Neale & Davies, 2016), which report that the transition to fatherhood is rarely planned for many young fathers. The next section explores how young fathers responded to the news of the pregnancy.

6.3 Reaction to the pregnancy news and impending fatherhood

Analysis of the interviews with young fathers in this study generated varied reactions to the pregnancy announcement. These reactions have been grouped into two subthemes: emotional reactions to the announcement of impending fatherhood and decisions regarding the pregnancy as discussed below.

6.3.1 Emotional reactions to the announcement of impending fatherhood

The findings from this study indicated that the most common emotional reaction to the news of the pregnancy for most young fathers was initial shock at the outcome of their actions. Most of the participants also said that they were scared and worried about their future dreams, their own parents’ reaction, and their fatherhood expectations, as illustrated by the following remarks:

*I didn’t think pregnancy would be the outcome…. I felt bad and scared…I was scared because this was the first time it was happening to me. It really confused me, and I started wondering what would happen to me given the crime that I had committed. I was worried about what would happen. I was told by my family that what I had done was wrong and the maternal family were going to charge me for the pregnancy. I was worried about what my parents would do. So, that’s how my school journey ended. To*
be honest, I lost interest in school at that time, because of the mistreatment I was given by the maternal family. They reported me to the school authorities, and I was banned from school until after the ‘girl’ delivered.

Payani (father at 19 years, interviewed at 24)

Well, if it’s the first time, it scares you. When you hear that you have impregnated someone, you fear that your parents will be angry and shout at you. So, you start thinking that ‘this thing that I have done, will I manage to keep a child at my age, will I support the child quite well’. But after some time, your heart settles…it calms down and you accept that it happened. You convince yourself that ‘I will be strong’.

Zaire (father at 17 years, interviewed at 24)

After I heard about it, they sent a letter to my parents because at that time, I was at school. Then, my parents called to inform me that I had impregnated someone. So, I became worried and asked myself, will my parents continue supporting me with school fees or they will terminate support. So, I wasn’t at peace but worried. I thought that’s the end of the road for me with school. So, I went home, we talked and when the time came for us to discuss with the maternal family, we were told that we have to pay two cows by a specific date. So, we went back home, but whilst on our way home, I was just worried that my parents, like I said, would say we can’t manage to be spending money on two things.

Migo (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

The above excerpts underline how the news of impending fatherhood evoked negative emotions for most young fathers in this study. Most of them expressed that they were worried about how they would take care of their children or how their own parents would react in terms of acceptance and support. As the above accounts demonstrate, both Payani and Migo said they were concerned about the disruption fatherhood would cause to their future education aspirations and how they would negotiate cultural practices such as paying for pregnancy damage. As discussed in Chapter 2, payment of pregnancy damage is a cultural
practice in Zambian society that relates to the compensation for the depreciation of marriage prospects, or loss of future earnings for the young women who were still at school and have had their education interfered with by the pregnancy (Mann et al., 2015; White, 1971). While pregnancy damage may be seen as compensation to the family of young women involved, it is implicitly a form of penalty (fine) to a man involved for causing shame on the family of the young women (Mann et al., 2015). Thus, in the above excerpt, Payani uses the phrase ‘the crime that I had committed’ to signal wrongdoing or doing something unlawful that has consequences such as attracting a fine which may be difficult to pay. As hinted by Emmanuel earlier in section 6.2, it appears societal norms and values in the participants’ society do not permit premarital sex and childbearing outside marriage. Therefore, pregnancy confirms a departure from the expected norms. This might also explain why many young fathers were scared when they received the news of the pregnancy. While Payani and Migo were concerned with their future education aspirations, Zaire, on the hand, said he was concerned with how he would meet adult expectations, such as practical care and support for his child. Zaire’s concerns were also shared by many young fathers in this study. This suggests that many young fathers may be unprepared for fatherhood.

Whereas most of the young fathers reported that the news of the pregnancy was a source of worry and fear, there were contrasting emotions among young fathers. For example, two young fathers explicitly expressed being disappointed with the news of the pregnancy, while two other young fathers said they were happy with the news, as demonstrated by the remarks below:
I accepted it because I knew that a mistake was already made. I felt good because I was going to be a dad and that was my child. I knew I was responsible when that person told me that she was pregnant. I didn’t want to worry. If I did, I would have even developed BP or think about killing myself. It made me happy because that was a child just like I am to my parents. So, if they opted to throw me away, they would have made a mistake. so, I accepted it.

Jattomoya (father at 15 years, interviewed at 21)

We were having unprotected sex... not using condoms because I took it we were still young. Then just from nowhere, the ‘girl’ said that she is pregnant.....It was disappointing because I did not think I would do such. I was disappointed because I had a child at a time I was not supposed to. I could not take care of someone at that age.

Masauso (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

In the quotation above, Masauso recounted that he was shocked at the news of the pregnancy and disappointed that he was going to be a father at a young age. Like Zaire, it appears Masauso was also unprepared for fatherhood. In addition, by expressing that: ‘I was disappointed because I had a child at a time I was not supposed to’, Masauso underlines the internal stigma that he and the other young father experienced for transgressing the norms associated with sex and childbearing before marriage. On the other hand, for Jattomoya, while the pregnancy may have been unplanned, he expressed that it was a source of pride. His account also highlights how, some young fathers come to terms with the fact that they cannot reverse what has already happened.

The remarks by the participants in this section exemplify the diverse ways in which young fathers in this study reacted to the news of impending fatherhood. They expressed diverse emotions, with some of them sometimes, having multiple feelings at once. What was also clear from their remarks was that becoming a father at a younger age was not something parents in their cultural context approved of. This is consistent with research literature
discussed in Chapter 2, which suggested that social norms in the Zambian society do not support premarital sex and childbearing outside marriage, although it is anticipated (Dahlböck et al., 2006; Svanemyr et al., 2022; Taylor, 2006). Parents in Zambia expect their children to abstain from sex and focus on school (Svanemyr et al., 2022) and follow the conventional path: acquiring an education, possibly getting a job, getting married, and then becoming a father. By virtue of expressing worry and fear of how their parents would react, it was evident that the young men became aware that they had behaved in a manner highly contrary to what is acceptable and that such actions attracted consequences. The findings of this study mirror those of Mweemba and Mann’s (2020) study with married young fathers in Zambia, which found that the young men were frightened of the disappointment and anger of their parents with the announcement of the pregnancy. The study also reports that young fathers were scared and worried about their own future education aspirations and abilities to parent. Mweemba and Mann (2020) assert that the young men in their study reported that they felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities that they believed had unexpectedly fallen upon them and wondered how they would financially provide for their children.

6.3.2 Decisions regarding the pregnancy

Although pregnancy was unintended, the response regarding pregnancy responsibility was positive for nearly all the young fathers in this study. Analysis of the stories shared revealed that none of the participants in the study said that they advocated for the termination of the pregnancy. The common response regarding the pregnancy, according to participants’ accounts, was the acceptance of the responsibility at the very beginning. When asked how they reacted to the news of impending fatherhood, Emmanuel, Mwape, and Banda, for example, responded:
I received it well and accepted it, given that a child is a gift from God. I didn’t want her to abort. We kept the child so that the child should grow.

Emmanuel (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21).

I accepted it because I was the one that caused it. I was happy because I had received a gift from God.

Mwape (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

Well, I accepted it, but I had a lot of fears about how I will relay the pregnancy news at home. So, I received the news with fear.

Banda (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

The above remarks illustrate how most of the young fathers in this study said they took responsibility for the pregnancy, despite being initially scared of their parents’ reaction. In the above accounts, Banda, Emmanuel, and Mwape all claimed that they took responsibility for the pregnancy. What was apparent in the young fathers’ accounts was that taking responsibility also involved agreeing with their partners to carry the pregnancy to term and, for some, marrying the child’s mother. Emmanuel’s account suggests that abortion was not an option for him as he viewed a child as a gift from God. Hence, instead of advocating for abortion, he said that together with his partner they decided to carry the pregnancy to term and subsequently, he became a young father. Likewise, Mwape said that considering that he was certain that the child was his, he had to take responsibility. Thus, he also became a young father and during the interview he said that he later went on to marry the child’s mother.

Only three out of the 24 young fathers in this study reported that they took a while to accept the responsibility for the pregnancy for different reasons, as illustrated by the following remarks:
There was a bit of some confusion at the beginning as the woman named two people as being responsible for the pregnancy. It caused me to say I am not going to do anything about this.

Masauso (father at 19 years, interviewed at 21)

[Prior to] we had an agreement that we would get married later. Then, it so happened that I impregnated her, and I was charged for the crime I committed to pay two cows....

I rejected the pregnancy, and after I denied the responsibility, I was sued and arrested for not supporting the child. I stayed in the police cells for 4 days. So, when I was in the police cells, my parents paid the two cows they charged us.... My parents did not want me to take her. But we continued that relationship, and she had the second pregnancy. Thereafter, we got married. So, we got married when she had a child and another pregnancy.

James (father at 17 years, interviewed at 23)

At that time, some people were encouraging me to deny the pregnancy responsibility.... [so] at first, I rejected her. I denied the pregnancy responsibility, though later, I accepted.... I realised that I was just making a mistake denying the responsibility because this child has now grown... this is the child that I tried to deny.

Payani (father at 19 years, interviewed at 24)

Whereas young men are often blamed for not taking responsibility, the above accounts suggest that their decisions are sometimes influenced by other people. In the above excerpts, Payani claimed that due to pressure from people within his social network, he delayed acknowledging the pregnancy responsibility, a decision he described as regrettable. On the other hand, Masauso said he was unsure if he was even the real father of the child, considering that the child’s mother had initially named two men as responsible for the pregnancy. In contrast to Masauso and Payani, James’ reasons for rejecting the pregnancy responsibility were not explicitly stated. However, his account gave a sense that the
overwhelming fear of his parents’ reaction in terms of acceptance and support might have
influenced his decision. It seems that from the beginning, his parents were against his
relationship with the child’s mother. Apparently, James’s parents only accepted to pay for
his pregnancy damage to have him released from the police cells when he was detained. It
appears James had to marry the child’s mother as a way of taking responsibility for his
actions and fulfilling their agreement of getting married despite his parents’ position. These
three young fathers’ experiences also showed some similar patterns in terms of the decision-
making process. Their decision to accept the responsibility was triggered by the birth of the
child.

The accounts of young fathers in this section are indicative of how most of them reported
that they took responsibility for their actions. Most of them stated that they acknowledged
the pregnancy and paternity responsibility immediately following the news of impending
fatherhood. Possibly this was because they were sure that they were the ones responsible for
the pregnancy and they had the support from their parents, as discussed later in subsection
8.2.3. The findings of this study challenge the notion in some sections of society in Zambia,
that assume that when young men impregnate their partner, they often abandon them and
escape the consequences of their actions (Nawa, 2018). As the data for this study suggests,
even for the three fathers who initially opted to reject being responsible for the pregnancy,
it was reported that they all still later came to terms with the unexpected pregnancy incident
and acknowledged the children as their own, which suggests involved fathering according
to Gavin et al.’s (2002) model of paternal or father involvement. What emerged from the
data for this study was that some young men may sometimes delay the decision to
acknowledge the pregnancy and paternity responsibility because they might not be too sure
if they are, in fact, the ones responsible for the pregnancy. This is similar to the findings of
the study by Swartz and Bhana (2009) with teen fathers in South Africa, which found that
due to uncertainty as to whether they were, in fact, the real fathers of the child, some young
fathers denied paternity. In the present study, waiting until the birth of a child was a common pattern in acknowledging paternity among young men who initially denied the pregnancy responsibility. However, self-stigma associated with an inability to financially support the child was not reported to influence young men denying paternity in the current study, as was the case in Swartz and Bhana’s (2009) study. As earlier discussed, lack of family support or intimidation and pressure from members of their social network to deny responsibility were reported as other factors that influenced some young men in the current study to delay their decision to take responsibility. The following section focuses on the cultural practice of paying for pregnancy damage.

6.4 Paying for pregnancy damages

Paying for pregnancy damage is an established cultural practice in Zambia that all the young fathers in this study were aware of. According to their accounts, following the announcement of the pregnancy, the two families involved are expected to meet and discuss the pregnancy responsibility, the paternity of the child, and marriage possibilities. During the same meeting, charges for pregnancy damage or marriage (dowry) for those that decide to marry are announced and negotiated. Whereas the young fathers that took part in this study belonged to four different ethnic groups: Ngoni, Bemba, Chewa, and Nsenga, none of them said they were spared from the pregnancy damage charges as this is a defined custom within the setting where the study was conducted. During the interviews, young fathers mentioned being charged either cash or cattle for pregnancy damages, as demonstrated by the following statements:

*After it happened (impregnating), they charged me 3500 [Kwacha] and I paid cows equivalent to the money I was charged…… These charges vary with the people or tribe. Like among the Ngoni, Tumbuka or Chewa people, it’s different from us, the Nsenga.*

Nelson (father at 19 years, interviewed at 27)
After we received a letter concerning the pregnancy, we sat down [and I was charged], … [thereafter] we asked for more time [to mobilise financial resources]. Later, we started paying. They charged 1500 Kwacha and we paid everything.

Wilson (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

It so happened that [after] I impregnated her,… I was charged for the crime I committed to pay two cows.

James (father at 17 years, interviewed at 23)

Like many young fathers in this study, in the above excerpts, Nelson, Wilson, and James, use terms such as ‘charged’ or ‘the crime I committed’ to underscore how pregnancy outside marriage is unlawful in the Zambian society and it attracts a fine, which is paid to the family of the young woman as compensation. Considering that premarital sex and childbearing is forbidden, implicitly, young men who impregnate a young woman outside marriage are perceived as moral transgressors. As indicated in Chapter 2, failure to pay for pregnancy damages can prevent a man from asserting his rights to the child and interferes with his access to and interactions with the child. This, in turn, can preclude him from assuming his roles as a father. This is further discussed in Chapter 8 (see subsection 8.2.6). The next subsection looks at young men’s experiences of the transition into young fatherhood.

6.5 Transition to young fatherhood

In this study, young fathers’ description of their experiences regarding their entry into young fatherhood were grouped in five subthemes: emotional reaction to being a father; identity and status of a father; importance of being a father; community perceptions of young fathers; and the impact of being a young father.
6.5.1 Emotional reaction to being a father

Despite it being unintentional, most young fathers in this study spoke of joy and happiness at the birth of their child, as exemplified by the following statements:

*When the child was born, I felt good, I was very happy because I became aware that I can father a child in life.*

Zaire (father at 17 years, interviewed at 24)

*When the child was born and I became a father, I felt happy because my child was born. There were no complications.*

Paulo (father at 16 years, interviewed at 20)

*We celebrated with my parents because she managed to have a child without complications.*

Nelson (father at 19 years, interviewed at 27)

The above remarks illustrate how fathering a child was reported as a source of joy and happiness by most young fathers in this study, as it proved their reproductive potency and confirmed their identities as fathers. It appears fathering a child is important for men’s masculine identity and social status in the participants’ society. Like Zaire, many young fathers in this study expressed that the birth of the child provided them with a sense of relief and satisfaction that they could father a child. As discussed in Chapter 2, fathering a child is a source of respect for men in Zambia and research evidence indicates that failure to father a child is a source of shame and mockery for married men in the Zambian society (Howe, Zulu, Boivin, & Gerrits, 2020). Apparently, young men in the current study were aware of these struggles and shame that married men who had no children in their community underwent. Thus, despite being unintentional, for them, being able to impregnate their partner and have a child, seemed to provide them with assurances that they were capable, and they had escaped the shame associated with infertility in their community. Young fathers like Paulo and Nelson expressed that the news of the birth of the child was not only a source
of joy and happiness but also relief that the child’s mother had survived maternal death. In Zambia, the maternal death rate is relatively high (Phiri, Chasaya, & Ngomah, 2020). The feeling of relief expressed by Paulo and Nelson and the other two young fathers suggests their awareness of maternal mortality that occurs in their area.

6.5.2  Identity and status of a father

This study sought to understand what being a father means to young men. Across interviews and focus groups, it was apparent that being a father was associated with the ability to reproduce (virility), having a child, and social status. These are discussed in the following subsections.

6.5.2.1  Being grown up or an adult

For a notable number of young fathers in this study, being a father meant attaining an adult status and assuming adult expectations. What was apparent from young fathers’ remarks was that age-related attributes are not the only determinants in ascribing an adult status to an individual in their society. Analysis of their accounts showed that irrespective of age, fathering a child is one of the key determinants of adulthood socially. When asked what it means being a father, changes in one’s social status and conduct were often mentioned by participants, as demonstrated by the remarks below:

*It means I have now grown up, in whatever I do, I should show that there is wisdom and maturity in me. So, for the people that I stay with, I should take good care of them, and they should not suffer.*

Enerst (father at 20 years, interviewed at 33)

*It means that I have reached that age, I have really grown, showing that I can now have a child and that’s growing.*

David (father at 18 years, interviewed at 22)
It also means you have to be doing things like a mature person or an adult since you have a child. So, it just shows that you must change the way you do things.

Migo (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

The remarks by En erst, David, and Migo were also shared by many young fathers including older fathers who took part in a focus group discussion. Consistent with a previous study by Day and Evans (2015) involving 35 young people in Zambia, which found that parenthood was identified as one of the key events on a young person’s pathway to adulthood, young fathers’ accounts in this study showed that becoming a father is regarded as a status passage in Zambia. As the above remarks suggest, by fathering a child, a young man symbolically passes the social boundary from childhood to adulthood (Rasing, 2002). The birth of the child according to young fathers in this study led to new identities such as being a father and an adult with parenting responsibilities and adult expectations. Crivello and Mann (2020, p. 16) report that in Zambia, ‘pregnancy and parenthood lead to an abrupt shift in the way a child or young person is understood socially and within the vast majority of families.’ While young fathers may still be children by chronological age, socially they are understood and perceived as adults who should take responsibility for their children. Young fathers’ accounts in this study reaffirmed this view. As the above quotations suggest, regardless of one’s age, following the birth of the child, the young man transitions from childhood to adulthood and fatherhood. He is also ‘expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions’ (Turner, 1969, p. 359). Both Ernest and Migo seemed to be aware of this. In the above excerpts, Ernest talked about adult and fatherhood expectations and adapting to his new role such as showing wisdom and maturity and taking care of the family, while Migo spoke of conduct that would show that an individual is now an adult.
6.5.2.2 Having a child or being capable of reproducing

Further analysis of interviews for this study indicated that being a father demonstrated young men’s virility and manhood or showed that they were capable of fathering or having a child, as exemplified by the following remarks:

As a man, it’s important to have a child because some people stay married without a child and people laugh at them. So, when you have a child even before marrying, you feel that you are ‘okay’, you are capable of having a child. But other people can’t manage to have a child. So, to be a father also means you are capable.

Enerst (father at 20 years, interviewed at 33)

Being a father means I am respected everywhere I go. It’s different from someone who has no child. You will find that someone might be older, and he is a bachelor (unmarried), and compared to me, it will be different. I will be called by my child names and not him…. The coming of the child makes someone become a father and they call you by your child’s name. When you have no child, it’s not good. We call such people ng’omwa. They need intervention or help so that they can try to have a child…. it’s just that when you have a child, respect comes. When you have a child, it shows that you are a real man and those who don’t, they are incapable.

Nelson (father at 19 years, interviewed 27)

Having a child has meaning. When I sit down, I think of myself as a real man, I’m capable of having a child.

Zaire (father at 17 years, interviewed at 24)

Nelson’s account is indicative of how many young fathers expressed that the birth of the child marked a transition point in the ways they were viewed and understood or treated by others, which is consistent with the notion of status passage (Davis-Floyd, 2022; Newton, 2012). As discussed in the previous section, becoming a father in Zambia is viewed as a
status passage, which is associated with changes in one’s social status. Nelson’s account and those of many young fathers in this study reaffirms this. According to Nelson, because of his fatherhood status, he was viewed and treated differently with respect compared to men who were childless. This mirrors the literature discussed earlier in Chapter 2 (see section 2.3), which showed that following the birth of the child, young men in Zambia are viewed as adults and as a sign of respect, friends, family, and community members begin to call them by the child’s name. For example, in the case of Nelson, if his child is named Peter, they stop calling him Nelson and start calling him atate bake Peter in Nsenga\(^2\) (translated father to Peter).

What was also apparent in the participants’ accounts in this study was that failure to father a child as a man, undermines his social status and manliness and becomes a source of ridicule or shame in their society as echoed and reaffirmed by the following comments by Nsato and Paulo:

\[ \text{I would say it’s always a difficult situation in terms of respect if I am alone, or single, I am not given much respect. It’s different from someone that has a family. Those who have no children, they are laughed at a lot. In the past, when such people died, they never used to count them. They would be like ‘just bury it, it has not left any fruit on earth’.} \]

Nsato (58 years old, focus group)

\[ \text{At this age, I don’t think it’s important. At least, when you are 21 or 22 [years old] that’s when you should have a child…. In our community, many people desire to have a child, but usually, what happens with young people is that it starts from having a girlfriend. Then, it results into pregnancy. [Those who don’t have children but are married], are never at peace. They are expected to have children once they marry. If} \]

\(^2\) Nsenga is a name of one of the 72 languages and tribes in Zambia.
they can’t have children, it’s always difficulty because sometimes, marriage can even be dissolved. If one can’t have a child, it also entails that the man does not function sexually. So, people laugh at those who are not capable.

Paulo (father at 16 years, interviewed at 20)

The above quotations underscore the importance of fathering a child for one’s own respect or social status and identity. Nsato uses a metaphor ‘leaving fruit on earth’ to signify fathering a child before one dies. He underlines the importance of having a child to avoid the shame or stigma associated with infertility, maintain the family name or line and enhance the social status of a man in society. Similarly, Paul stated that having a child is important as it is one of the marriage expectations in their society. He claimed that it is the desire of every man in their culture to have a child as failure to do so attracted ridicule and in worst case scenario would lead to marriage breakdown.

The findings of this study are consistent with research literature such as Schlyter (1999), which shows that fathering a child in the Zambian society represents the male identity of proving virility and is associated with the notion of being a real man (masculine identity). According to participants’ accounts, when men father a child, they achieve a superior status and get a sense of satisfaction as this proves their male reproductive potency or virility and masculinity (Helfferich, 2012; Mweemba & Mann, 2020). Concurrently, this enhancement of one’s social standing in society creates a hierarchy of status-related masculinities with men that have children being given a superior status and those who do not have a lower status. This is evidenced by the way respect is accorded to men who have children compared to those who do not. As recounted by Nelson, men that have children are called by the child’s names to signify respect while those that do not have, are called by their own names. The hierarchy of status-related masculinities that fatherhood produces in this society reflects Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 832), hegemonic masculinity represents the ‘currently most
honoured way of being a man and requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it’. As advanced by Paulo in his remarks: ‘in our community, many people desire to have a child’, undoubtedly, in this society, many men may desire to have children because fathering a child is a cultural expectation for married men (Taylor, 2006) and is central to their masculine identity (Schlyter, 1999). Other than economic provision, their manhood or masculinity in marriage is measured by the ability to father a child. Nevertheless, not all men are able to live up to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell recognises the existence of subordinated masculinities, which are associated with men who exhibit traits and attributes that are opposite to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Connell is alive to the fact that hegemonic masculinity generates hegemony over other masculinities. As such, Demetriou (2001, p. 341) posits that hegemonic masculinity also represents ‘a social ascendancy of one group of men over others.’ In this study, this ascendancy is exemplified by the hegemony of men who have children over those who do not have them. Nevertheless, whereas in line with the notion of status passage, young men gain the privilege of their social status being elevated and being respected by their friends, family, and society at large, when they become fathers, their incorporation into adulthood remains questionable. As discussed later in section 6.5.4, the community still doubts their ability to live up to the responsibility of fatherhood.

6.5.3 Importance of being a father

Findings of this study indicate that for the most part, young fathers’ positive emotional reactions to the news of the birth of the child was inextricably linked to the importance of having a child for men in their society. Whereas all the young fathers interviewed for this study expressed that it was not important to be a father at a younger age, they did not suggest that they had been averse to the future prospect of becoming fathers. According to the young fathers’ accounts, having a child was regarded as essential for every man at the right age that is, when one is an adult, independent, and married. When asked about the importance of
being a father, as earlier discussed (see subsection 6.5.2.2), many young fathers’ responses were tied to social status, respect, proving virility or masculine identity, and marriage expectations. However, most of them situated the importance of having a child in the context of security in old age, as illustrated by Migo’s remarks below:

_You see, the way life is these days, everyone is helped by children. So, it’s important to have children. In future, they are the ones that will be helping me. When you grow older and you lose strength, the children will help you._

Migo (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

In the above quote, Migo highlights the importance of fathering a child for future assistance. Migo’s remarks were also echoed by older fathers during the focus group. When asked about the importance of having children, Syd, for example, responded:

_It’s important [to have a child] because in future, that child will come and help you. It’s like what a Bemba³ proverb says ‘mayo mphapa naine nkakupapa’ (translated- ‘mother carry me on you back now and I will carry you in the future’). What this means is that, when you have a child and decide to put him in school, you want his future to be better so that he should help you in future. You help him now, so that he should help you in future. That’s what is important and that’s why a child is needed at home._

Syd (43 years old, Focus group)

In the above excerpt, Syd uses a Bemba proverb ‘mayo mphapa naine nkakupapa’ to underscore the importance of parents investing in their child for the future, with expectations of the child returning a favour. This proverb is an implicit ‘generational bargain’ (Collard, 2000, 2001), which underscores the notion of intergenerational reciprocity in the provision of care and support responsibilities (Day & Evans, 2015). According to Collard (2001), the

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³ _Bemba is the name of one of the 72 languages and tribes in Zambia._
bargain is hardly written down but remains implicit and is sometimes driven by duty and affection.

The accounts by Migo and Syd exemplify how within the cultural context of this study, children were perceived by participants as future safety nets that is, a guarantee of future subsistence and source of security in old age. This finding resonates with research literature in Zambia such as Chirwa (2017), which highlights how the notion of reciprocity embedded in the cultural norms and practices in Zambia influence parents’ views of their future lives and perception of their children. Research literature indicates that in Zambian society, there has been high expectations of children helping their parents in old age (Chirwa, 2017; Mapoma & Masaiti, 2012; Noyoo, 2013). Thus, it is not surprising to see young fathers in this study drawing on such cultural discourses when explicating the importance of having a child. Rammohan (2001) asserts that in low- and middle-income countries, children are regarded as an important source of security in old age and this hope of future security influences the decision of some to have a child. While it did not emerge as a reason for having a child at an early age in this study, the young fathers’ accounts indicated that children were important for their future security. The next subsection moves on to look at how young fathers were perceived by the community.

6.5.4 Community perceptions of young fathers

Analysis of interview and focus group data for this study revealed different negative stereotypical perceptions of young fathers by the community. Most of the young fathers interviewed in this study said that they generally felt being negatively judged by the community. When asked why the community had negative perception of young fathers, it was clear from the stories told by the participants that the community did not approve of anyone becoming a father at a younger age, let alone out of wedlock. Participants’ accounts suggested that the acceptable ways of one becoming a father were being older, independent, and married with the ability of providing for the child or family. Payani, for example, stated:
You have first to go to school, get educated and if possible, you go to college. After you finish school, you have to get a job. When you start earning [money], that’s when you can get married and have a child, so that you can manage to take care of them.

Payani (father at 19 years, interviewed at 24)

Payani’s sentiments were also echoed by older fathers and other young fathers during the focus group discussions. They underscored the need for a man to be independent in terms of housing and economic provision and being married before fathering a child:

To be a father in our community, at least, you should be working on your own, you are able to provide money, and you have your own house. Not a situation where you have no house, it tends to be challenging.

Banda (father at 18 years, focus group at 21)

In a normal way, someone should have a child when they are married. That will mean that preparations will be in place, and he will be able to help the child.

Syd (43 years old, Focus group)

It was clear from the participants’ remarks that the most common community perceptions were that young fathers were ‘naughty’ and deviant. When the question: ‘How are you perceived as a young father in your community?’ was asked, Paul and Phade, for example, responded:

They look at you as someone who misbehaves or who is naughty for having children out of wedlock. Anyways, that’s how you look like; a naughty person who does not listen to what parents say.

Paul (father at 20 years, interviewed at 26)
They usually see you to be a naughty person. They want you to marry before you can have a child. If you impregnate before marriage or have a child out of wedlock, they speak negatively about you. They will look at you as a naughty person or male prostitute.

Phade (father at 20 years, interviewed at 21)

The above accounts contradict Nelson’s remarks in section 6.5.2.2. There appears to be tension between cultural norms and values associated with the status of a father and those that pertain to premarital sex and childbearing. On the one hand, as expressed by Nelson and other young fathers in this study, when they became fathers, they experience an elevation in their status as friends, family and the wider society begin to respect them. On the other hand, Paul and Phade indicated having experienced backlash from the community as they perceived them as ‘naughty’ and deviants. The word ‘naughty’ in the Zambian context carries a negative connotation when discussing sexual-related behaviours of young people. It is often associated with promiscuity (see Simpson, 2009; Zuilkowski, Henning, Zulu, & Matafwali, 2019). In the above excerpts, Paul and Phade use phrases such as ‘they look at you as someone who misbehaves’ and a ‘naughty person or like a ‘male prostitute’ to underscore how fathering a child outside marriage is associated with promiscuous sexual behaviour and is perceived as a transgression of moral standards in their society.

Other than being labelled as ‘naughty’ and deviants, some young fathers expressed that some people in their community also perceived them as ‘too young’ to impregnate someone and more so, incapable of assuming the responsibilities of a father, as demonstrated by James’s comments below:
People used to say he is not the one because he is too young…. So, when you impregnate in the community, they usually say, he is too young to have a child and he can’t manage to take care of a family. The focus is on kusamalila\(^4\) the children.

James (father at 17 years, interviewed at 23)

James’ account demonstrates how men in the participants’ society are seen as heads of the households and responsible for providing for their child and their wife. Therefore, according to James, some people in their community tend to question the ability of young men to take care of the family, including their ability to father a child. Many young fathers in this study said that there were concerns among some community members regarding their ability to economically meet adult expectations, considering that most of them were still dependent on their parents.

The participants’ accounts in this section illustrate how young fathers were either perceived as inadequate, ‘naughty’, or deviants by the community. As discussed earlier (see subsection 6.3.1), social norms in their society did not support premarital sex and childbearing outside marriage. Impregnating a woman and fathering a child out of wedlock violated the acceptable societal standards or conventional moral standards that require young people to abstain from sex and only have children when they are older (legal age i.e., 21 years old and over) and married. Likewise, becoming a father at a young age seemed to defy contemporary social expectations that require young people to adhere to the conventional ‘threshold’ or ‘normal’ life path that is, acquire education, get a job, get marriage, and then have a child (Day & Evans, 2015; Weber, 2012). Consequently, many young fathers reported that they received some negative reactions from some members of the community. Based on data from

\(^4\) Kusamalila is a native term used among the Nsenga and Chewa people of Eastern Zambia which if translated to English in a literal way would just mean to take care or to be careful. It has multiple meanings depending on the context. In this study, participants use the term to mean different roles they played in the child’s life such as providing economic support and physical care for the child.
this study, it can be argued that young fatherhood in the society where the study was conducted is perceived as a sign of disobedience and immorality.

Moreover, most of the young fathers in this study became first-time fathers before the age of 20, which suggests that they were still adolescents. During these years in the Zambian societies, adolescents are expected to be in school and they tend to have no individual sources of income. They often rely on their parents for nearly everything. Thus, when some of them became fathers, some people in the community perceived them as inadequate fathers. According to the young fathers’ accounts, some people in the community questioned their abilities to provide for the child and the mother if they decided to get married. This underscores how men who become fathers at a young age are often perceived in deficient terms when it comes to their ability to meet fatherhood expectations (Reinicke, 2021). While it may be true for some, it is not every young father that may be inadequate. However, what is evident is that most young fathers tend to struggle to provide for their children economically (Weber & Schatz, 2013). The situation tends to be even more daunting for those who lack family support.

6.5.5 The impact of being a young father

Analysis of young fathers’ accounts for this study showed that the transition to young fatherhood had both negative and positive impacts on the lives of some young men. According to the stories shared by many young fathers, they were behaviourally, socially, and economically impacted by the transition. Moreover, their transition to fatherhood also had consequences for their children and families as discussed in the following subsections.

6.5.5.1 Behavioural impact at the personal level

Findings from this study indicate that the transition to fatherhood had a positive effect on some young fathers’ behaviours. During the interview, most young fathers spoke of
becoming more responsible and hardworking following the birth of the child, as illustrated by the following accounts:

It has changed me because nowadays, I have started working hard to find support for the child…. It has also made me realise that you need to have a reason and plan if you want to have a child. You don’t just do things anyhow without a proper reason or plan. So, I have, at least, learnt one thing. I have also changed my ways when it comes to playing. I used to be playful knowing that my parents would provide everything. I never used to do piece works or anything to help me raise money because I knew they will give me. But this time, it has changed. I manage to work for myself so that I can find something to help my child. When it comes to girls, I have also changed. I can’t have sex without using a condom. I have learnt that if you have sex without a condom, you can impregnate someone.

Masauso (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

It has changed me indeed. Before I had a child or married, I used to go out and play anytime as desired but after I had children, I had to create time to be with the children. I now must think about what they have eaten in a given day, or what they need in a particular day. So, I spare time to look at how the day was for my children.

James (father at 17 years, interviewed at 23)

Change is there…. It has also taken me away from reckless life, the life of womanising. I have stopped because I now have a child. I have stopped having girlfriends because I can destroy the life of my child. You see, nowadays, girls like money. So, if I go that path, I will fail to support my child.

Fred (father at 19 years, interviewed at 21)

The above remarks by Masauso, James, and Fred are indicative of how the transition to young fatherhood was reported as a positive turning point that motivated some young men in this study to change their reckless sexual behaviours and become more responsible as
fathers (Reeves, 2006). Apparently, the unintended pregnancy and subsequent fatherhood heightened the awareness of the consequence of unprotected sex and the need to become responsible for themselves and their children. As the participants’ accounts show, the birth of the child seemed to be a strong motivation for some young fathers to make positive change in their behaviours. As a way of preventing the reoccurrence of unplanned pregnancy, some young fathers claimed that they decided to quit sexual relationships or having multiple sexual partners, while others said that they had started using condoms. Furthermore, becoming a father appeared to provide extra motivation for some young fathers to work hard by engaging in piece work and other activities that would help them raise financial resources to provide support for the child. Therefore, based on these findings, it can be argued that the transition to young fatherhood can be a transformative process or experience, and young fatherhood can be a potential platform for positive change for some young men. Findings of this study are consistent with previous studies in South Africa (e.g., Chideya & Williams, 2013; Swartz & Bhana, 2009) and the UK (e.g., Reeves, 2006; Robb, Featherstone, Ruxton, & Ward, 2017), which have found that becoming a father influences some young fathers to change their behaviours positively by becoming more responsible. For instance, Swartz et al.’s (2013) study with young fathers in South Africa found that concerns about their future ability to care for their children led to increased condom use among young fathers following the birth of the child. However, Nixon, Whyte, Buggy, and Greene (2010) assert that fatherhood may not represent a turning point in the sexual behaviour patterns for a few young men. This is consistent with the finding of the current study. A case in point in this study is James who fathered a second child before they got married with the child’s mother. This suggests that James did not change his sexual behaviours to reduce the risk of another unintended pregnancy (see subsections 6.3.2). Nevertheless, as reported by Devault et al., (2008), this

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5 Piecework is short-term informal work often low-paid (called “ganyu” in some parts of Zambia), which involves negotiation to receive in-kind payments or cash payments for the labour provided. (Phiri & Abebe, 2016; Schmitt-Harsh, Waldman, Estes, & Evans, 2020). It is unregulated work with no fixed working hours or wage period.
study found that the birth of the child for many young fathers was a wake-up call that prompted them to redefine their lives

6.5.5.2 Socioeconomic impact on the individual

Whereas the transition to fatherhood impacted some young men in a positive way in terms of sexual behaviours and responsibilities, analysis of interviews for this study also indicated that the transition into fatherhood had negative socioeconomic consequences for a few young fathers. Some young fathers spoke of how the pregnancy and the subsequent birth of the child led to a disruption of their education and expedited their entry into marriage earlier than expected, as exemplified by the following accounts:

[Fatherhood] has really changed me. I am someone that used to go to school but also doing some business. When the child was born, everything came to a standstill. I have stopped business to support the child with the money I had. With education, that’s how I stopped school after she had a child. It became difficulty, my parents could not afford to pay double, for my school and pregnancy damage. I realised also that I could not manage. That’s how I stopped my business and school. So, I took the girl and brought her home as my wife.

Emmanuel (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

These things did affect me because for me to find money while at school, it was difficult. For me to manage to provide what is needed, sometimes, I had to stay away from school to do some work so that I can manage to provide for the child.

Banda (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

The above accounts demonstrate how the transition to young fatherhood interfered with the education plans and life trajectory for a few young fathers in this study. Consistent with Futris, Olmstead, Pasley, and Nielsen’s (2012) assertion that becoming a father at a younger age accelerates role transitions for which young men are unprepared and place them at a greater risk of dropping out of school, a few young fathers in this study said that the need to
work so that they can economically provide for their children forced some of them to miss classes and eventually to drop out of school. Other young fathers stated that when their parents could not afford to simultaneously pay for their school fees and support the child, it became impossible for them to continue with school. Thus, some young fathers said that they dropped out of school and channelled the little financial resources they had towards child support. This also facilitated the decision for some to marry earlier than they had envisioned, as was the case with Emmanuel.

Other than dropping out of school, participants’ accounts also indicated that the transition into fatherhood for young men also came with extra or other associated costs, such as payments for pregnancy damages as highlighted earlier (see section 6.4), and financial losses for some young fathers owing to increased child-related expenses. Paul, for instance, had this to say:

_The coming of the child has somewhat changed me. The reason I am saying this is because I have gone some steps backwards on things I was doing. By becoming a father, I lost out. All my money for fertiliser went into buying stuff for the child. What is required for the coming of the baby is a lot. So, all the money for fertiliser went into the buying of those stuff. All my capital went and to make the matters worse, the ‘girl’ I impregnated stays far. So, I incurred huge costs on transport to bring her to the hospital. So, that’s the disadvantage of becoming a [young] father here in the villages.... It really affected me because I was young when I became a father. All the money I had went to meet the costs._

Paul (father at 20 years, interviewed at 26)

Like Emmanuel, who suggested that he sacrificed the finances of his small business to economically provide for his child, the above quote, demonstrates how the birth of the child resulted in the loss of financial capital for Paul. Farming is the main source of income for young men and the general population in the communities where this study was conducted.
In addition, fertiliser is a key catalyst to high productivity. Therefore, using money meant for fertiliser to meet the cost of preparing for the coming of the baby was a significant loss according to Paul. It meant that he could not have substantial money to support the child and meet his personal needs the following year, due to low productivity resulting from non-application of fertiliser to his crop.

What was evident in the young fathers’ accounts was that the birth of the child changed their financial priorities. With the coming of the child, it meant financial resources were no longer used to meet their individual needs only, but also those of their children, as exemplified by Oliver’s and Gabriel’s remarks below:

*Then, I didn’t have a plan or ways of finding things for the child and myself. So, I have seen some differences. When I didn’t have a child, I only used to look for things to cater for myself only but now, I have first to cater for the child then look after myself. So, things have changed.*

Oliver (father at 18 years, interviewed at 26)

*It has taken me some steps backwards because, whatever money I find, I can’t save as I have to support the child. I am failing to pick up.... Every single coin I find, I have to spend it on the child. For me to do other things, it’s quite challenging.*

Gabriel (father at 18 years, interviewed at almost 19)

Oliver’s and Gabriel’s remarks were echoed by many young fathers in this study. Similar to Chili and Maharaj’s (2015) study with young fathers in South Africa, most of the young fathers in the present study said that following the birth of the child, they started incorporating their children in their financial plans and spending and this made it difficult for some of them to make financial savings and do other personal things.

These findings demonstrate how the transition to fatherhood can have negative socioeconomic consequences for some young fathers. As the data from this study shows, the birth of the child created competing interests and priorities for some young fathers, which
required making tough life choices such as choosing between school and the child’s welfare as well as maintaining an income or fulfilling their roles as fathers. Participants’ accounts suggested that some young fathers chose to give up on their future dreams and small businesses for the sake of the child. While most of the research literature (e.g., Naudeau, Hasan, & Bakilana, 2015; Samuel, 2019) on young parenthood in Zambia has only documented the negative consequences of young parenthood on female education, this study demonstrates that young parenthood also has significant implications for the education and life trajectory of young men. Participants’ accounts illustrated that entry into fatherhood in the communities where this study was conducted facilitated some young fathers dropping out of school and getting married at a younger age. Findings of this study resonate with previous studies in sub-Saharan African countries (e.g, Mweemba & Mann, 2020; Ufashingabo, 2017), which have found that young fatherhood disrupts education pathways and the sequence of life events for some young men. For example, Mweemba and Mann’s (2020) study with young married fathers and mothers in Zambia found that the pressure to provide financial and material support for their children expedited some young fathers dropping out of school to go and work. Similarly, the study by Ufashingabo (2017) with young fathers in Rwanda found that fatherhood forced some of the young fathers who were attending school to dropout in order to look for jobs and plan their marriages.

6.5.5.3 Impact on support and wellbeing of the child

Young fathers’ accounts for this study indicated that early childbearing by young men can have negative consequences for their children. When asked how being a young father affected or impacted their child(ren), most of the young fathers spoke of their children growing up unhappy and receiving inadequate economic support and practical care, as Masauso’s and Kota’s statements below illustrate:
It has affected my child, in that, I never used to afford everything, I was still at school. So, my parents never used to manage to give my child everything. It used to affect him because I never use to take care of him properly. I channelled all my efforts to school. So, my child lacked a lot of things because I was at school.

Masauso (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

When you are a father, you are expected to manage to buy all the things needed for the child and you are expected to think like an adult not a child.... Society hopes that the father will pay for the child’s school fees, buy clothes for the child....You are expected to do all those things for the child. If you have not done that, your child grows up unhappy. He is not free when in the company of friends. It affects me and I’m not at easy because I don’t manage to provide everything for my child.....You see, in his group sometimes, he comes last, and not looking good. The clothes he wears when compared to what other wear, it does not look okay for me.

Kota (father at 15 years, interviewed at 25)

The above excerpts illustrate how, the poor socioeconomic status of young fathers can negatively impact the level of support received and the wellbeing of their child. According to Masauso, being in school at that time when he became a first-time father limited his ability to provide economic support and practical care for the child. While he acknowledged the support from his parents for his child, Masauso stated that his parents could not meet all the needs for his child, and this resulted in his child having inadequate economic support and practical care. Kota, on the other hand, indicated that because of his inability to adequately provide support for his son, he felt his child was growing up sad, lacking confidence, and feeling uncomfortable around his friends because he could not match what his friends had. Evident in the above participants’ accounts is how, many young fathers in this study felt that their children were impacted negatively. As data from this study indicated, some young fathers stated that their children received inadequate economic support and practical care because they were sometimes unavailable due to school or lacked the capacity to provide
materially and financially. According to some young fathers’ remarks, lack of adequate support in turn, affected the wellbeing of their children. As Kota claimed, when the needs of the child were not met, he felt that the child grew up unhappy with low self-esteem. Therefore, it can be argued that in communities where this study was conducted, young fatherhood may have serious consequences on the level of support and practical care for the child when young fathers are economically dependent on their parents who may have limited financial resources.

6.5.5.4 Economic impact on the family

Given the socioeconomic circumstances of young men at the time when they became first-time fathers, the findings from this study indicated that their transition into fatherhood negatively affected their families economically, as demonstrated by Paul’s remarks:

It really affected me because I was young when I became a father. All the money I had, went to meet the costs. I also made my parents suffer. For example, if they [maternal family] say we don’t have soap and I don’t have, my parents had to come in. My parents were affected because they had to take care of me and my child too. Their budget stretched…it went up because of me.

Paul (father at 20 years, interviewed at 26)

Paul’s account is illustrative of how the dependence on the family for school and child support affected the parents of many young fathers financially. According to Paul, when he could not afford to support the child financially, his parents came in and served as a buffer for economic stress, helping with meeting the needs of his child. This, in turn, created a financial burden on the family as it stretched their budget. Paul’s sentiments were also echoed by older fathers’ comments during the focus group:
Like the way I am, if my child impregnates someone, for him to appear to be a good father, it also affects me the parent. For your child to look like a good father, as a parent, you have to intervene. Maybe buy soap and give him and ask him to take it there [to the maternal family].

Syd (43 years old, Focus group)

The accounts by Paul and Syd demonstrate two important aspects: the importance of the microsystem, that is, the immediate family in providing support to young fathers and how the transition into fatherhood negatively impacts their families economically. As the above excerpts illustrate, when many young fathers lacked the means of providing support for the child, they stated that they relied on their parents who became an important source of economic support for their children. It appears that when their parents realised that their children were failing in their responsibilities as fathers, they were compelled to intervene to maintain their reputation of ‘good’ and ‘responsible’ parents and helped the young fathers. As expressed by Syd, parents desire their children to maintain the good father identity with the maternal family, as this also reflects their family image. To ensure that they maintained a good family image and a good father identity for their own child, it was reported that some parents endeavoured to provide financial and material assistance to young fathers for their children. This, in turn, affected the family finances. Therefore, it can be argued that young fatherhood can sometimes, be an economic burden to the family.

6.6 Summary and conclusion

This chapter discussed findings relating to what being a father means and young fathers’ experiences of the transition into fatherhood. The chapter revealed that entry into young fatherhood was unintentional for all young fathers in the study. Despite being unintentional, young fathers were not averse to the idea of being a father in later life.

Whereas young fathers are often depicted as ‘cavalier young males who sexually exploited their female partners, got them pregnant, and then callously abandoned them’ (Kiselica &
Kiselica, 2014, p. 260), the findings of this study suggest that most of them, in fact, do take responsibility. For a few of those who initially deny responsibility, following the birth of the child, they tend to acknowledge paternity of the child. Their decision to initially deny pregnancy and paternity responsibility is sometimes influenced by uncertainty as to whether they are responsible, lack of family support, or the influence of other people advising them to deny responsibility.

The chapter also revealed that the meaning of being a father is intertwined with male reproductive potency, masculinity, social status, and status passage in the participants’ cultural context. It was clear from the participants’ accounts that becoming a father demonstrated virility and manhood and represented a social symbol of adulthood, which enhanced and changed young men’s social status and identity. Hence, becoming a father is status passage in participant’s culture.

Importantly, the findings discussed in this chapter also suggested that the transition to fatherhood might be a transformative process or experience and young fatherhood a potential platform for positive change for some young men. It was revealed that becoming a father motivated some young fathers to change their sexual behaviour patterns and become more responsible. However, becoming a father also had negative consequences on the education and life trajectories of some young men. It was revealed that some young fathers dropped out of school to go and work to economically provide for their children, while others ended up getting married after quitting school.

Having presented and discussed what being a father means and young fathers’ experiences of the transition to fatherhood, the next chapter moves on to look at how young men construed their roles as fathers and what influenced their understanding.
Chapter 7: Construction of fatherhood roles and negotiating cultural expectations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how young fathers understand their fatherhood roles and how they negotiate differences in their fathering practices and cultural expectations. To answer these questions, the chapter begins by exploring how young fathers construct their fatherhood role and what shapes their conceptualisation of the fatherhood role. Thereafter, it delves into how young fathers negotiate cultural expectations and masculine identity.

7.2 Construction of fatherhood roles

In this study, young fathers described their roles in a similar way and drew on existing cultural discourses of good fatherhood and masculinity within their society. Predominantly, most of them often talked about their fatherhood role using an overarching concept: Kusamalila\(^6\) mwana (the child). Kusamalila is an indigenous Chewa/Nsenga\(^7\) concept that encompasses being an economic provider to your child and providing physical care to your child. In the subsequent subsections, attention is paid to how young fathers understood their fatherhood role.

7.2.1 Providing economic support

Across all interviews for this study, young fathers primarily defined their fatherhood role in terms of economic provision for their children, as this was perceived as a hallmark of being a ‘man’ and a ‘good father’. When describing their roles, young fathers often spoke of having a responsibility for providing their children with the means to go to school and providing

\(^6\) Kusamalila is a native term used among the Nsenga and Chewa people of Eastern Zambia which if translated to English in a literal way would just mean to take care or to be careful. It has multiple meanings depending on the context. In this study, participants use the term to mean different roles they played in the child’s life such as providing and supporting the child and caregiving.

\(^7\) Chewa and Nsenga are names of both the spoken languages and ethnic groups that speak the language.
material support. For example, when asked about their roles as fathers, they often mentioned providing finances and items such as bathing soap, washing powder, lotion, clothes, shoes, and food for their children, as exemplified by the interview extracts below:

*My biggest role is to provide food and clothes so that the child should be looking good.*

*So, I have to provide food, buy clothes, soap and lotion for my child.*

Isaac (father at 18 years, interviewed at 22)

*My role is to care for the child so that he dresses well. I have to buy clothes, take him to school, and looking for money so that he can be in school. That’s my major role.*

Zaire (father at 17 years, interviewed at 24)

*I do a lot for my child...... If there are things needed like school stuff, they call me the father of the child. There are a lot. So, everything that the child would cry for or need, for everything, they call me... For example, if at school they need a uniform, I have to provide. If they need books, I will be required to sort out the problem. If they need food for the child at school, it’s me as a father that will be required to handle that. Even when its school fees needed, I have to take the money there.*

Oliver (father at 18 years, interviewed at 26)

The remarks by Isaac, Oliver, and Zaire reflect the sentiments shared by other young fathers in this study. In the above interview extracts, Zaire and Isaac use phrases such as ‘my biggest role’ and ‘my major role’ respectively, to underscore the significance attached to economic provision for them as men and fathers. In the same fashion, Oliver uses the phrase such as ‘for everything, they call me’ to highlight the notion of being a ‘breadwinner’. Although there were some variations in what these young fathers provided for their children, what was common in their remarks was that they all saw themselves primarily as economic providers for their children. Even when asked about their expectations of fatherhood prior to the birth of their children, most of the young fathers predominantly identified themselves with the economic provider role. Isaac and Zaire, for example, stated:
I thought that when the child is born, I will be buying clothes, soap, and lotion, provide food so that the child can eat and when the child is bathed by the mother, he or she should be looking good.

Isaac (father at 18 years, interviewed at 22)

I thought that when my child is born, I will first love him. I will have to take care of him so that he can look good. I will be buying him clothes so that he can look good

Zaire (father at 17 years, interviewed at 24)

Perhaps this is unsurprising, given that all the young fathers in this study grew up in a society where they have been socialised to gender roles that emphasise and mandate men/fathers as economic providers or ‘breadwinners’ (Brudevold-Newman et al., 2018; Crivello & Mann, 2020). Consequently, when they became fathers, they identified themselves with the economic provider role and construed fatherhood in economic provider terms.

However, what became clear during the interviews was that when young fathers juxtaposed their expectations and actual experiences, the realities of fatherhood did not match their imaginations. Analysis of their accounts indicated that following the birth of the child, most of them struggled to raise finances to meet their fatherhood expectations. Thus, most of them described their experiences of fatherhood as difficult, as exemplified by Migo’s and Emmanuel’s comments below:

[Before the child was born] I hoped to take my child to school, provide food and ensure that he had good shelter and beddings. Those were my expectations...... [but when I compare what I thought with my experience] I would say the difference is there. Given that at that time, I was just thinking that when I grow up, I will manage everything without a problem, but things happened before I grew up and became mature enough. So, the difference that is there is that I struggle in the ways I find things. That’s why I have said, the difference is there......It has been a difficult experience. It’s different from the life I had before because if you are not a father, you have no wife, you are
taken care of by your parents. But where I am now, I have a wife and child, I do all things by myself. So, in short, I would say it’s a difficulty thing.

Migo (fathers at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

There is a big difference because I thought I will be doing well with farming, but it has not come to fruition. You see the way my life has been going, it has been hard. Life has been hard for me. I don’t even know what I can do to be a good father….. From the time I learnt that I was going to have a child and when the child was born, I started going through difficult situations; feeding the child, soap, finding ways of making my wife and child look better, it was difficult for me. It made me come to a decision that we have to do family planning so that we don’t find ourselves in the same situation.

Emmanuel (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

The above interview excerpts demonstrate how young fatherhood posed many economic challenges for many young men in this study. Many of them struggled to be financial providers as intended. Emmanuel’s remarks suggest that being a ‘good father’ is associated with economic provision in their community. Therefore, as his remarks underline, the struggle to provide economically heightened the internal conflict he felt when he realised that he may not live up to expectations. Thus, like Migo, he described his experience of fatherhood as difficult. Only four out of 24 young fathers in this study said they managed to provide economically as they had imagined. However, as they grew older and their sources of income improved, many young fathers said they were more able to meet the economic provider role. Kota, for example, had this to say:

From the time I impregnated her up to a certain age, I would say I was a bad father. I could not manage to provide what the child needed but now, I try to provide. I now manage and I can say I am a good father.

Kota (father at 15 years, interviewed at 25)

Kota’s remarks reflect the views and experiences of many young fathers in this study and demonstrate how, the ability to provide economically was associated with good fathering.
and failure to do so was equated to bad fathering. When asked who a good father was, most of the young fathers foregrounded the ability to provide for the child economically in their construction of a good father. Masauso, for example, explained:

* A good father is the one who manages to provide everything a child needs. Even if sometimes he does not manage to provide everything. He is able to provide for the child. Others are fathers just by name, but they fail to buy soap for a child. That one cannot be called a good father...... What good fathers do is that.... they buy bathing and washing soap and buy clothes [for the child and] ...... for you, who is a father to be called a man, they look at how you support your child and what you do. If you can’t support your child, they can’t see you as a real man.

Masauso (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

From Masauso’s remarks, it is evident that economic provision was not only perceived as appropriate for their gender but was also inextricably tied to men’s sense of self in relation to being a ‘real man’ and a good father in their society. Even when the young fathers in this study were aware of their limited financial abilities to live up to the economic provider expectations, they still maintained the notion of being an economic provider. This underscored how economic provision was important for young father’s sense of fatherhood identity and masculinity. Young fathers in this study were motivated to provide financially and materially for their children as this helped them to portray themselves as ‘good fathers’ and to bolster their masculinity (Weber, 2013). As data from this study suggests, failure to economically provide for the child heightened the sense of being a bad father and the stereotype of being an inadequate father. In the above excerpt, Masauso used the phrase: ‘*others are fathers just by name* ’ to justify that he was a good father because he made efforts to provide for his child despite struggling. Masauso’s remarks reflect one of the important cultural discourses of a good father shared by Syd, a 43-year older father, during a focus group discussion: ‘Like they say in our culture, even just managing to provide small things makes you a good father’. Seemingly, some young fathers in this study sometimes relied on
some of these cultural discourses to discursively negotiate the bad and inadequate father identity. Such cultural phrases appear to serve as powerful discursive resources for making sense of their identity as good fathers. Kota, for example, conveyed the following sentiments:

What makes men good fathers is that they manage to provide everything for the.... child....... I try to provide for my child, even if now, I am not that old, I have no money quite alright, but I try at my age to provide for him. I have not received any report from school that my child has been sent home because there is no money for school fees. I manage to do things for him.

Kota (father at 15 years, interviewed at 25)

In the above quotation, Kota expresses fatherhood in economic provider terms. He appears to show awareness of the existing negative cultural stereotypes highlighted in the previous chapter that assume that young fathers are inadequate. He tries to challenge such assumptions based on his efforts to provide the means of going to school for his child. Not receiving reports of the child being chased from school for financial-related problems provides Kota with a sense of satisfaction that he is a ‘good father’. For him, this is an indication that, despite being young, with limited financial resources, he is not inadequate, as he is able to meet the expectations of economic provision for his child.

The accounts by young fathers demonstrate how, most of them in this study primarily identified with the role of economic provider. Consistent with research literature in the US (Paschal et al., 2011; Silverstein et al., 2002), their remarks underscore how a good father is construed as an economic provider. Young fathers identified themselves with this hegemonic fatherhood role because societal expectations of fatherhood and norms of masculinity within their society prescribed so. Therefore, it can be argued that identifying with the role of the economic provider provided them with an opportunity and benefits of negotiating the inadequate father identity. These findings mirror the study by Brudevold-Newman et al. (2018), on traditional parenting and childcare practices in Zambia with older married fathers.
and mothers. The study revealed that a father’s role in the Zambian society mainly tends to be situated outside of the household and centres on providing financial and material support for the child. Similar studies in the US and South Africa with young fathers have also shown how the majority of young men tend to define fatherhood primarily in financial and material provider terms (Chideya & Williams, 2013; Madiba & Nsiki, 2017; Paschal et al., 2011) and equate a good father to a good economic provider (Paschal et al., 2011). Despite seeing themselves primarily as economic providers, young fathers in this study seemed to reject the notion that economic provision was the only ‘marker’ of being a good father. They regarded other roles, such as positive role modelling and being a moral and spiritual teacher/guide as equally important and representing good fathering. This is discussed in the following section.

7.2.2 Moral and/or spiritual teacher and guide.

The study found that in addition to seeing themselves as economic providers, half of the young fathers in this study also identified themselves with the role of moral teacher and guide. Kota, for example, had this to say:

*Society hopes that the father will...... teach the child how to respect people and live with people...[Thus], a good father gives good advice, should teach a child traditions and rules, [as well as] how to talk to elderly people...... [When I spend time with my child], before we do anything else, I also spend time teaching him about respect. I tell him, ‘When at school, respect the teacher and when you are here at home respect people’. That’s what I like telling my child. I also tell him that ‘if you want to grow up responsibly, you need to know how to work’.*

Kota (father at 15 years, interviewed at 25)

Teaching and offering guidance to children on various aspects, such as respect and good behaviour, emerged as a central part of fatherhood roles for some young fathers. What was
evident in these young fathers’ accounts was that providing guidance and teaching their children good behaviour and social values demonstrated that they were ‘good’ and responsible fathers. Thus, failure to do so would suggest being a bad and irresponsible father, as illustrated by Zaire’s and Migo’s remarks below:

A bad father is a person who does not want to be close to children to teach them good behaviour.

Zaire (father at 17 years, interviewed at 24)

A bad father is the one who can’t manage what I said... [he] does not teach and guide a child. In short, he does not care in anyways. Such [a person] is a bad father because when you have a child you are supposed kusamalila.

Migo (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

What was also apparent in the young fathers’ accounts was an emphasis on the need for them to serve as positive role models to their children, as this would portray them as good and responsible fathers. During the interviews, six of the young fathers in this study underscored the need for them to be a good example to their children. Migo, for example, shared the following remarks:

You see, children sometimes imitate their parents. So, when you are with a child as a father you must teach your child good behaviours and how to live with people. If you have friends who fight, you can’t be around such people when you are with your child. if you or your friends are insulting someone, your child may begin to imitate you. Ensure that when you meet your friends, respect is demonstrated, and your child will imitate good behaviours...... When you are with your child, you must show good behaviour because if you demonstrate bad behaviour like insulting someone that visits you, the child will start imitating you. When the child goes to play, he or she will replicate that insulting behaviour that he or she got from you. So, when you are with
your child, you must make sure you demonstrate good behaviour so that your child should imitate you.

Migo (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

Migo’s remarks above are indicative of the awareness of the powerful influence that parents have on moulding their children’s behaviours and social values. He placed emphasis on the need for fathers to live an exemplary life for their children as an important fathering practice. Similar sentiments were also echoed by Mwape, who highlighted the need for a father to lead by example, as illustrated by the following comments:

When a father is with his children, he should show that he is an adult person at home.

He is supposed to demonstrate respect so that he can teach children respect.

Mwape (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

Mwape uses the phrase, ‘he should show that he is an adult person at home’, to underscore the need for fathers to act or conduct themselves with maturity and wisdom in the presence of their children, considering that they are expected to be positive role models for their children.

Whereas most of the young fathers interviewed only placed emphasis on the role of a moral teacher and guide, a few of them felt that it was also their responsibility as fathers to offer spiritual teaching or guidance to their children. During the interviews, James and Kota recounted how they offered their children spiritual guidance or teaching in addition to the economic provider and moral teacher roles:
I have a good relationship with my children because I stay with them. I teach them good behaviours and how they should live with people. I also teach them religious things and I go with them to church.... For us people to say someone is a good father, we look at how he does Kusamalila his children. We look at his way of living.... What does he teach his children? Those are things we look at when determining a good father.

James (father at 17 years, interviewed at 23)

[When we spend time together with my son], we also watch films together. I like watching with him Christian movies that teach about Jesus so that he grows in an upright way. Sometimes, I just get and read the Bible for him and discuss it with him.

Kota (father at 15 years, interviewed at 25)

The above statements highlight how religion uniquely impacted the ways in which James and Kota viewed, interpreted, and expressed fatherhood. Although the nature of the activities they engaged in with their children were different, both Kota and James felt that it was important for their children to be brought up with a Christian ethos and values. While there were only a few young fathers that explicitly talked about offering spiritual guidance and teaching to their children, this does not mean that some young fathers who did not express it were not doing it. The society where the study was conducted is predominantly Christian with a mix of Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. In this setting, some of the cultural meanings and ideals of fatherhood are deeply rooted in Christianity. Consequently, it is not uncommon to find the Christian religion intrinsic in the fatherhood roles and practices for those who are committed to its ideals. As seen from the above interview extract, James said that his children attended church with him, while Kota claimed that his child’s life was guided by Christian movies and biblical teachings, something that reflected their religious practices and beliefs. However, research literature also suggests that whilst religion is strongly evident and important in the Zambian society (see Holder, Coleman, Krupa, &
Krupa, 2016; Lindsey, Kay, Jeanes, & Banda, 2017), it may not occupy a significant place in the lives of some young people (Lindsey et al., 2017). Moreover, in most Christian churches in Zambia, the role of teaching children is left to the church through Sunday school classes, and this could explain why some of them might not have seen it as their role. However, as earlier discussed, norms of masculinity and cultural discourses of good fatherhood in their society place a great deal of emphasis on economic provision. Perhaps this may also explain to some extent why most young fathers in this study could not identify themselves with the role of a spiritual guide and teacher but instead saw themselves primarily as economic providers.

The participants’ remarks in this subsection exemplify how some young fathers in this study construed fatherhood in terms of moral and/or spiritual teaching and guide. It appears being a moral and/or spiritual teacher and guide represented an alternative to the economic provider role for some young fathers and a more realistic and achievable way of depicting themselves as good and responsible fathers. Therefore, for these young fathers, becoming a father also entails becoming a positive role model to the child (Devault et al., 2008).

7.2.3 Caregiving, ‘it’s everyone’s responsibility’

Traditionally, caregiving has been viewed as a province for women in Zambian society (Brudevold-Newman et al., 2018; Crivello & Mann, 2020). While this has been the long-standing perception, many participants in this study felt that this should not be the case. During the interviews, many participants stated that caregiving was a responsibility of both the mother and father because, in their view, the child does not belong to a woman alone. This contradicts matrilineal cultural beliefs around children discussed in Chapter 2, as illustrated by the remarks below:
When we are just the two of us [with my son], I must cook for him and bath him when the mother is not around so that she finds him clean. Then, the mother will know that I love my child. That way, she will also know that I also do what she does.... A father should love his child, bath him, cook for him, wash for him, and do men’s jobs. When a child is born, he or she is not just for the women but for both of you. You should both love your child.

Jattomoya (father at 15 years, interviewed at 21)

It’s everyone’s responsibility and it’s not one person’s child. So, when the mother goes away, I have to ensure the child eats, baths, and I cook even if they laugh [at me] .... I don’t listen to such people [who laugh at me for doing care activities] because a child does not only belong to one person. So, I make sure when the mother is not around, I cook for my child, and bath him. So, even if they laugh, I can’t follow what they think. The child belongs to both of us. So, if they only want you to be looking for food, what will happen if the mother goes away, should the child die with hunger.

Migo (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

Despite claiming that caregiving was everyone’s responsibility, Jattomoya’s and Migo’s accounts highlight the ambivalences expressed by many young fathers in this study. The use of the phrases such as ‘when the mother is not around’ and ‘when the mother goes away’ appeared to suggest that participation in care activities tends to be contextual. They engage in care activities only when the child’s mother is unavailable or unwell. This, to some extent, signifies that caregiving was less commonly understood as a father’s role but something extra that they engaged in to ‘help out’ mothers (Garcia, 2012).

However, there were notable differences in how caregiving was talked about between young fathers who were married at the time of the study and those that were unmarried. For most young fathers who were still unmarried and not living with their children, caregiving seemed to be rather embraced as a responsibility and a way of being involved in the physical care of
the child. Often, these respondents used phrases such as ‘when the mother is not around’ or ‘when the mother is not there or away’ in instances when the child’s mother had left the child in their custody, or they had picked up the child themselves to spend time together at their residential place. Vincent, for example, expressed the following:

When I am with my son and the mother is not there, when he starts crying, I go with him to the market and buy him some bananas and play with him. That way the child feels happy.... The other thing I do is to carry him on my back. You see, children like crying when the mother is not around. So, you have to carry him on your back and play with him...... Like I said, sometimes, I play with him. Sometimes, when I get him in the morning, by noon I have to bath him. Then, when taking him back in the evening, if I have money, I do buy him some soap and give it to the mother. Often, when he comes home, I have to cook for him and feed him.

Vincent (father at 16 years, interviewed at 21)

Vincent’s remarks highlight how many young fathers who were not living with their children interchanged roles. On the one hand, when the child was in their custody, they assumed traditionally female gender roles while on the other hand, when returning the child to the mother, they reverted to the so-called ‘masculine’ gender roles, for example, economic provision.

For some young fathers, acknowledging caregiving as their responsibility and engaging in care activities appears to be important for their image and reputation as fathers. Paul, for example, had this to say:

Nowadays, when you become a father...you are expected to take your children to the hospital when they get sick for them to remain healthy. You are also expected to support children at home.... A good father... manages to have good times with his children. He finds time to be there for his children at home...... [and] manages to
appease a child, even when the child is crying. He understands a child. When the child is sick, he manages to take the child to the clinic. That way you remain a good father.

Paul (father at 20 years, interviewed at 26)

In the above account, Paul claims that the culture and conduct of fatherhood were changing and caregiving was becoming an important component of good fathering alongside the provider role. His comments contradict Migo’s account earlier where he expressed that people in the community laugh at those who embrace what is seen as ‘women’s work’. In the above excerpt, Paul presents the notion that the contemporary lens through which good fatherhood is determined includes ‘being there’, being involved in the care of the child, and the provision of economic support. Perhaps the fact that Migo was married, and Paul was not, could explain the differences in their experiences. Gender roles seemed to be rigid within the marriage domain and doing care activities might have been deemed inappropriate for Migo as a married man, as illustrated by Isaac’s and Wilson’s remarks below:

I play with my child, lifting her and laughing together while we play...... [However], I don’t bath her but the mother. I can’t do that she a girl but cooking for her I do when the mother is sick. When she is around, I can’t do that, that’s a woman’s job. Even the mother stops me from doing that because she thinks it would suggest that she is not cultured and not taught well by her parents. Culturally, a man is not supposed to be touching a pot when the wife is around.

Isaac (father at 18 years, interviewed at 22)

When [we are two of us and] the child is hungry, I prepare porridge and give him. So, I cook for the child. Sometimes, when the mother is away and maybe she forgot to tell me what to give the child, I have to figure out. After eating, I have to give the child some water to drink. The child sometimes, indicates what he wants, and I give him as way of responding to his needs. When [people] find me [doing care activities], I don’t feel okay because that’s women’s work. People expect to find me doing men’s work....
When the mother is busy, you can play with your child, and feed the child. But of course, when the mother is around, I can’t bath the child.

Wilson (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

The above quotations by Isaac and Wilson highlight how cultural norms tend to regulate the participation of men as fathers in what are perceived as traditionally feminine gender roles within households. In the above interview extracts, both Wilson and Isaac state that ‘but of course, when the mother is around, I can’t bath the child’ and ‘when she is around, I can’t do that, that’s a woman’s job’, respectively, to underline that many aspects of caregiving were not a father’s role but that of the child’s mother. As with other young fathers in this study, Isaac’s and Wilson’s interpretation and expression of fatherhood were influenced by the cultural norms that prescribed what they could and could not do as men and fathers within the domain of marriage. As seen from the excerpts above, Isaac stated that he could not take part in some care activities such as cooking in his home when the child’s mother was available. Furthermore, he claimed that he could not bath his daughter because it was culturally inappropriate for him as a man and father to do so. In a similar fashion, Wilson was uncomfortable performing ‘feminine’ gender roles both publicly and privately because society expected him as a man to perform ‘masculine’ gender roles. Young fathers who were married at the time of the study appeared to be more sensitive to cultural norms that prescribed and promoted rigid gender roles within the household or domain of marriage. Previous studies in Zambia, such as that by Mubita (2021) with older married fathers, have reported that when married men engage in childcare they sometimes encounter or experience negative reactions. Paul’s remarks regarding caregiving as a contemporary expectation for men as fathers seemed to reflect and be influenced by the prevailing calls by the government through the 2012 National Health Policy for men’s involvement in antenatal and postnatal care of their children (Ministry of Health, 2012). However, there is still some reported resistance from men to being involved in care work, maybe due to fears that they might be ridiculed for participating in what they describe as ‘women’s private activities’ (Muloongo
et al., 2019, p. 1). This policy appears to portray involved men as good and caring husbands or fathers. Perhaps, for some of the young fathers in this study, including Paul, acknowledging and engaging in caregiving served as a resource to portray themselves as caring, involved, responsible, and good fathers in the face of financial struggles and the negative stereotypes that portray them as irresponsible, unsupportive, and absent from the child’s life (Nawa, 2018).

These accounts of participants in this section demonstrate how cultural norms in their society limit or restrict men’s roles in childrearing within households. Bornstein and Cheah (2006, p. 19) assert that ‘cultures provide their members with implicit or explicit models for childrearing’, which ‘include when and how to care for children…, which parenting practices are accepted or expected’. Findings from the current study corroborate those from the previous study by Crivello and Mann (2020) with married young fathers and mothers in Zambia, which showed that parenting roles in rural and urban Zambia are highly gender-differentiated and childrearing, particularly, caregiving and nurturing, continues to be seen as the responsibility of women within households.

Irrespective of their perception of the caregiving role and their marital statuses at the time of study, many young fathers in this study claimed to have been performing different care activities when they spent time with their children, albeit to a varying degree. The care activities that were often mentioned included bathing, washing, cooking, feeding the child, taking the child to the clinic, taking a walk with the child, watching over the child, as well as playing with the child, as illustrated by the stories shared by young fathers earlier in this subsection. These activities reflect three paternal functions: protection, formation (socialisation), and caregiving, within the involved fathering model proposed by Gavin et al. (2002). However, young fathers’ accounts also indicated some differences in the nature of the care activities that they engaged in with their children and the time they spent doing such activities. Notwithstanding these differences and participants’ marital statuses at the
time of the study, a similar pattern of the context in which they engaged in caregiving was noted. Across all interviews, young fathers indicated that they took part in care activities when the child’s mother was not around or was unwell, which suggested that they spent less time participating in caregiving than mothers. This echoes research literature in many settings, which has shown that (young) mothers shoulder the larger part and vast majority of care responsibilities for children (Bellamy & Banman, 2014; Wall & Arnold, 2007).

This study illustrates how young fathers construed their roles as fathers in quite traditional terms common in the context of a patriarchal society. At the same time, many of them felt that caregiving should be embraced by fathers alongside other stereotypical masculine gender roles, and they engaged in different care activities. Consistent with research literature such as Crivello and Mann (2020), their remarks suggested that caregiving was less commonly understood as a father’s role but mainly perceived as a mother’s responsibility. As also hinted at by young fathers’ comments that when they engaged in caregiving activities, they were laughed at, it indicates that some people in their community still believe that childcare is still reserved primarily for mothers (Steinour, 2018). Based on the data for this study, it can be argued that for some young fathers on the one hand, participation in caregiving signified moral duty or lending a helping hand to the child’s mother. For others, on the other hand, it served as a resource to negotiate the negative stereotypes and portray themselves as involved, caring, and good fathers.

7.3 Fathering philosophies: learning what (not) to do as a young father

This section explores what shapes young fathers’ understanding of fatherhood roles and fathering. As discussed in section 3.5, the literature reviewed indicated that fatherhood and fathering is influenced by multiple factors. Data analysis for this study reaffirmed this position. By drawing on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979,1986) ecological system theory, this section demonstrates how young fathers modelled their fathering roles on a wide range of sources and influences, including drawing on their own childhood experiences of being
parented as well as what they were taught, what they observed and imitated within their microsystem. It further demonstrates how the existing gender constructs and relations as well as the social constructs of masculinity situated within the macrosystem informed them of what they could and could not do as fathers, as discussed below.

7.3.1 Fatherhood role socialization

Analysis of interviews for this study indicated that for a few young fathers, their own childhood experiences of being parented had a significant influence on how they perceived and enacted their roles with their own children. During interviews, these young fathers expressed fond memories of their own parents providing care and support for them and how that became a central part of their decisions on what to do for their own children when they became first-time fathers. For example, Jattomoya and Migo recounted:

\[
\text{I... started remembering... how my dad used to do things. I saw how he used to buy food and clothes. He loved me. So, I just told myself, that's what is needed even for me.} \\
\text{Jattomoya (father at 15 years, interviewed at 21)}
\]

\[
\text{I knew from the way my parents used to take care of me. They used to do everything for me. So, I also knew that when I have a child, all the things that my parents used to do for me, I should also do for my child.} \\
\text{Migo (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)}
\]

Jattomoya’s and Migo’s accounts highlight the importance of the immediate family in playing the role of primary socialisation. Their childhood experiences with their own parents laid the foundation on which they moulded their own style of parenting. Both Jattomoya and Migo appeared to have had a positive childhood experience with their own parents, which motivated them to replicate it with their own children when they became fathers.

Being taught and guided by adults was one of the most recurrent themes, as young fathers spoke of the different ways in which they came to learn what to do when they became first-time fathers.
time fathers. Research literature such as Banda and Morgan (2013) suggest that being educated by experienced adults seems to be the traditional way many young people learn various practices in the Zambian society. The findings from the present study support this view. Most young fathers often cited either their own fathers or grandfathers as people that primarily taught and provided guidance to them relating to fatherhood, as demonstrated by the following remarks from Nelson and Vincent:

*When I became a father at that time, I had my grandpa. He is the one that taught me what to do. He told me: ‘at this age that you have reached, you have to find and provide this and that for your child’. He was the one who also enlightened me on preparations for the coming of the baby.*

Nelson (father at 19 years, interviewed at 27)

*The way I knew about what to do was during the time I was called for discussions after I impregnated the girl. I was told that now that you are going to be a father you need to change. You need to be doing this and that. My father told me that I now have to ensure that when I do some piece works, I should buy soap, lotion or clothes and take there for the child.*

Vincent (father at 16 years, interviewed at 21)

Vincent’s and Nelson’s remarks illustrate the important role of members of the young fathers’ microsystem in performing the formal socialisation roles such as teaching, guiding, and advising young fathers relating to roles of a father.

Whereas most of the young fathers reported being taught and advised by either their own fathers or grandfathers, some of them cited other members of their support system as people who guided them on what to do as fathers. Among the notable mentors or teachers often mentioned by young fathers in this study were friends, cousins, uncles, and other adults in their community who were experienced fathers, as exemplified by the following statements:
Some adults guided me about it and when I failed in my roles, I would go back and consult. Then, they would enlighten me.

Enerst (father at 20 years, interviewed at 33)

I knew when my uncle told me that I am now a grown person. Those things we used to do for you, we have stopped, and you have to do things on your own. They gave me land and told me that I should be doing a vegetable garden [to help me raise finances to support my child].

Emma (father at 20 years, interviewed at 24)

Some people told me that I should be doing this and that. So, I follow those things and do them. There are people we interact with, like friends; they do advise you like ‘that path you want to take is not okay and take it this way’. For example, a friend of mine from our village advised me a lot on what to do. When I have a problem, I also go to him and explain that I am experiencing a problem in this area. Then, he advises me what to do and things work out......At home, I have a cousin called Peter. He advised me that for your house to be respected, you must have soap and lotion.

Wilson (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

While a few young fathers expressed that the experiences of being taught and parented by their own fathers provided an important foundation for their own parenting, most young fathers (15 out of 24) in this study did not mention their own fathers as people who served as their role models that is, people whom they emulated. Instead, they spoke of observing and imitating other individuals whom they idolised, shared a close relationship with or perceived to possess good qualities of a father. Often, they cited their grandfathers, uncles, neighbours, cousins and married older brothers, including, in rare instances, their friends who were also fathers. Isaac, for example, felt that his uncle and grandfather were good fathers and worthy of emulating:
Like my uncle and grandpa, they are good fathers. They work hard, when they get paid, they buy everything at home so as kusamalila their children... I... observed people like my uncle, he has a good job, and he gets some good money. I wish to be like him but its only that there are no jobs.

Isaac (father at 18 years, interviewed at 22)

Isaac’s account underlines the importance and influence of the extended family in the lives of young people in the Zambian context. His uncle as a social father became an important resource on which he drew his own fathering style when he became a father.

For Paul, it was his own married older brothers who served as his role models. However, he was mindful of which brothers were good role models in the family, as expressed below:

I observed how other people cared for their children, for example, I have some brothers who are married. So, they have been my examples. But of course, there are good and bad examples in our family.

Paul (father at 20 years, interviewed at 26)

Surprisingly, for Fred, although he acknowledged being advised by his own parents when he became a first-time father, during the interview, he only talked about emulating his own friends. When asked, how did you know what to do as a father? He responded:

For me to really know things that I had to do, my parents sat me down. They explained to me that ‘you must stop being playful now that you are a father. If you continue being playful, your child will suffer, and you will see that for yourself. So, get you acts together so that you can help your child... I also learnt through friends. I have some friends who are also fathers. I saw that when they became fathers, they would go for piece works. So, I also started doing that and I realised that if I don’t, there is nothing that I am going to achieve. There is a friend of mine I imitate. His name is John, he does that a lot. So, I decided to join him together with other people in the community so that I can be given something [money]. It did not matter even if it was small.
In the above excerpt, Fred highlights that while his parents provided counsel regarding fatherhood, his peers were an important resource for understanding and navigating fatherhood roles. Their experience and resourcefulness when they became first-time fathers in a community that is characterised by the lack of employment opportunities caught his attention and he wanted to be like them. They helped him to understand that he had to work hard to meet the economic provider expectations. McLeod (2016) asserts that individuals are more likely to gravitate towards and imitate people whom they perceive to be like them and where there are associated benefits of identifying with them. Perhaps, this could be the reason why Fred only mentioned his peers as people he imitated. John and other friends were also young fathers and they helped to link him to piecework opportunities, which bolstered his ability to provide economic support for his child.

While nearly all the young fathers in this study only spoke of male figures with regards to their socialisation of fatherhood roles, uniquely, one young father claimed that his own mother was instrumental in ensuring that he was competent of what to do as a young father. When asked how he knew what to do as a father, Lawrence had this to say:

*What I used to do is when I sit down with my mom, she used to give me ideas. She would say that ‘now that you have a wife and a child, you need Kusamalila them’.*

Lawrence (father at 16 years, interviewed at 18).

At the time of the study, Lawrence was married and, together with his wife and child, was living with his mother. He lost his father prior to the birth of his child. Following the death of his father, Lawrence appeared to have maintained a strong bond with his mother, such that time and time again, he sought counsel from her when he became a father. This finding echoes those of previous studies in the UK (e.g., Robb, 2020; Robb et al., 2017), which have highlighted the important role of female figures in the lives of young fathers from fractured families.
Participants’ remarks in this section are indicative of how parents play the primary fatherhood role socialisation with the wider family and community playing the secondary role. Okagaki and Divecha (1993) assert that childrearing can be influenced by several sources and influences, including social networks outside a home and one’s own parents inside a home. However, young fathers’ own parents were not the most important and influential people regarding their paternal behaviour or fathering and understanding fatherhood, but the wider family constituting uncles, elder brothers, and grandfathers. Significantly, the findings of this study demonstrate how grandfathers are the most influential people who serve as both role models and teachers to young fathers regarding fatherhood in communities where this study was conducted. These findings contrast with those of previous studies in the US (e.g., Maiden, 2013; Paschal, 2003), which found that parents tend to be the most important and influential role models. These differences could be attributed to different cultural settings. In the Zambian context, the extended family plays an important role in the lives of children (Taylor, 2006).

Based on data from this study, it can be argued that sometimes, the philosophy of what constitutes fathering practices for some (young) fathers is born out of childhood experiences with their own parents, teachings and guidance received, and fathering practices from other members of their social network.

This subsection has discussed how teachings and guidance, childhood memories of being parented, and observed parenting styles of people in their social network influenced some young fathers’ own fathering. The next subsection turns attention to how gender dynamics and ideologies shape young fathers’ construction of fatherhood.

7.3.2 Gender constructs and relations

In this study, the influence of cultural beliefs and norms about gender and gender relations on young fathers, manifested in their expressed attitudes towards certain childcare activities...
and the accounts of the roles they claimed to play for their children. This is exemplified by the following interview extracts:

_I do cook for her because that’s my child. I can’t be keeping a child the whole day hungry. But when it comes to bathing, I can’t do that because she a girl. So, I call a woman to bath her._

Gabriel: (father at 18 years, interviewed at almost 19)

_When he sleeps, I put him to bed. I also cook for him when the mother is not around. When he is crying for Super Shake, I have to buy for him that...[and] I also bath him since he is a boy._

Lawrence (father at 16 years, interviewed at 18)

The above statements by Gabriel and Lawrence and that of Isaac in section 7.2.3 underscore how, most young fathers in this study were caught in a tension between personal sense of moral duty and wanting to portray themselves as responsible or good fathers, on the one hand and adhering to rigid gender roles and relations on the other hand. As the above accounts suggest, when the child’s mother was unavailable or sick, nearly all the young fathers in this study felt that they had a moral duty to perform some ‘feminine’ gender roles, such as cooking and feeding their children. Nonetheless, further participation in certain care activities such as bathing a child was contingent on the sex of the child. When the child was a boy, some young fathers found it easier to defy traditional gender roles and perform many of the perceived or supposedly feminine gender roles including bathing a child. In contrast, when the child was a girl, as was the case with Isaac and Gabriel, it was difficult for some young fathers in this study to take part in certain caregiving roles, as social norms restricted or precluded them from doing so. Virtually every society has cultural beliefs and norms about gender and fatherhood which define what roles and behaviours are appropriate for

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8 Super shake is a milk drink.
women/mothers and men/fathers. These norms and beliefs have their roots in the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) and shape the activities of the lower order systems: micro-, meso-, and ex-osystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Young fathers in this study seemed to be aware of the socio-cultural norms of how a father is expected to behave and relate to a girl child in their society. Thus, those that had daughters said that they had to delegate the responsibility of bathing the child to women who shared the same sex as the child to avoid being shamed by society or accused of sexual inappropriateness. The next subsection focuses on how cultural expectations of men influenced young fathers’ choices of fatherhood roles.

7.3.3 Social construct of masculinity

Analysis of young fathers’ interviews for this study showed a connection between the primary fatherhood role adopted and enacted by young fathers and cultural expectations of men as fathers in their society. As discussed earlier (see subsection 7.2.1), economic provision was regarded as central to men’s constructions of masculine self in the participants’ society. Young fathers in this study seemed to be aware that being unsuccessful with the economic provider role, heightened the feeling of their ‘manliness’ being called into question. Nelson, for instance, had this to say during the interview:

A man is expected to be a hard worker. You should show that where you come from, you provide everything. If you can’t, your manliness is called into question.... Such things affect me and that’s why as a father, I work hard, but the money I get is very little. That’s why I said it’s sad that my school got disturbed. I wished to work for the government so that I can get adequate money to cater for everything.... I try even if it’s little money. It’s better to continue working hard to be able to provide. It’s just that you can’t provide everything that is expected.

Nelson (father at 19 years, interviewed at 27)
From the accounts shared by the participants in this study, it was apparent that the dominant construction of what it means to be a man, for fathers in their society, centred on economic provision and this influenced their construction of fatherhood roles. Across all interviews, young fathers drew on existing cultural discourses of masculinity and underscored how they had to work hard to economically provide for their children. Although this may have been difficult and demanding for them given their age, they often positioned themselves as economic providers. Bhana and Nkani (2014, p. 343) posit that ‘young fathers’ conceptualisations of their roles and responsibilities are embedded in complex gender dynamics and constructions of masculinity.’ Findings of this study support this view. Like many young fathers in this study, Nelson put a great deal of emphasis on the notion of economic provision as this reflects manliness in their society. In the above account, he speaks with an awareness of cultural expectations pertaining to masculinity and fatherhood. Thus, he was influenced to work hard to meet the cultural expectations.

Young fathers’ accounts of the cultural discourse of what it means to be a man and a father were also echoed by older fathers in the focus group. For example, Nuzulu explained:

*To be manly or describing someone as a man, it means that they put that person on the level of people that manage to provide everything at home. For example, providing food and clothing for the children, farming, and he has a vegetable garden, which means food is readily available at home. In short, he has means of finding money. Then, people would say ‘that one is a man’.*

Nuzulu (52 years old, focus group)

The above remarks by Nelson and Nuzulu demonstrate how social expectations or the cultural discourse of what it means to be a man, influence individuals’ expression, interpretation, and enactment of fatherhood. As data from this study suggests, young fathers strived to work hard to become economic providers and achieve the status of ‘manliness’. Despite encountering financial challenges, they conformed to existing norms of masculinity.
by adopting the hegemonic ideology of fatherhood that positioned men as economic providers. This appeared to be significant for them because economic provisions helped them to portray themselves as good fathers and bolster their masculinity (Weber, 2013). This reflects the power of masculinity ideologies in shaping fatherhood. In this context, Connell’s (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity provides useful insights into understanding the choices young fathers made in taking up the economic provider role. It was clear from their accounts that in their society, hegemonic masculinity underscores economic provision. Therefore, the primary fatherhood roles young fathers identified with were ‘expressed in terms of popular images and social icons about fathers and fathering that are deeply embedded in the culture’ (Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006, p. 160). Young fathers were aware that being an economic provider represented the currently most honoured way of being a man within their society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Consequently, they positioned themselves in relation to economic provision and worked hard to meet the economic provider expectations which all men in their society are measured against to be perceived as good fathers (ibid). Dick (2011) asserts that the fathering roles that men enact are influenced by the existing cultural dynamics and ideologies of how men should be as fathers and the conduct of fatherhood. It was evident in the current study that young fathers’ understanding of fatherhood primarily in economic provider terms was tied to notions of masculinity and good fatherhood. These findings resonate with those of Cao and Lin (2019) in China, which have shown how young fathers conform to the prevailing and dominant construction of ideal fatherhood. Their study showed how young fathers strived to provide a stable material life or construct positive prospects for their children as this represented a masculine role for fathers in their cultural context.

7.4 Negotiating cultural expectations and masculine identity

This study also examined contemporary cultural expectations of fatherhood in the participants’ society and their own fathering practice. It sought to understand how young
fathers negotiated and dealt with differences, if any. Analysis of interviews for this study with young fathers indicated that differences existed between societal expectations and some of their fathering practices based on the reactions they received from the community. What was apparent in participants’ accounts was that contemporary societal expectations in the study setting emphasised financial and material provision as well as moral teaching and not nurturing and caregiving roles. Across all interviews, participants spoke of how society hopes that men as fathers would teach their children how to respect people and provide financial and material support for their children. When asked, what they thought is expected of a father these days, Mwape and Zaire, for example, responded:

*He must work for the child, teach a child respect and how to live with others..... They[society] hope that, as a father, you must look for money and then give the mother to buy clothes or food for children. They think bathing a child is not something a man can manage to do. They only think of a man as someone who looks for money or food, not bathing or cooking and feeding a child. They believe that a man should just look for money and other things, bring them home and give the women who have that responsibility of cooking.*

Mwape (father at 18 years, interview 20)

*Society expects you] to be buying clothes for the children so that they can be looking good. Then, when a child grows up, he or she needs to go to school. So, you should support the child, pay for his or her school fees until he or she completes school. You are also expected to teach a child to have respect for other people.... For people to say you are a man, you are expected to work hard so that you can manage Kusamalila your family. They will look at your deeds, hard work and how you support your children.*

Zaire (father at 17 years, interviewed at 24)
The remarks by Mwape and Zaire are indicative of how economic provision and moral teaching are associated with men in the participants’ society. As discussed in the previous sections, economic provision is central to the construction of good fatherhood and masculine identity in participants’ culture. As such, men strive to adhere to ‘masculine’ gender roles, as roles such as bathing, cooking, and feeding a child are perceived as women’s responsibilities. Consequently, some young fathers who claimed that when they engaged in what were perceived as ‘non-traditional’ fathering roles, said they experienced some backlash from some sections of society, as demonstrated by the following excerpts:

They say I am stupid, how can I be doing that, and where is the mother of the child. Particularly, when it comes to washing for the child, people laugh at me.

Fred (father at 19 years, interviewed at 21)

Some say: ‘Why are you bathing your children? Have you become a woman for you to be bathing a child?’

Mwape (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

Well, some say I know how kusamalila my child, but others do laugh at me. They say, why does he bath a child when the mother is around, maybe the mother of the child ran away.

Zaire (father at 17 years, interviewed at 24)

Consistent with Brescoll and Uhlmann’s (2005) study in the US, which found that people respond negatively to men and women that do not conform to traditional gender roles, some young fathers in the current study said they received some negative reactions from some people in their communities for engaging in ‘feminine’ gender roles. As the above accounts indicate, some of the young fathers were ridiculed, teased, and laughed at when found doing caregiving activities. These reactions suggest that by participating in care activities, young fathers did not engage in appropriate roles (Merla, 2008). They had violated or transgressed
their expected roles, such as economic provision, and norms of their gender by assuming ‘feminine’ roles (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005; Hunter, 2018). In the present study, only five young fathers expressed being praised and encouraged for participating in childcare tasks.

Research literature indicates that older fathers who receive negative reactions for engaging in ‘unconventional’ roles utilise different strategies to negotiate cultural expectations and masculine identity (Hunter, 2018; Medved, 2016; Merla, 2008; Mubita, 2021). Findings of this study suggest that some young fathers also employed one or more strategies, like the ones older fathers employed as discussed below.

Whereas cultural expectations and norms of masculinity emphasised economic provision and moral teaching to the exclusion of caregiving and nurturing, in what constituted good fathering and masculine identity, the majority of the young and older fathers that took part in this study rejected this notion. For example, David stated:

*Society hopes that you will teach the child different ways of life, because wherever he goes and anything that he does, the blame will be apportioned on his father. When the child is taught where he goes, people can acknowledge that, indeed, that father taught his child well. They also hope that the father will support the child...... Support is the most important thing. So, support can be in terms of providing food and clothes so that the child should look nice. Even when the child needs lotion, I must take it there.... [On emphasis placed on economic provision and moral teaching], I don’t agree with society. There are other things a father can do. Sometimes, for you to be a good father, you must be there for your child. For example, taking the child from the mother and going with him where you are going, even to Lusaka for a holiday. That cannot affect you or generate a problem and the community will say that ‘this is really his child’.*

David (father at 18 years, interviewed at 22)

Young fathers in this study were not averse to the notion that economic provision was important, but they held a view that beyond economic provision and moral teaching, there
were other important roles that would equally define someone as a ‘good’ father. For example, in the above excerpt, although David regarded economic provision as the most important role, he said ‘being there’ for the child that is, spending quality time with the child, was equally important for someone to be regarded a ‘good’ father. By expressing that, ‘that cannot affect you’, David suggests that his masculine self is not threatened by engaging in other roles other than economic provision. Thus, he did not endorse society’s notion of good fatherhood and manliness, which is tied to economic provision only.

Likewise, Paulo rejected the idea that economic provision is the only lens through which good fatherhood can be determined. Engaging in caregiving in tandem with other masculine gender roles such as economic provision was something Paulo felt was important as it meant ‘kusamalila’ a child in totality. As earlier indicated (see section 7.2), kusamalila is an indigenous concept that encompasses the provision of economic support and physical care for the child. Thus, Paul claimed that he ignores those that ridicule or shame him in the community for taking part in care activities. He expressed that he does not allow such people to distract him, instead, he continues to engage in the same domain, that is, caregiving roles such as bathing and cooking for the child aside economic provision:

*Society hopes that you will only buy things for that child and not bath him. They only want you to take care of the clothes and food that’s all, … I don’t agree with society, for I have kusamalila my child. When the child is hungry, I must cook for him. I must bath him so that when the mother comes, she should find that I have already done everything. So that’s what I tell those that laugh at me…..For those that laugh, I just ignore them and continue doing what I do, kusamalila my child … I just ignore on condition that I do kusamalila my child.*

Paulo (father 16 years, interviewed at 20)

Paul’s account illustrates how some young fathers in this study negotiated cultural expectations and the shaming associated with men’s participation in ‘feminine’ gender roles, by not paying attention to those who ridiculed, teased, or laughed at them. Paul claimed that
he continued engaging with the domain that was the source of negative reactions as he felt that his masculinity was not threatened. By saying ‘I just ignore on condition that I do kusamalila my child’, Paul suggests that what matters is him providing the care that the child needs.

Similarly, other young fathers negotiated cultural expectations by regarding caregiving as a way of expressing love for the child, as exemplified by the following remarks by Phade:

> To laugh at me for what? It’s my child, I have to do it [bathing the child]. It’s just an expression of love for a man to his child to do such.

Phade (father at 20 years, interviewed at 21)

Like a few young fathers in this study, Phade drew on the discourse of love for the child to rationalise and legitimatise his participation in care activities as a way of negotiating cultural expectations.

For some young fathers, their strategy involved regarding care roles as gender neutral, as illustrated by Mwape’s and Migo’s comments below:

> Some say, ‘why are you bathing your children, have you become a woman for you to be bathing a child?’ But they can’t say it’s only a woman who can bath a child. Even a man can bath a child; it’s also a job.

Mwape (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

> They can’t laugh at me. Why should they laugh at me when it’s my own child? How can they laugh at me? I have Kusamalila my child... it’s everyone’s responsibility and it’s not one person’s child. So, when the mother goes away, I have to ensure the child eats, baths, and I cook even if they laugh.

Migo (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies such as that by Mubita (2021) in Zambia with older fathers, which found that when men sometimes engage in non-normative parenting roles, many of them receive negative reactions. The negative reactions received by some young fathers was a clear indication that some people in their society still
regard childcare as women’s responsibility. Participating in caregiving to those that reacted negatively, signified a ‘departure from traditionally normative boundaries of masculinity that dictate specific and separate parenting roles for men and women.’ (Hunter, Riggs, & Feo, 2019, p. 628).

As discussed earlier in section 7.2, young fathers in this study desired to be good fathers and to be thought of as masculine. However, many of them found economic provision challenging. Therefore, they tried to find alternative ways of trying to portray themselves as good and involved fathers and bolster their masculinity. However, as young fathers’ accounts indicated, those alternative ways were often met with backlash which they had to negotiate. As data from this study suggests, young fathers interviewed for this study negotiated cultural expectations and masculine identity through different strategies, which are not mutually exclusive. Firstly, most young fathers challenged the primacy of providing as the basis of good fatherhood (Roy & Dyson, 2010). Many of them rejected the notion that economic provision was the only ‘requisite of good fatherhood’ (Dermott, 2008, p. 41). Challenging existing norms appeared to be a realistic way of achieving their aspirations of being good fathers. Secondly, some of them negotiated cultural expectations by interpreting parenting roles as gender neutral, similar to older married fathers (see Medved, 2016; Mubita, 2021). However, despite expressing the gender-neutrality of care roles, some young fathers like David still maintained ties with economic provision and regarded it as the most important role for their own sense of masculine selves. Merla (2008, p. 126) asserts that maintenance of attachment provides ‘them with opportunities to demonstrate their conformity to other elements of hegemonic masculinity.’ This suggests the importance of masculinity to young men’s constructions of their identity. Finally, young fathers’ accounts also demonstrated that some of them negotiated cultural expectations by not paying attention to critics and then, rationalising and legitimising their involvement (Rochlen et al., 2008; Smith, 1998). As data from this study suggested, some young fathers regarded caregiving as
one way of providing care for their children and linked it to the notion of expressing love for their children.

7.5 Summary and conclusion

By drawing on overlapping bodies of theory-ecological systems theory, gender roles, and masculinity, this chapter explored young fathers’ understanding of fatherhood roles, what informed their understanding, and how the young fathers negotiated cultural expectations and masculine identity. The chapter showed that young fathers construed their fatherhood roles in quite traditional terms that is, economic provision, positive role modelling, as well as moral and/or spiritual teaching and guide. However, the economic provider role was the most important role they identified with. All the young fathers in this study saw themselves primarily as economic providers because, in their society, economic provision is inextricably tied to men’s sense of self in relation to being a man and a good father.

It was revealed that many young fathers struggled to live up to the role of economic provider. Although they regarded economic provision as important, the majority of the young fathers seemed to reject the notion that economic provision was the only lens through which good fathering could be determined. Consequently, for some young fathers, becoming a positive role model, a moral or spiritual teacher and guide was equally important as being the economic provider, as these roles were also claimed to exemplify good fathering. Weber and Schatz (2013) assert that some young fathers face significant challenges to provide economically. Therefore, they identify with alternative roles as a way for them to define good fatherhood in achievable terms. This may suggest why some young fathers regarded other roles to be also important.

With respect to caregiving, the findings in this chapter showed some ambivalences and nuances between and among young fathers that were married and unmarried at the time of the study. Whereas many of them felt that caregiving was everyone’s responsibility and should be performed by men as fathers alongside other stereotypical masculine gender roles,
their accounts suggested two different perspectives. Accounts of most young fathers who were married at the time of the study, largely suggested that caregiving was perceived as the mother’s responsibility and taking part in care activities meant helping the child’s mother. Conversely, for most young fathers who were still unmarried at the time of the study, caregiving seemed to be embraced as a responsibility and served as an important resource to portray themselves as involved, caring, responsible, and good fathers.

The chapter also illustrated that the philosophy of what constituted fatherhood and fathering practices for some young fathers was born out of childhood experiences with their own parents, teachings and guidance received, and witnessing fathering practices of individuals whom they interact with in their microsystem. As data from this study suggested, their own parents were important agents in playing the role of primary fatherhood role socialization while the wider family and community played the secondary role. However, parents were not the most important and influential role models and teachers of fatherhood roles. Members of the extended family such as uncles and grandfathers were the most important and powerful role models and teachers to many young fathers. Furthermore, the chapter demonstrated how cultural dynamics and gender ideologies as well as the cultural discourse of masculinity that young fathers were socialised to, informed them of what they could and could not do as men/fathers.

The chapter also demonstrated that fatherhood expectations in the participants’ society underscored economic provision and moral teaching. Notwithstanding that, a great deal of emphasis was placed on economic provision as it was associated with good fathering and masculinity, while caregiving and nurturing, on the other hand, continued to be associated with women. As a result, the study established that there were some discrepancies between young fathers’ fathering practices and cultural expectations, as evidenced by the reactions of the community when some young fathers were found doing ‘feminine’ gender roles. The chapter suggested that young fathers’ participation in caregiving was viewed as transgressing
traditional gender roles and norms of masculinity. Consequently, some of them were ridiculed, teased, and shamed by some sections of society. However, young fathers negotiated cultural expectations and masculine identity in different ways. Although not mutually exclusive, major negotiating strategies employed by young fathers included challenging the primacy of providing as the basis of good fatherhood, interpreting parenting roles as gender neutral, and not paying attention to critics as well as rationalising and legitimising their participation in caregiving. The chapter suggested that for some young fathers, caregiving represented one of the ways of providing care for their children and they linked it to the notion of love for their children. The next chapter turns attention to what influenced young fathers’ involvement with their children.
Chapter 8: Barriers and enablers: young fathers’ involvement with their children

8.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore what influences young fathers’ involvement with their children. Whereas the analysis of participants’ accounts of their experiences of fatherhood for this study suggested that most of the young fathers were determined to be involved with their children, many of them expressed that they experienced myriad barriers related to personal, relational, and contextual factors. Castillo and Sarver (2012) assert that within an ecological framework, father involvement is conceptualised as the product of personal, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors that serve as both barriers and supports for involved fathering. By drawing on secondary literature and adopting the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) as a framework for analysing young fathers’ involvement with their children, this chapter demonstrates how these factors inhibit and enable the involvement of young fathers in the upbringing of their children.

8.2 Barriers and enablers to involvement with the child

8.2.1 Personal attitudes and behaviours towards pregnancy and child paternity

Within the ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner acknowledges the significance of personal characteristics or traits that individuals bring with them into any social situation as they play a part in shaping their own social experiences (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). Across all interviews for this study, personal attitudes and behaviours towards pregnancy and paternity responsibility emerged as one of the contributing factors that influenced immediate and subsequent involvement of young fathers with their children. Analysis of participants’ accounts indicated that those that denied the pregnancy responsibility, precluded themselves from all forms of involvement with their children. As previously indicated (see subsection 6.3.2), three young fathers in this study delayed their
decision to commit to fathering and assuming their roles as fathers because they initially rejected being responsible for the pregnancy. Consequently, they only assumed their roles as fathers after acknowledging the children they rejected as their own.

At the beginning, we had a conflicting relationship because of what happened with naming two people as being responsible for the pregnancy. [But after the child was born, that’s when it was known that the child was mine]. I later decided to go against my parents, who were against my involvement after that confusion. I didn’t want her to lose direction and for us to start taking each other to courts of law after discussing pregnancy damages. So, I started mending that relationship with her.

Masauso (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

The account by Masauso is illustrative of how the three young fathers that initially rejected the pregnancy were only involved with their children after birth and accepting the paternity of the child. In the above excerpt, Masauso suggested that he could only assert his rights to the child and assume the role of a father when it became certain that he was the real father of the child. Masauso’s account also revealed one important aspect of the bidirectional nature of the interactions within the microsystems. He talks about the influence of his parents in his initial decision not to be involved after the conflicting paternity, which he later goes against after the birth of the child.

Based on the participants’ accounts in this study, it appears that the decision by young fathers to initially deny the pregnancy responsibility and later acknowledge the child as their own, complicated their involvement with their children. This was most apparent in older fathers’ remarks during the focus group. In response to the question, ‘What are the things that make it difficult for the young fathers to be involved with their children in your community?’ Syd, a community leader, responded as follows:
There are other things that would cause the maternal family to stop young fathers from seeing their children. Sometimes, it’s what happens at the beginning of the entire thing. It could be that maybe during the family discussion, the young man refused that I am not the one responsible for the pregnancy or maybe they even fail to discuss the matter. Then later, he comes to learn that indeed that child is his. So, sometimes, young fathers stop themselves from seeing their children. They fear that it will not sit well with the maternal family for me to get the child given that I denied paternity in the first place. They may be thinking ‘maybe they might shout at me, or they might send me back’. So, some of the barriers come from the young fathers themselves. So, since he refused, the maternal parents might also be like ‘let’s leave him’. Then, he stops himself since he already denied [being responsible] and the worst part of it is that maybe the child even resembles him. It becomes difficult to go back…. Sometimes, you can stop yourself from seeing your child. What stops most of the young people is initially denying the pregnancy responsibility, then later accepting.

Syd (43 years old, focus group)

The remarks by Syd highlight some of the dilemmas young fathers might find themselves in after initially denying being responsible for the pregnancy. According to Syd, young fathers’ negative attitudes and behaviours towards pregnancy responsibility may lead to the maternal family blocking them from having access to the child. Thus, finding their way back into the life of the child they initially rejected, may require negotiating with gatekeepers. Some young fathers may be unsure of how the maternal family (gatekeepers) would react if they later decided to return and accept the paternity of the child. Consequently, the feeling of uncertainty and fear of rejection may discourage some of them from negotiating access, making it hard for them to assert their rights to the child.

On the other hand, accepting the pregnancy and paternity responsibility at the very beginning, appeared to facilitate many young fathers’ involvement with their children.
Despite being scared and worried about how their parents would react to the news of the pregnancy, as discussed earlier (see section 6.3.), most (21 out of 24) young fathers in this study reported that they accepted the responsibility without delay following the announcement of the pregnancy. Most of them expressed that they were sure of being responsible for the pregnancy. By virtue of accepting the pregnancy and paternity responsibility, these young fathers were able to participate in the care of the child during and after pregnancy and assert their rights to the child after birth. It also allowed some of them to assume the role of a father even before the child was born, albeit for some, that was later impeded by different factors as discussed later in this chapter. When asked what made their relationship with the child easier, Phade, for instance, stated:

*I think what made it easier is that when we were having discussion over the pregnancy, I said we would get married with the mother of my child…. Consequently, there were no difficulties that I would say stopped me from seeing my child.*

Phade (father at 20 years, interviewed at 21)

Whereas Phade was still unmarried at the time of the study, accepting the pregnancy responsibility and pledging to marry the child’s mother seemed to have influenced the maternal family not to block his access to the child. Young fathers, like Oliver and Fred, reported to have assumed the role of a father even before the birth of the child following their acceptance of the pregnancy responsibility, as exemplified by their accounts below:

*I didn’t reject the pregnancy because I’m the one that used to go out with her…. After the child was born, even if I wasn’t doing anything serious economically, I fought hard and managed to raise some funds from selling some small-small items. I managed to dress the child and buy all what was needed in preparation for the coming of the baby. I had some chickens that I sold until all what was needed was bought.*

Oliver (father at 18 years, interviewed at 26)
I accepted because I knew I was going to be a father and I was responsible for the pregnancy... I bought for her what was needed at the hospital......[with access to the child] there were no difficulties.

Fred (father at 19 years, interviewed at 21)

Contrary to the negative stereotypes that assume that when young men impregnate young women, they do not take responsibility (Nawa, 2018), the above remarks illustrate how Fred and Oliver reported that they were involved and supportive to their pregnant partners and the unborn child. What was apparent in their accounts was that they accepted the responsibility because they were certain that they were the ones responsible for the pregnancy. So, they had to take responsibility for their actions. Their favourable response to the pregnancy responsibility enabled them to be involved in care prior to and after the birth of the child.

The significance of a positive attitude and behaviour towards pregnancy responsibility in facilitating young fathers’ involvement with children was reiterated by older fathers during the focus group. When asked to share their views on what made it easier for the young fathers who were involved with their children in their communities, Nuzulu had this to say:

What helps the most after you impregnate someone is your ability to cooperate and agree with the maternal parents. If you do, there is no problem because in that way, the young man is always free such that even the maternal family would encourage by saying ‘he should be coming to see the child.’

Nuzulu (52 years old, focus group).

Nuzulu’s remarks suggests that when young fathers accept the pregnancy responsibility, it attracts the support of the maternal family, which is an important enabler to their involvement with their children.

The above accounts by participants illustrate how some young fathers’ personal attitudes and behaviours towards pregnancy and paternity responsibility influenced their involvement
with their children. Accepting the pregnancy responsibility appeared to foster a supportive relationship with the maternal family that facilitated their involvement with their children. Conversely, the tendency by some young fathers to first deny the responsibility for the pregnancy appeared to create a primary barrier that inhibited them from being involved with their children. As data from this study suggested, some young fathers in this study were unable to outrightly assert their rights to the child, establishing a relationship with the child, and assume their fatherhood roles because they were unsure if they were the ones responsible for the pregnancy. For some, the pressure from members of their social network to deny pregnancy responsibility and the fear of losing family support might have affected their initial decision towards acknowledging the pregnancy responsibility. The next subsection shifts attention to how young fathers’ socioeconomic statuses affects their involvement with their children.

8.2.2 Socioeconomic status

Another individual characteristic that emerged to have influence on young fathers’ involvement with their children was their own socioeconomic status. 62.5% (n=15) of the young fathers that took part in this study reported that they did not complete schooling. 37.5% (n=9) said they dropped out of school at the secondary level of education while 25% (n=6) at the primary level of education. Only 8.3% (n=2) of the young fathers were still attending high school at the time of the study. Of the 24 young fathers, only 29.2% (n=7) stated that they completed secondary education, though none of them attained tertiary or vocational education. The limited formal salaried employment opportunities in the district where participants live meant that their educational background inhibited them from being competitive in the formal labour market. Nelson, for example, remarked:
I completed Grade 12…. I am a bricklayer….., but the money I get is very little. That’s why I said it’s sad that my school got disturbed. I wished to work for the government so that I can get adequate money to cater for everything…. I try even if it’s little money. It’s better to continue working hard to be able to provide. It’s just that you can’t provide everything that is expected. You see, in this community people suffer a lot to find money. So, the little you find makes a difference in helping.

Nelson (father at 19 years, interviewed at 27)

Most of the young fathers in this study said they were unemployed and depended on underpaid piecework (casual employment), which did not guarantee them consistent and adequate money. This made some young fathers less able to meet their provider expectations given that most of them in this study primarily saw themselves as economic providers. In the above excerpt, Nelson recounts how challenging it was to earn adequate money to successfully meet his fatherhood expectations. Despite having some bricklaying skills, he expressed that he was being underpaid which, in turn, limited his ability to economically provide for his child as expected of him as a father.

The situation of some young fathers in this study was complex. Not only did they have to deal with the challenge of providing economic support for the children but also issues of self-esteem. Because of the inability to provide for the child or having nothing to offer the child when visiting, six of the young fathers spoke of having difficulties visiting their children frequently. Some of them said that they temporarily withdrew from having regular contact with their children out of self-respect. When asked what made their relationship with their children difficult, Enerst, for instance, explained:
The only difficult part was mobilising economic support. Sometimes, I could not manage to support the child......The difficult part was when going to see the child, I needed to go with something. Sometimes, I couldn’t have anything to take there. So, when I don’t have, I used to depend on my parents to help me and if they don’t have, I would then decide not to go because I was scared that they would laugh at me.

Enerst (father at 20 years, interviewed at 33)

In the above excerpt, Enerst expressed his fear of being ridiculed or shamed by the maternal family for going to visit the child empty-handed. It appears that Enerst was aware of the expectations of the maternal family and that failure to meet those expectations would result in a strained relationship and being ridiculed. Like many young fathers in this study, Enerst seemed to attach greater importance to economic provision for the child as it signified being a ‘good father’. Therefore, according to young father’s accounts in this study, being able to carry something materially and financially for the child when making visitations, meant much more for them as fathers as it gave them the confidence to face their children and the maternal family. Consequently, when they lacked and their parents had nothing to offer them for their children, some of them said that they opted to relinquish the visits to the child to maintain a positive self-image. Other young fathers cited the fear of being asked about the money for pregnancy damage as the reason they sometimes temporarily disengaged with their child.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Banda and Vincent during the focus group when asked to describe things that made it difficult for the young men as fathers to be involved with their children in their communities. In response, they had this to say:

I think lack of money to buy stuffs for the child. Because sometimes on your own you just feel shy [going there]. When they ask for soap, you fail to take soap there. You question yourself that how will I go there when I don’t even have money to buy soap for the child. Whatever I try, it does not yield anything. So, it becomes difficult.

Banda (father at 18 years, focus group at 21).
But it’s difficult to go there without anything. They will ask you ‘what have you brought for the child?’ in such circumstances, you will just be quiet and then in the end you decide not to go there when you have nothing to give because you feel shy and ashamed.

Vincent (father at 16 years, focus group at 21)

The responses by Banda and Vincent highlight the shame associated with failure to provide for the child and how it erodes some young fathers’ confidence to visit their children when they have nothing to offer. Some young fathers appeared to be affected by self-stigma, that is their own imaginations of how the maternal family would negatively perceive them or react to their empty-handed visits. According to Vogel, Bitman, Hammer, and Wade (2013b, p. 2). ‘self-stigma is defined as the reduction in a person’s self-esteem or sense of self-worth due to the perception held by the individual’. By temporarily withdrawing from making regular contact with the child, it also precluded them from playing other paternal functions such as caregiving and socialisation (Gavin et al., 2002), which are contingent on the physical contact and interaction with the child.

Strikingly, a notable number of young fathers felt and expressed that their low socioeconomic status did not affect their relationship or involvement with their children. When asked if their education and occupational status affected their relationship or involvement with your children, Wilson responded: ‘No, they had no effects’, while Emmanuel stated: ‘It does not affect the relationship I have with my child’. As discussed earlier (see subsection 6.5.4), young fathers in this study were aware of the negative stereotypes aimed at them, such as being perceived as inadequate fathers by some sections of their society. As data from this study suggests, for most young fathers, being an economic provider was an important feature of good fatherhood and a demonstration of masculinity. Thus, when they were unable to economically provide for their children, it appeared to negatively impact how they viewed themselves. Perhaps for some, rebutting the notion that their socioeconomic status affected their relationship or involvement with their children in
any way, might have been a strategy of negotiating the inadequate father identity. On the other hand, it could also mean that their definition of involvement was more than economic provision.

Nevertheless, a further analysis of the shared stories of fatherhood experiences indicated that most of the young fathers were struggling or having challenges to raise financial resources. This, subsequently, made them less able to provide for their children, as exemplified by Banda’s remarks:

> *I completed school. I went up to grade 12 just here at [this] secondary school. Currently, I am not doing anything, [I'm] just a school leaver. ..... Of course, there are things that I can’t manage to do because of my status.... You must be working so that you can find money.... buy soap for the child, clothes, just a lot.*

Banda (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

Similarly, Masauso and Migo explained how challenging it was to mobilise either material or financial support for their children given that they were still in school when the child was born:

> *It affected my school. It also affected me moneywise. I had difficulties with finding money [to support my child].*

Masauso (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

> *I would say, they affected me in some ways because at that time I was still at school and with school life, you depend on you parents who pay for your school fees. On the one hand you need to be in school and on the other hand your child need support. It was difficult for me. It’s like here I am learning and at the same time I have kusamalila my child, so I suffered.*

Migo (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

On the other hand, having a source of income or ability to provide support for the child and meet the maternal family expectations seemed to greatly influence some young fathers’ involvement with their children as they were able to face them with confidence. Data for this
study suggested that notwithstanding the poor relationship or unpaid/unfinished payments of pregnancy damages, the maternal parents were inclined to allow or give access to the child for young fathers who were ‘good’ economic providers. Eight young fathers in this study spoke of the important role child support played in them being given access to the child by the maternal parents, as illustrated by the following quotation:

*We had a very good relationship with the mother of the child. I didn’t have a problem with her. The problem was only with her parents. Each time I go there they would not greet me; they were just acting rude. That’s why I never used to go there frequently because she was being kept by her parents... After the child was born, whenever I visited my child, she could not even smile at me... So, I said to myself, ‘even if I go there, those people are not happy, what should I do?’... After I started growing vegetables at the garden, I started having money and I would send money even if those people were not talking to me. I would buy things and send someone to take there.... So, when they saw my commitment as I managed to pay both for pregnancy damages and buying other things like soap, they said its okay don’t pay...When they saw that, they started bending and sending messages that I should be going there to see my son. They had to send someone to tell me.*

Vincent (father at 16 years, interviewed at 21)

In the above account, Vincent underscores how the improvement in his economic status enabled him to provide financial and material support for his child which, in turn, enhanced the relationship he had with the maternal grandparents. His ability and commitment to provide for the child financially and materially increased some degree of tolerance on the part of the maternal grandparents and diffused the tension between them. Subsequently, it persuaded the maternal grandparents to allow Vincent to be able to make regular physical contact with the child and waive the remainder of the payments for pregnancy damages, which was one of the barriers to father involvement for a few young fathers in this study (see subsection 8.2.6 for detailed discussion). Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) ecological framework
provides insight on how the interactions between the developing person and the ecological environment systems are reciprocal or bidirectional. As shown in the above excerpt, the action by Vincent affected the maternal grandparents and vice versa.

Similarly, Banda felt that providing support for his child helped persuade the maternal grandparents to let him maintain regular contact and spend time with the child. When asked what made his relationship with his child easier given that he was unmarried and the child was living with the mother, he explained:

*The biggest thing is support. Usually those who are not allowed to see the child, you will find that they don’t support the child. If you support the child, they [the maternal parents] will allow you. For me, there hasn’t been a time when I’ve been denied access to the child…… They don’t make it difficult for me to see the child. For me, when I fail to provide, I am honest, and I will tell the mother of my child that I don’t have at this time.*

Banda (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

The participants’ accounts in this section indicate two important phenomena. Firstly, they demonstrate how lack of money due to their low socioeconomic status impacted their regular contact with their children particularly, when they had nothing to offer or provide for the child. While for a few participants like Banda, that was not the case, others were affected. Their low socioeconomic status sometimes impairs their ability to provide for their children. As data from this study suggests, when some young fathers lacked finances and material support for their children, they were sometimes forced to temporarily withdraw their visitation to the child for fear of being shamed or asked for child support by the maternal grandparents. Vogel, Bitman, Hammer, and Wade (2013a) assert that feeling shame and limiting interaction with others is a common illustration of self-stigma. Thus, for some young fathers in this study, avoidance of child visits seemed to serve as a powerful resource of managing self-stigma or maintaining a positive image of themselves (Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007). Secondly, participants’ accounts underscored the importance attached to
economic provision for the child by both young fathers and the maternal families. It was evident from this study that failure to provide economic support for the child affected how young fathers viewed themselves. Conversely, being able to provide economic support for the child seemed to increase young fathers’ self-esteem and helped to persuade the maternal family to allow them to have access to the child despite the existing antagonism between them. Subsequently, this allowed them to be more involved with their children. The next subsection pays attention to how family support may bolster some young fathers’ involvement with their children and lack thereof, may pose a threat.

8.2.3 Family support

Within the microsystem, the developing persons (young fathers) engage in interactions with family members that help determine their course of development which, in the case of this study, is their involvement with the child (Cabrera et al., 2014). In the present study, support received from parents was discussed as an impetus to many young fathers’ involvement with their children, as demonstrated by Nelson’s remarks below:

*Like I earlier said, when the child was born, it was difficult for me to focus on school and the child. For the child to be okay, it was all because of my parents. They are the ones that were taking care of my child. It pained me because they had to take care of me and look after the needs of my child.*

Nelson (father at 19 years, interviewed at 27)

The above account by Nelson demonstrates how for some young fathers, their parents were a supportive resource for them to be involved or maintain their involvement with their children. Many young fathers in this study were not economically independent at the time they became fathers and some of them were struggling to balance schoolwork and fatherhood. At the same time, being able to provide economically was important for their self-confidence to visit their children. Consequently, for some of them as was the case with Nelson, their parents served as a buffer for economic stress, helping with meeting the needs
of their child. This facilitated their regular contact and further involvement with the child. The intervention of the parents in this study highlights one important cultural value underscored in historical and research literature such as Taylor (2006), which suggests that fatherhood in the Zambian culture or society is a shared responsibility. Caring for children is not only the responsibility of the one that fathered the child but also the responsibility of those that are kin to the father of the child.

As earlier indicated, acknowledging responsibility for the pregnancy was described by participants as key to facilitating access to their child. Some parents in this study were reported to have played an important role in encouraging their children to make a positive decision regarding the pregnancy and paternity responsibility. For example, Lawrence had this to say during the interview:

*What was key I think was the earlier decision I made. When you impregnate someone and know that you are the one responsible for the pregnancy, you must not deny it. When I impregnated her, my parents asked me if I was responsible, I didn’t deny it. I said I am responsible. So, they advised me that if that’s the case, during the family discussions you shouldn’t deny it because this may escalate into a court case which might not be good. ‘We shouldn’t go to court for straightforward things.’*

Lawrence (father at 16 years, interviewed at 18)

The account by Lawrence demonstrates the important role that parents play in facilitating young fathers’ involvement with their children. Despite being afraid of their reactions, many young fathers in this study recounted how their parents were supportive and influential in their decision regarding the pregnancy responsibility. According to Lawrence in the above excerpt, his parents encouraged him to take responsibility.

Only one young father in this study spoke of lack of support from his own parents, which did not affect his involvement with his child. Jattomoya recounted how the lack of family support did not deter him from having access to and interacting with the child:
When my parents heard [about the pregnancy] and we had those family discussions, my parents refused to pay [the pregnancy damage charges] for me. So, I stopped school. I just started working in the community.... My parents told me that I must pay for damages on my own. I have not even finished paying for damages...[But] before I paid, there was no problem with the maternal family when it comes to seeing my son. All was good but they used to remind me.... We have a great bond with my son. Our relationship with the mother is okay, we do talk on phone. I just avoid when she goes to school so that I don’t disturb her... With her parents, we also have a good relationship, I am very free to go there and see my child. They don’t stop me from seeing my son.

Jattomoya (Father at 15 years, interviewed at 21)

This quotation is indicative of the importance of the supportive role of the maternal grandparents in facilitating young fathers’ involvement with their children in the absence of paternal family support. According to Jattomoya, the maternal parents enabled him to have face-to-face interaction with his child even when his own parents were unsupportive. The maternal family did not block access to the child for Jattomoya, even when he had not paid for pregnancy damages. Jattomoya’s experience differs from some of the other fathers who reported that failure to pay for pregnancy damages was an inhibitor to seeing their children and assuming their roles as fathers (described in further depth in subsection 8.2.6).

Notwithstanding Jattomoya’s experience, the accounts by older fathers during the focus group foregrounded how lack of family support can be a deterrent to young fathers’ involvement with their children. Fk-busy, for example, narrated:

The other problem lies in the character of the parents to the boy. During family discussion or before, they might have already heard that their child impregnated someone. Instead of thinking about what has happened to find a way forward to solve that, they start teasing their child and scaring that male child. Their language might intimidate him such that he might be thinking: ‘the way mom and dad were speaking,
if we go there, and I accept, there might be a problem. I might not stay in peace at this home’. So, sometimes, it comes from the parents when they start scaring their own child. Sometimes, they tend to threaten like ‘I don’t have cows to give you, it’s up to you. You know what to do. Then, the child might be scared. Consequently, when they go for pregnancy family discussions, he is likely to deny something he knows he is responsible.

Fk-busy (60 years old, focus group)

Fk-busy’s remarks indicate the powerful position of influence parents occupy within the family microsystem and the direct influence they have on their children that is, young fathers. They control family resources, which young fathers may need to deal with some of their problems, given their low economic status and dependence on their parents for support. In contrast to Lawrence, who highlighted the role of the parents in facilitating young fathers taking responsibility for the pregnancy and establishing a relationship with the child, Fk-busy’s remarks underscore how parents can sometimes, inhibit young fathers from asserting their rights to their children and assuming their roles as fathers. As suggested above, when parents threaten to withdraw support or refuse to support them, some young fathers may have no choice but to deny the pregnancy and paternity responsibility, subsequently precluding them from being involved in care and upbringing of their children.

The findings of this study corroborate with those from previous studies in the US and UK, which have shown that support from grandparents facilitates paternal involvement (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Neale & Lau Clayton, 2014). Findings from the present study suggest that paternal grandparents were an important source of economic and moral support for some young fathers. It was evident in young fathers’ accounts that, when some of them were faced with competing interests between schoolwork and fatherhood following the birth of the child, the paternal grandparents intervened and provided economic support for the child on their behalf. For others, as was the case with Lawrence, it was the parents that encouraged them to accept the pregnancy and paternity responsibility following the news of the
pregnancy. Whereas some young fathers may still maintain contact with their children without support from their parents, as was the case with Jattomoya, it's worth pointing out that lack of support from the family coupled with their own low economic status makes it less possible for some young fathers to economically provide for their children. As indicated in the previous subsection, most of the young fathers in this study became first-time fathers at the age when they were still in school, and yet to achieve autonomy from their own parents. They depended on their parents for financial support. In the face of competing interests and economic struggles, maintaining father involvement over time in terms of economic provision following the birth of the child was contingent on family support. Their parents served as a buffer for economic stress, helping taking care of their children’s needs.

Based on data from this study, it can be argued that some young fathers’ involvement with their children in the society where this study was conducted, was in part due to a great family support system and vice versa. In the subsequent sections, attention shifts to the role of young fathers’ relationships with the child’s mother and maternal family on their involvement with the child.

8.2.4 The quality of the relationship with the child’s mother and maternal family

At mesosystems level, the quality of the relationship with the child’s mother or maternal family emerged as an important influencing factor to young fathers’ involvement with their children in this study. According to Bronfenbrenner, the linkages and direct interactions that occur within the microsystems (paternal family, maternal family) are represented by the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). These interactions can be healthy or unhealthy and might either promote improved functioning, in this case, father involvement or inhibiting it (Piel, Geiger, Julien-Chinn, & Lietz, 2017). The subsequent subsection discusses how the relationship with the child’s mother affects young fathers’ access and involvement in the care and upbringing of their children.
8.2.4.1 The quality of the relationship with the child’s mother

Analysis of young fathers’ interviews for this study indicated that having a positive relationship with the child’s mother enabled many young fathers to be involved with their children, as exemplified by Fred’s remarks below:

*The child lives with the mother.... but sometimes, the mother brings her.....* We have a good relationship. When my daughter was born, I was called to be informed about it and she told me that I have kusamalila my child.... [but] I had difficulties with the maternal family. From the beginning, they were not honest. They stopped me from seeing my child. They told me I shouldn’t be going there, and I don’t know why. I think from the time we had family talks, they showed that it would be difficult. Initially, they said, ‘with the way things were going, there would be no payments [for pregnancy damages], but the man [the father to be] should be coming’. So, when the child was born, they started again [demanding] and said they want me to pay for damages, but my father refused and reminded them that we agreed that there would be no payments. ‘So, what are we going to pay for?’ So, that made them to deny me access to my child...... They said I should pay two cows, but we didn’t pay since they said we shouldn’t pay [in the first place]. However, we were willing to pay. They didn’t continue demanding for payments. The mother managed to bring the child so that I can see her, and I also later started going there. ...It was the uncle who made it difficult. .... [The one that made it easier] was the grandmother, that’s the biological mother to the mother of my child who allowed her to be bringing the child so that I can see her. She told her to inform me that I should be going there to see the child.

Fred (father at 19 years, interviewed at 21)

The excerpt above is indicative of the complex relationships that some young fathers had with the maternal family which, on the one hand, inhibited their access to the child and on the other hand, facilitated their access to and interaction with their children. According to
Fred, whereas the relationship with the uncle to the child’s mother was tense, hostile, and led to his access to the child being blocked, he was able to maintain contact and spend some time with the child through the special arrangements made by the child’s mother. Fred suggested that his involvement with the child was enabled by the good relationship he had with the child’s mother with support from the child’s maternal grandmother who let him spend some time with his child.

For Oliver, although he is not married to the child’s mother, he said the cordial relationship that they have allows him to pick up his child and spend quality time together at his residential place. Oliver, said this during the interview:

_We have had a good relationship with the mother of my child.... Even when I say to them, I have missed my son, I want to get him so that I can be with him for some time, they have been allowing me. So, they will organise his clothes and then I go with him. And sometimes, when the child tells me I miss mom or my grandparents, then I have to take him there. Even if it’s late in the evening, I will take him there. Sometimes, the mother calls ‘your son has missed you; he wants to see you. Please come and get him. Then, I do go and get him._

Oliver (father at 18 years, interviewed at 26)

Although most of the young fathers in this study stated that they had a good relationship with the child’s mother and were involved with their children, it was not the case with a few of them. Three young fathers spoke of having a poor relationship with the child’s mother at the time of the study, which inhibited their involvement with their children, as illustrated by Paul’s remarks:

_For the past 2 years, we have been very far from each other and the place (the city) where they are is very far. I can’t even communicate to the mother......she changed the sim card and the numbers she was previously using were thrown away. So, I don’t even see or communicate to my child... Everything was going on well that time until the mother moved to Lusaka and got married [to someone else]._
Paul’s remarks illustrate how a deterioration in the mother-father relationship negatively impacted the father-child relationship. In the above interview extract, Paul expresses frustration and hopelessness at the lack of access and interaction with his child because the child’s mother decided to terminate communication after she got married to another man.

The accounts by Fred, Oliver, and Paul exemplify how fathers’ involvement with their children is to some extent embedded in the father-mother relationship. The quality of relationship between the father and mother can either facilitate or inhibit fathers’ involvement with their children. As data from this study suggests, a poor relationship with the child’s mother led to a restricted or denied access to the child and an exclusion of a few young fathers from taking part in childrearing. Conversely, a positive relationship with the child’s mother seemed to create an enabling environment that allowed most young fathers to establish a relationship with their children and become involved in their care and upbringing. It is clear from the findings of this study that a young father’s involvement with their child is also influenced by the mesosystems. The father-child dyadic relationship can be shaped by the quality of father-mother dyadic relationship. Turney and Halpern-Meekin (2017, p. 864) posit that ‘difficulties in any one dyadic relationship reverberate throughout other dyadic relationships’, meaning that the consequences of a poor relationship between young fathers and child’s mother can manifest, in part, in young fathers’ lack of involvement with their children. In the same way, a positive relationship would result in meaningful involvement. Similar findings have also been reported in previous studies in the UK and US (Lau Clayton, 2015; Neale et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2014), which have shown how the quality of the relationship with the child’s mother either enabled or restricted young fathers’ involvement with their children. For example, a longitudinal study with 31 young fathers in the UK by Neale et al. (2015), found that when young fathers’ relationship with the child’s mother became fragile, contact with the child was either restricted or blocked. This created
a challenge for some young men to fulfil their fatherhood roles. On the other hand, Lau Clayton (2015) reports from the same study that regardless of the status of their romantic relationship, a good relationship with the child’s mother facilitated meaningful involvement with the child, with young fathers being able to spend time with the child away from the mother.

8.2.4.2 The quality of the relationship with the maternal family

Findings from this study also indicate that the quality of relationship between young fathers and the maternal family influenced the maternal parents/family gatekeeping to the child that is, maternal parents/family members influencing young father involvement with their children through the use of controlling, facilitative, and restrictive behaviours directed at them (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). A few young fathers in this study spoke of having a conflicting or poor relationship with the maternal family, which negatively impacted their access and interactions with their children. When asked if the relationship they had with the maternal family influenced their relationships with their children in any way, Paul, for example, responded as follows:

*The problem that was there was the brothers to the mother of my child. They were trying to force me. They wanted me to do things I wouldn’t manage; they were forcing me to marry her. That was putting pressure on me and would force me not to be going there. I didn’t have anywhere to accommodate her.*

Paul (father at 20 years, interviewed at 26)

The account by Paul and that of Vincent in subsection 8.2.2, highlight the influence of the maternal parents and the extended family members on young fathers’ involvement with their children. While some young fathers seemed to be determined to have a relationship with their children, their accounts suggested that sometimes, they were discouraged from making visitations and struggled to maintain a relationship with the child because of the conflict and tension between them and the maternal family. However, reasons for their discouragement
were different. Paul, for example, said he felt pressured to marry the child’s mother when he was not ready while Vincent claimed that he felt uncomfortable by the unwelcoming attitude of the maternal grandmother.

Whereas a few young fathers were negatively impacted by the conflicting or poor relationship they had with the maternal family, the stories shared by many young fathers suggested that they made regular contact with their children and were involved in their care and upbringing. What was clear in these young fathers’ accounts was that their involvement with their children was, in part, due to the good and supportive relationship they had with the maternal family. When asked what made their relationship with their children easier, many young fathers spoke of the support, encouragements, and generosity of the maternal grandparents. Masauso, for example, made these comments:

*What helped was the parents to the mother of my child. After I impregnated her, they told me not to be very concerned with paying everything pertaining to pregnancy damages, but I should focus on supporting the child.*

Masauso (fathers at 18 years, Interviewed at 21)

The above quotation highlights how the maternal grandparents may sometimes, be more concerned with young fathers having a relationship with the child or the welfare of the children.

These findings demonstrate the influence of the quality of the relationship with the maternal family on young fathers’ meaningful involvement with their children. As data from this study suggests, the maternal family have the leverage of gatekeeping given that they often live with the child’s mother and children of unmarried young fathers. This allows them to play the primary caregiver role. Consequently, young fathers’ access to and involvement with their children is to some extent contingent on a supportive environment and having a good relationship with the maternal family. As illustrated above, a positive relationship with the maternal grandmother was said to be instrumental in facilitating access, initiating contact, and a relationship with his child when Fred was blocked access to the child by a
member of the extended family that is, the uncle to the child’s mother. On the other hand, a hostile or poor relationship with the maternal family either restricted or prevented some young fathers from having access to the child and fulfilling their various fatherhood roles. This suggests that lack of young fathers’ involvement with their children is unquestionably not always their choice (Fagot, Pears, Capaldi, Crosby, & Leve, 1998). Sometimes, they are caught in the web of unhealthy relationships with the child’s mother and the maternal family, which interferes with their involvement.

While in some studies with young fathers in the UK, perceptions of unsuitability of young fathers by grandparents has been reported to be the basis for some young fathers being excluded from getting involved with their children (see Speak et al., 1997), in the current study, this was not the case. Data for this study indicates that conflict and tension that interfered with young fathers’ access to their children or relationship with their children mainly stemmed from the maternal family pressuring young fathers to marry the child’s mother and the unwelcoming attitude of the maternal grandparents. Because of the hostility and the pressure faced from the maternal family, some young fathers temporarily withdrew their visitations to their children. The next subsections focus on how young fathers’ involvement with their children may also be affected by lack of employment opportunities and access to support services.

8.2.5 **Lack of employment opportunities and access to economic support.**

Participants in this study reported that mobilising financial resources was a challenge for people living in the district where this study was conducted. Nelson, for example, said: ‘you see, in this community people suffer a lot to find money’. This was not surprising, considering that Sinda District is situated in a rural setting, which is characterised by limited economic institutions and lack of social service agencies (Mvula, 2015). Other than a few government institutions available, the district has only two major private companies, namely, Sable Transport and Continental Ginnery, which provide seasonal employment to a small
number of local people (Ibid). Overall, employment opportunities for young people and the
general population are limited and young people, have no access to social service support in
the district. As such, it was not unusual to find that virtually all the young fathers that took
part in the study said they were jobless. Arguably, this made them less able to economically
provide for their children. Most of the young fathers interviewed for this study expressed
that they depended on either their parents, piecework, or seasonal, rain-fed, and labour-
intensive small-scale agriculture activities as a source of income, as demonstrated by
Lawrence’s remarks below:

After I realised that I had a child, I started doing piece works and other things. I even
started farming on my own.

Lawrence (father at 16 and interviewed at 18)

Many young fathers in this study shared similar remarks with Lawrence’s. Due to lack of
economic institutions and social service agencies in their locality, none of the young fathers
spoke of going to find a job in a company or seeking help from a social service agency. The
common themes from their stories were those of parents serving as a buffer for economic
stress, doing underpaid piecework, and farming so that they could provide for their children.
However, farming is often a one-off, annual money-making activity. This means that for
most of the year, young fathers lack finances to provide economic support for the child on a
regular basis.

Only a few young fathers, who had access to their parents’ dambo\(^9\) land and engaged in
vegetable production, said they were able to raise some money from the sale of vegetables

\(^9\) Dambo is a common local name in Southern Africa for wetlands or seasonally waterlogged bottomlands, or
shallow streamless depressions at the headwaters of drainage systems (Mückel, 1973; McFarlane & Whilow,
1990). Dambos are popularly used for vegetable production in rural Zambia. Kuntashula, Sileshi, Mafongoya,
and Banda (2006, p. 300) define a dambo as a ‘wide and low-lying, gently sloping, treeless, grass-covered
depression, which is seasonally waterlogged by seepage from surrounding high ground, assisted by rainfall,
and which has a water table that for most of the year is in the upper 50–100 cm of the soil profile, from which
it drains into streams’
and help themselves to meet some of the financial and material needs of their children on regular basis. Vincent and Emma, for example, had this to say:

> After I started growing vegetables at the garden, I started having money and I would send money [for the child] even if those people were not talking to me. I would buy things and send someone to take there.

Vincent (father at 16 years, interviewed at 21)

> When I was thinking about what I will be doing [when the child is born], I had not started doing vegetable gardens and rearing pigs. The difference is that now I can manage to provide but at the beginning when I was still at school, I used to depend on parents but now I do things on my own... I do vegetable gardens(production) ... This is one of the ways that helps me manage to buy soap, lotion and everything that may be lacking at home.

Emma (father at 20 years, interviewed at 24)

In the above quotations, Vincent and Emma highlight how their engagement in vegetable production bolstered their ability to economically provide for their children. Emma recounts how prior to venturing into vegetable production and when he was still in school, it was difficult to perform his role as a father as he had to depend on his parents to meet the needs of the child.

These findings demonstrate how the exosystem influences father involvement. Lack of employment opportunities made it difficult for some young fathers in this study to mobilise financial resources which, in turn, made them less able to be involved with their children as they would want. As discussed earlier, (see subsection 8.2.2) when they were unable to provide for the child, some of them said that they temporarily relinquished their visits to their children.
What was also evident in this study was that young fathers’ involvement with their children was also impacted by cultural practices associated with fatherhood in their society, which created conditions for gatekeeping to the child by the maternal family. This is discussed in the next subsection.

8.2.6 The cultural practice of paying pregnancy damages

In this study, the cultural practice of paying pregnancy damages emerged as an important constituent of the macrosystem that influence young fathers’ involvement with their children. Analysis of both interview and focus group data for this study suggested that some maternal families charged pregnancy damages exorbitantly, such that many young fathers either struggled or failed to make payments. Those who failed to pay encountered difficulties getting involved with their children, as exemplified by Paulo’s and Nelson’s statements below:

*I paid slowly; I was charged 6000 Kwacha.... Before I paid [for the pregnancy damages], they [the maternal family] proved to be difficulty. They used to block me from seeing my son. They used to say, you have not brought the money. You can’t be coming here to see your child when you have not yet brought the money.*

Paulo (father at 16 years, interviews at 20)

*With the damage payments, after it happened [impregnating her], they charged me 3,500 Kwacha and I paid cows equivalent to the money I was charged. Prior to, this is what contributed to the sour relationship we had. It was difficult for me to see the child. So, after completing school, instead of waiting to raise money, we decided to give them cows so that the problem could go away. They also charged 300 Kwacha for marriage..... These charges vary with the people or tribe. For example, among the Ngoni, Tumbuka or Chewa people, it’s different from us the Nsenga.*

Nelson (father at 19 years, interviewed at 27)
The above remarks by Paulo and Nelson demonstrate how the payment of pregnancy damages as a cultural practice was an impediment for many young fathers who wanted to be involved with their children. What was clear from the stories shared by young fathers in this study was that the amounts of money demanded by the maternal family in some instances were more than an average monthly salary for a civil servant in their country. Most of the young fathers revealed that they were charged between 3,500 and 8,000 Zambian Kwacha (ZMW), which they either paid cash or cattle equivalent. By their standard, the amount of money demanded by the maternal family was quite high and that increased the likelihood of failure to pay by many young fathers who live in rural communities of a society like Sinda District, which is characterised by the lack of employment opportunities. In the above interview extracts, Paulo and Nelson claimed that this cultural expectation interfered with their access to and interactions with their children until the expectation was met. Five other young fathers that took part in the study spoke of being denied access to their children by the maternal family for failure to pay for pregnancy damages. As told by young fathers in this study, the maternal family often acted as gatekeepers, controlling access to the child given that the child and the mother ordinarily lived with them.

The negative impact this cultural practice tends to have on young fathers’ involvement with their children was also reaffirmed by older fathers during the focus group discussion. For example, Nsato a community leader had this to say:

> Of course, sometimes, there are barriers for him on how to go there at the maternal family’s place because of the agreement they made during the family discussion for the pregnancy or marriage. It could be that maybe he has not paid for damages or charges in accordance with the agreement. So, it becomes a challenge as a young father might be thinking ‘how do I go there, I did not manage to fulfil the agreement’.

Nsato (58-year-old, focus group)
Nsato suggested that for fear of being asked about the payment for the pregnancy damage by the maternal family, some young fathers sometimes avoid making visitations to their child. Subsequently, young fathers struggle to assert their rights to the child and sometimes get excluded from performing their fatherhood roles.

Conversely, what was also evident from the accounts shared by young fathers and older fathers in this study was that partial or full payments for pregnancy damages were key to unlocking access to the child and facilitating some young fathers’ involvement in the care and upbringing of their children. When asked what made their relationship with their child easier, David and Banda, for example, responded:

When I paid for the pregnancy damages fully, that’s when I found things to be easier.  
But when you have not paid for damages, they are difficult particularly, the maternal parents.

David (father at 18 years, interviewed at 22)

I was charged two cows, but I have paid one. They don’t bother me now because here in the villages, when you pay part of the charges, they don’t make your life difficult. If you have not made any payments, then there will be a problem… I see the child daily.  

We stay very close to each other with the mother.

Banda (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

David’s and Banda’s remarks suggest that showing commitment by making partial or full payment for the pregnancy damages defused the tension between young fathers and the maternal family. This view was also shared by other young fathers. In many cases, young fathers said it persuaded the maternal family to relax the restrictions regarding access to the child and enabled some of them to be involved with their children.

Only two young fathers in this study spoke of having access to their children, even after failing to pay for pregnancy damages, as exemplified by Masauso’s and Emma’s statements below:
They charged me 3500 Kwacha as pregnancy damages, and I have not paid but they did not deny me access to the child.

Masauso (father at 18 years, interviewed at 21)

For pregnancy damages, I was charged 4000 Kwacha, but I have not paid. When they charged me, within a short time, I went back to them and told them that I want to marry the mother of my child. So, her father said let us allow them to get married and with charges, I will need to assess how they will take care of each other…….. Yeah, the marriage and how well I have been taking care of her has helped to waive the pregnancy damage payment. Non-payments of damages was not an issue in terms of access to the child.

Emma (father at 20 years, interviewed at 24)

It appears some maternal families mainly eased access restrictions to the child for young fathers who failed to pay for pregnancy damages when they met other conditions including opting to marry the child’s mother or providing adequate child support, as expressed by Masauso in response to the question, what made his relationship with his child easier: ‘Support [for the child] really helped’.

The accounts by the participants demonstrate how cultural practices such as payment of pregnancy damages impact young fathers’ involvement with their children. The demands by the maternal family for pregnancy damage payment was reported by young fathers in this study to restrict access to the child for some young fathers who failed to pay. The maternal family were reported of using the custody of the child as a resource to compel young fathers to pay for pregnancy damages. What emerged in young fathers’ accounts was that some maternal families charge large sums of money that surpass young fathers’ capacity given their age and economic status. Most of the young fathers said they struggled to make payments, and some could not manage to pay. Lack of employment in their rural setting in the face of exorbitant pregnancy-related charges, made it difficult for some of them to meet such cultural expectations. Consequently, those that failed to pay for pregnancy damages
said that they were either restricted or denied access to their children. For most young fathers, their accounts demonstrated that what facilitated their involvement with their children was their ability to show commitment to pay for pregnancy damages by making partial payments or committing to marry the child’s mother as well as providing adequate child support. The payment of pregnancy damages as a cultural practice has its roots in the macrosystem, which manifests at the microsystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As Piel et al. (2017) posit, what happens in the macrosystem affects the processes that occur within the microsystem. Undoubtedly, some young fathers’ involvement with their children in this study was negatively impacted by the cultural practices relating to payments of pregnancy damages that were in many instances exorbitant. Therefore, based on data for this study, it can be argued that young fathers in the society where this study was conducted are not solely responsible for lack of involvement with their children. To a large extent, cultural practices such as paying of pregnancy damages, which tends to be often high, inhibit young fathers from being involved with their children. Findings of this study resonate with those from similar studies notably Swartz and Bhana (2009) and Swartz et al. (2013) in South Africa, which have shown that failure to pay for damages results in unmarried young fathers being denied access to their children by the maternal families. The next subsection looks at how young fathers’ involvement with their children was also interfered by life events.

8.2.7 Consistencies and changes in relationship status of young fathers and the child’s mother

Analysis of the accounts presented by participants for this study indicated that some young fathers’ involvement with their children was influenced by either normative life transitions such as remaining romantically involved and getting married to the child’s mother or non-normative life transitions such as the child’s mother relocating to another city, relationship breakups, and the child’s mother marrying someone else. What was apparent in young fathers’ remarks was that when the child’s mother and father were no longer romantically
involved, the father’s involvement with the child was restricted or became difficult. Mostly, the situation became complex when the child’s mother was dating or had married someone else. In such cases, access to the child was restricted and the child’s father found it hard to be involved in the care and upbringing of the child, as illustrated by David’s and Paul’s remarks below:

*Difficulties were there, particularly when the other man who had gotten into a relationship with the mother of my child came into the picture. The man thought I was still going out with the mother of my child. So, this caused some frictions [between us] and when I go there, they started blocking me from seeing my child when the child is at the mother’s place....... When the child was born, on the paternal family side all was okay, but the problem was with the maternal family. They said ‘we can’t allow these children to get married at this age. They should wait and find something to do’. So that’s how my parents said, ‘we will let our son continue with school. When he completes school, we would then think about what will happen’. So, when they heard about that, the maternal family thought we were wasting their time. So, that’s how they allowed their daughter to get married to someone else. It contributed to me not being involved with the child at some point.*

David (father at 18 years, interviewed at 22)

*Now, he [the child] is with the mother in Lusaka but when he was here, I used to do a lot. I used to go there to take surf (washing powder), to see him, to take clothes, to get him and bring him here at our home so that my parents can see him. All those things I used to do.....When my child was near, we used to be very close but for the past 2 years, we have been very far from each other and the place [the urban city] where they are is very far. I can’t even communicate to the mother, she got married to another man. She changed the sim card and the numbers she was previously using were thrown away. So, I don’t even see or communicate to my child... Everything was going on well*
that time until the mother moved to Lusaka and got married…… Apart from that, everything was okay. The biggest problem now is the situation where the mother to my child is married to another man, and I can’t communicate with her. I don’t know if the person she is married to is working and can manage to send my child to school.

Paul (father at 20 years, interviewed at 26)

The accounts above are indicative of the complications that came with life transitions of the child’s mother on the father-child relationship for a few young fathers in this study. Both David and Paul had difficulties in accessing and interacting with their children when their partners had moved on and got married to other men. However, their accounts showed some nuances. David claimed that the lack of involvement with his child was instigated by the decisions made by the maternal family to allow the child’s mother to get married to someone else. He underscored how the coming of a new sexual and subsequent marital partner in the life of the child’s mother caused tension in his relationships with the child’s mother and maternal grandparents. This, in turn, resulted in gatekeeping to the child to protect the new relationship of the child’s mother because of the emerging insecurities. On the other hand, Paul’s situation was somewhat complex as it involved multiple life transitions, with the child’s mother initially relocating to another city, which was quite far from his and later, getting married to someone else. He claimed that the relocation of the child’s mother to another city and the distance involved made it harder for him to make contact or visit the child and maintain his involvement in the care and upbringing of the child. According to Paul, this was compounded by a deterioration in their relationship with the child’s mother getting married to someone else and blocking communication between them.

Conversely, remaining romantically involved with the child’s mother or getting married appeared to enhance the involvement and engagement with the child for many young fathers. When asked what made their relationship with their children easier, Migo, for example, responded:
Before we got married] we had a good relationship with the mother of my child, and I had access to my child.... [However] going there every day was really difficult, I never used to manage. Like I said, I had to know if the child had eaten, or bathed. So, it was difficult always trying to visit the child, but when they both came home, it made things easier.

Migo (father at 18 years, interviewed at 20)

Migo’s sentiments were echoed by other young fathers in this study. In the above quotation, Migo suggests that whereas remaining romantically involved with the child’s mother made access to the child easier, getting married and moving in together with the child’s mother enhanced his engagement and involvement with his child.

The stories told by David, Paul, and Migo exemplify the influence of life events in altering existing father-child and father-mother dyadic relationships at the chronosystems level. As data from this study suggests, the status of the father-mother relationship after a life transition of both the child’s mother and father created dynamics that either enabled or inhibited the involvement of the fathers in the care and upbringing of the child. Evident in young fathers’ accounts was that a breakdown of the romantic relationship and the child’s mother moving on into other relationships or marrying someone led to less father involvement in the care and upbringing of the child. Additionally, in situations where the child’s mother relocated to another city, it was found that their relationships deteriorated and access to and interaction with the child for some young fathers became problematic due to distance and communication barriers as was the case with Paul. On the other hand, consistencies in the romantic relationships or marrying the child’s mother was an important factor in creating an enabling environment for some young fathers to be meaningfully involved and remain engaged with their children.
8.3 Summary and conclusion

By drawing on secondary literature and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979, 1986), the chapter explored the barriers and enablers to young father’s involvement with their children. The chapter demonstrated that young fathers’ involvement with their children was influenced by individual, relational, and contextual factors. These factors included young fathers’ personal attitudes and behaviours towards pregnancy and paternity responsibility, socioeconomic status, lack of employment opportunities and social support services, cultural practice of paying pregnancy damages, and family support and the quality and status of relationship. However, the chapter showed that the quality and status of the relationship with the child’s mother and the maternal family was the most influential determinant of the young fathers’ involvement with their children.
Chapter 9: Conclusion and recommendations

‘[In Zambia], there is a dearth of evidence on how the [young fathers] navigate their new roles and relationships, including experiences of parenting... and the types of support and services that are available to them. Moreover, little is known about how the choices, opportunities, experiences, and relationships of [young fathers] are shaped by age, gender, and the changing social, cultural, and structural contexts in which they and their families are living.’

(Mweemba & Mann, 2020, p. 7).

A review of research literature for this study revealed that there is a noteworthy paucity of research on young fatherhood, specifically on unmarried young fathers in Zambia. Research in the last decade has mainly focused on the risk factors of child marriages, adolescent pregnancy, and young motherhood (Bwalya et al., 2018; Katowa-Mukwato et al., 2017; Menon et al., 2016). Studies that have made attempts to investigate young fathers have mainly been quantitative in nature and have also focused on risk factors surrounding young fatherhood (e.g. Amoo et al., 2018). Mweemba and Mann (2020) assert that although these factors are well understood in Zambia, there is a dearth of evidence on how young fathers navigate their new roles and relationships, including experiences of parenting. Therefore, this study sought to contribute to filling this knowledge gap.

Additionally, in the recent past, unmarried young fathers in Zambia have increasingly been subjected to negative stereotypes, portraying them as irresponsible, unsupportive, and absent from the lives of the mother and the child (Nawa, 2018). Such negative assumptions have been contested by a growing body of international qualitative studies (see Kiselica, 2008; Neale et al., 2015; Swartz & Bhana, 2009), which have found that many young fathers are, in fact, actively involved with their children. However, such critical studies have been
lacking in Zambia. It is against this backdrop that this study set out to explore the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers in rural Zambia by answering the following research questions.

i. What are young men’s experiences of the transition to fatherhood?

ii. How do young fathers understand their fatherhood roles and what informs their understanding?

iii. How do young fathers negotiate and deal with differences if any, between their fathering practices and cultural expectations?

iv. What influences young fathers’ involvement with their children?

By employing an interpretative phenomenological methodology by means of hermeneutic phenomenology, this study revealed the intricacy of lived experiences of unmarried young fathers in rural Zambia: altering their education and life trajectories, roles, identities, social status, and expectations. Overall, the findings of the study suggested that contrary to dominant stereotypes which portray young fathers as ‘cavalier young males who sexually exploited their female partners, got them pregnant, and then callously abandoned them’ (Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014, p. 260), most of the young fathers who took part in this study took responsibility for the pregnancy. Irrespective of their romantic relationship and economic status, many of them were involved in the care and upbringing of their children. Their accounts highlighted how they desired to be involved and were actively involved with their children not only in monetary terms but also in non-monetary ways such as being there or physically present when the child falls ill, playing with their children, bathing, and feeding their children, caring roles that have traditionally been perceived as women’s work. Additionally, for many young fathers, becoming a father was reported as a positive turning point that motivated them to become more responsible economically and change their sexual behaviours. These findings provide positive examples of young fathers as parents which represent a departure from the earlier theorisation of young fathers within the social problem
framework which depicted them as absent, feckless and a risk (Duncan, 2007; Panades Blas, 2015).

What the findings of this study also highlighted was that young fathers’ entry into fatherhood was unplanned and many of them were unprepared for fatherhood. Their account demonstrated that some of them experienced difficulties in meeting some of their roles such as economic provision, although this was something which improved as they grew older, and their income sources improved. The struggles to economically provide for their children that some young fathers experienced is not significantly different from those of older men who become fathers whilst unemployed. Despite economic difficulties, many young fathers in this study reported to a varying degree providing finances and items such as bathing soap, washing powder, lotion, clothes, shoes, and food for their children. This questions the deficit model of fatherhood often used to theorise young fatherhood.

Furthermore, it was found that despite their desire to be involved with their children, some young fathers encountered relational and cultural barriers that interfered with their involvement. This suggested that lack of involvement of some young fathers with their children may not be solely their responsibility. Therefore, this research or thesis has addressed a gap identified within the area of young fatherhood in Zambia and contributed to knowledge in sub-Saharan Africa by exploring the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers.

To understand the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers, this study drew on overlapping bodies of theory: ecological systems theory, transition theory, theories of masculinities discussed in chapter three. The ecological system theory provided the main lens through which to understand unmarried young fathers’ lived experiences in this study.

This theoretical framework was adopted after a review of the research literature on young fatherhood (e.g. Maiden, 2013; Paschal, 2003; Swartz & Bhana, 2009) which revealed how this framework has been relevant in providing insights and understanding of what shapes
young father’s conceptualisation of fatherhood and what influences their fathering behaviours. Furthermore, it has been found useful in analysing the influence of social, cultural, and structural environments on young father’s experiences of fatherhood. Analysis of young fathers’ accounts for this study reinforced its usefulness and relevance. However, some themes emerging from participants’ narratives during data collection and data analysis highlighted the need for alternative theoretical perspectives. Therefore, the transition theory (status passage) and theories of masculinities (hegemonic and caring masculinities) offered alternative perspectives for analysing young men’s transition to fatherhood, conceptualisation and enactment of fatherhood, and how young fathers negotiate cultural expectations and masculine identity. Thus, discussions of the findings of this study have been framed around these three theories.

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings that emerged in relation to the research questions. In addition, it highlights the major contribution to knowledge on lived experiences of unmarried young fathers. The chapter is divided into six sections: key findings of the research; theoretical relevance of findings; limitations and strengths of the study; implications for policy and practice; future research direction; and reflections on the research process.

9.1 Key findings of the research

The key findings of this research have been grouped into four themes that represent each research question and they have been discussed in relation to existing theories. They illustrate how this research contributes to existing knowledge, theory and provide new insights on unmarried young men’s lived experiences of young fatherhood.
9.1.1 Experiences of the transition to fatherhood

9.1.1.1 Becoming a father as a status passage

The findings of this study revealed that becoming a father is a status passage in the participants’ culture. This is consistent with previous studies (Day & Evans, 2015; Mann et al., 2015; Mubita, 2021; Mweemba & Mann, 2020), which found that becoming a father was a status passage and a symbol of adulthood status for men in the Zambian culture. Glaser and Strauss (1971, p. 2) theorised status passage as a ‘movement into a different part of a social structure; or a loss or gain of privilege, influence, or power, and a changed identity and sense of self, as well as changed behaviours.’ The concept of status passage allowed an understanding of young fathers’ interpretation of fathering a child and how in the Zambia culture fathering a child marks a transition point in the way young men are viewed, understood, or treated by their peers, family, and the wider community. Across many participants’ accounts, narratives of changes in social status, behaviours, identity and gaining of cultural privileges reinforced Glaser and Strauss’s (1971) conceptualisation of status passage. The stories told by young fathers in this study demonstrated that irrespective of age, the birth of the child marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood for young men as well as moving into the structure of parenthood and acquiring a new identity in Zambian society. Young father’s accounts in chapter six showed that following the birth of the child, their identity changed, and they experienced an elevation in their social status that is, they were given a superior status over their peers who were childless and gained the cultural privilege of being called by the child’s name as a sign of respect. Furthermore, the findings also showed that after the birth of the child, young fathers were no longer regarded as children but viewed as adults, and they were expected to perform adult responsibilities such as providing financial and material support for the child regardless of their economic status. This may represent ‘double-doses’ of stress’ for those young fathers who are still adolescents (Paschal et al., 2011, p. 75). This entails that they now must manage the
transitions and challenges associated with normal adolescent development and parenthood (Paschal et al., 2011).

Whereas some previous studies have also suggested that becoming a father is a status passage to adulthood, the findings of this study also highlighted some tensions between cultural expectations and actual experiences of young fathers. Young father’s accounts exemplified how many young fathers still depended on their parents to manage some fatherhood expectations such as economic provision despite society placing this expectation on them as fathers and viewed as adults. This demonstrate that while symbolically young men may be regarded or treated by society as adult when they become fathers, they do not immediately cross the threshold to adulthood following the birth of the child but instead, find themselves betwixt and between statuses of being a child and an adult that is, occupying a liminal space (Turner, 1994). They may not be prepared for fatherhood. Therefore, it is unsurprising that many young men may struggle to provide for their children. Many of them may need a strong family support system and access to support services to help them manage the transitions and be successful in parenting rather than being stereotyped.

9.1.1.2 Impact of the transition to fatherhood

Another key finding of the study was that the transition to fatherhood has both negative and positive consequences for young men. Contrary to being the feckless youths and a risk to their children and society as often depicted (Duncan, 2007; Holgate et al., 2006; Lau Clayton, 2016), many young fathers who took part in this study saw pregnancy and the birth of the child (becoming a father) as a life-changing event and a positive turning-point. Chiming with Glaser and Strauss’s (1971) conceptualisation of status passage as changed sense of self and behaviours, it was suggested that pregnancy and subsequently the birth of the child motivated some young fathers to change their sexual behavioural patterns. Young fathers’ accounts demonstrated that some of them quit sexual relationships and multiple sexual partners while others start using condoms to avoid repeating the ‘mistake’.
The study also revealed that fatherhood initiated a shift in life focus and priorities for many young fathers. Participants’ accounts illustrated that some young fathers became more responsible and started incorporating their children in their time and financial spending. It was suggested that the birth of the child provided extra motivation for some of them to start working hard i.e., engaging in piecework to be able to provide financial and material support for the child. This challenges the long held negative stereotypes of uncaring young fathers. These findings corroborate those of previous studies with young fathers in South Africa, the UK, and Australia (Chideya & Williams, 2013; Reeves, 2006; Robb et al., 2017; Swartz & Bhana, 2009; Swartz et al., 2013; Wilkes, Mannix, & Jackson, 2012), suggesting that fatherhood is a powerful motivation for young men to re-evaluate their lives, turn away from reckless behaviours, become more responsible, and refocus life priorities. However, even though these previous studies and the current study suggested that becoming a father was a positive turning point for some young men, the present study also showed that it is not a positive turning point or transformative experience for every young man, as some of them repeat the same ‘mistakes’, such as repeated pregnancy.

The study also revealed that the transition to fatherhood interfered with the education and life trajectories for some young men. It was found that pregnancy and the birth of the child facilitated some of them dropping out of school. Young fathers’ accounts showed that many of them were not economically independent, and their parents were the main source of economic support for their school and the child. When it became financially difficult for their parents to support them in school and meet the needs of their children, some of them quit school to go and do some piecework so that they could provide for their children. It was also found that some young fathers redirected the limited financial resources they had towards the child’s support and dropped out of school as they could not afford to continue with school. This demonstrates how young fathers value their children and their role as fathers.
The study also found that when some young fathers left school as requested by the school authorities enforcing the education re-entry policy, they never returned to school due to lack of funds and ended up getting married earlier than anticipated. Findings of this study strengthen evidence from previous studies in Zambia and other sub-Saharan African countries such as Rwanda (e.g., Mweemba & Mann, 2020; Ufashingabo, 2017), indicating that young fatherhood disrupts education pathways and the sequence of life events for some young men. Whereas much of the research literature in sub-Saharan Africa only highlights negative consequences of young parenthood on the education and the life trajectory of young women, findings of this study showed that it also has negative consequences for young men’s education and life trajectory. Therefore, like young mothers, young men may also need economic support for them to manage fatherhood roles and remain in school or return when they drop out.

9.1.2 Understanding fatherhood and what influences fatherhood and fathering

9.1.2.1 Construction of fatherhood roles

The study revealed that young fathers construed fatherhood in quite ‘traditional’ terms: a father as an economic provider, positive role model, and moral or spiritual teacher and guide. However, economic provision was reported as the most important fatherhood role. In all young fathers’ accounts, financial and material provision was professed as the central aspect of good fatherhood and masculinity. Participants’ accounts exemplified that despite their economic challenges, the provider role remains central to young fathers’ construction of fatherhood and masculine identities. It is acknowledged that in cultures where economic provision represents the culturally exalted form of masculinity and fatherhood, men feel obligated to adhere to traditional roles or hegemonic masculine ideals (Lewington et al., 2021; Sikweyiya, Shai, Gibbs, Mahlangu, & Jewkes, 2017). Young fathers’ accounts demonstrated that they all conformed to a culturally idealised form of masculinity and ideals of good fatherhood by defining fatherhood roles primarily in economic provider terms.
These findings demonstrate how hegemonic, or provider masculinity strongly guides the constructions of what it means to be a father or man in Zambian society. This has implications for young fathers’ involvement in other roles or the striving of caring masculinities. The importance attached to economic provision and its association with masculinity has the potential to preclude some young fathers from enacting caring masculinities or engaging in caregiving roles which are perceived as feminine or ‘women’s work’. However, young fathers in the present study reported being involved in caregiving activities but some of them experienced stigma from some sections of their communities. Despite being involved in caregiving roles, participants’ accounts suggested that many young fathers mainly understood caregiving as a mother’s responsibility, like what Crivello and Mann (2020) found with married young fathers in Zambia. This highlights how caring masculinities are subordinated to provider masculinities in Zambian society. Findings of this study echo findings from previous studies in the UK and US (Neale & Lau Clayton, 2011; Paschal et al., 2011), which found that young fathers consider economic provision as the most important aspect of fatherhood. However, these studies were conducted in the urban setting. The current study was conducted with young fathers living in a rural area, which lacks social services for young fathers and has limited employment opportunities.

9.1.2.2 Factors influencing the construction of fatherhood and fathering

From an ecological perspective, it is acknowledged that fatherhood is influenced by several contextual factors (Deslauriers & Kiselica, 2022). Findings of the current study reinforced this notion and demonstrated how young fathers’ conceptualisation and enactment of fatherhood were shaped by cultural discourses and ideologies of gender, masculinity, and good fatherhood. It was noted that sociocultural norms within participants’ societal settings hindered young fathers from enacting caring masculinities as they restricted or prevented some of them from taking part in care roles that society deemed inappropriate for men. Participants’ accounts demonstrated that some young fathers could not take part in certain
caregiving roles or household chores such as bathing a girl child or cooking when the child’s mother is around.

The study also found that all the young fathers primarily identified with roles which were central to men’s constructions of masculine and good fatherhood identity. Participants’ accounts illustrated that all young fathers identified with the economic provider role. It was noted that all the young fathers in the study desired to be economic providers, despite being aware that they could not live up to the expectations, because dominant discourses of what it means to be a man in their society prescribed it. This supports Connell’s (1995) notion of hegemonic masculinity discussed in chapter three.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the family influenced the paternal behaviours of young fathers through socialisation. Bronfenbrenner described the importance of the family (home) as the microsystem and acknowledged its influence on the developing person. In the present study, it was found that most young fathers moulded their own fathering on childhood experiences of being parented, or what they observed and what they were taught when they became fathers by their own parents and the wider family consisting of grandfathers, uncles, elder brothers, and cousins. However, the study revealed that parents were not the most important and influential people for young fathers that took part in this study. It was found that grandfathers, uncles and married elder siblings were the most idolised, important, and influential people that served as role models. This finding contrasts with findings from previous studies in the US (Maiden, 2013; Paschal, 2003), which found parents to be the most important and influential role models for young fathers.

9.1.3 Negotiating cultural expectations and masculine identity

The way in which traditional masculinity shapes fatherhood is well established in fatherhood research literature. However, in recent past it has also been acknowledged that such traditional forms of masculinity may co-exist with other models such as ‘caring masculinity’ (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Elliott, 2016; Lee & Lee, 2018; Morojele & Motsa, 2019).
As discussed in chapter three, much of this evidence has been from studies with stay-at-home fathers or older fathers on parental leave taking up caregiving roles. In the present study with unmarried young fathers, evidence of both hegemonic and caring masculinities was present. Whereas most young fathers mainly constructed what it means to be man and fatherhood in economic provider terms which aligns with hegemonic masculinity in Zambian society, the study found that most of them were struggling to live up to the economic provider expectations but at the same time desired to be good fathers and masculine. As a result, their accounts indicated that they sought alternative ways of portraying themselves as good or responsible fathers and as masculine. The findings suggested that to achieve their aspirations, young fathers reconstructed masculinity and fatherhood in ways that incorporated caregiving activities into masculine identity and good or responsible fatherhood identity.

The ways in which young fathers discussed how they negotiated cultural expectations and masculine identity reflected the notion of caring masculinities discussed in chapter three. Participants’ accounts showed that the primacy of economic provision as the only determinant of good fatherhood and masculinity was rejected by most young fathers. It was suggested that despite being subordinated to hegemonic masculinity, most young fathers enacted alternative forms of masculinities that embrace values of care. Their account demonstrated that they considered care roles that are antithetical to hegemonic masculinity to be equally important and representing good or responsible fatherhood and masculine.

It was found that young fathers not only rejected the dominance of provider (hegemonic) masculinity but also rationalised and legitimised their involvement in caregiving activities by portraying themselves as loving and caring fathers and often suggested that their masculinity was not threatened. This demonstrate how contemporary ‘young men are to an extent able to adopt more open expressions of masculinity’ (Elliott, 2020, p. 1). Nevertheless, despite rejecting the primacy of traditional masculinity and being critical of it, they did not
completely depart from or completely undermine it. It was found that they still maintained the notion of being economic providers which aligns with traditionally masculinity. This resonates with findings from previous studies with stay-at-home fathers or older fathers who took up caregiving roles whilst on paternal leave in the US and European countries (e.g., Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2018; Leung et al., 2019; Shah, 2023), demonstrating how they incorporate traditionally feminine values of care and traditionally masculine traits into their new masculine identity, without degrading their masculine status.

The study also revealed that some young fathers who were found not conforming to traditional gender roles or norms of masculinity, experienced negative reactions, or stigma. This finding echoes previous studies with older fathers (Evans, 2016; Mubita, 2021), which found that in Zambia, men that engage in ‘feminine’ gender roles tend to be exposed to negative reactions. However, these studies were conducted with older married fathers in urban settings. The current study was conducted with young fathers in a rural setting. This study contributes new insights into men’s experiences of stigma for engaging in ‘feminine’ gender roles or enacting caring masculinities in a cultural context which is highly patriarchal. It suggests that it is not only older fathers who are subjected to stigma for engaging in what is seen as ‘women’s work’, but young fathers too. Furthermore, it highlights how stigma may be an obstacle to the striving of caring masculinities in Zambian society. Participants’ accounts demonstrated that some young fathers who embraced caring masculinities or performed childcare tasks were teased, ridiculed, shamed, and laughed at, and their masculinities were questioned as they were often asked if they had become women. However, it was found that young fathers who experienced negative reactions often ignored those that projected negativity towards them. Their accounts suggested that what mattered to them was meeting the needs of their children or ‘kusamalila mwana’, which they interpreted as providing total care for the child. Ignoring the negativity and maintaining care practices more commonly associated with mothers demonstrate how young men as
subordinated groups could challenge aspects of hegemonic masculinity and dominant ideals of good fatherhood. Whereas in this study young fathers showed resilience as they did not report avoiding caregiving roles after being subjected to stigma, the study by Mubita (2021) with older married fathers in urban Zambia suggested that some men disengaged if the source of disapproval was a relative.

9.1.4 Factors influencing young fathers’ involvement with their children

The study found that overall, most of the young fathers were actively involved in the upbringing of their children. What was evident in this study was that their definition of involvement transcended financial and material provision to include regular contact with the child, being there or present and supporting the child when sick and having a relationship with the child. However, there were variations in degree of involvement with their children. Prominent in young fathers’ accounts was that the frequency of contact with the child, maintenance of physical presence and a relationship with the child was to a large extent contingent on availability of resources to offer to the child and meet cultural expectations, geographical location of residence, and quality and status of relationship between the child’s mother or maternal family. Examples of different ways young fathers were involved with their children included but not limited to spending quality time with the child, providing financial and maternal support, teaching, and playing with the child, cooking, and bathing the child. All the five aspects of Gavin et al.’s (2002) model of paternal involvement (endowment, provision, protection, formation, and caregiving) discussed in chapter three were apparent in young fathers’ accounts. For instance, in relation to provision, despite their economic status, young fathers reported ensuring that their children’s material needs were met either directly or through their parents who often served as a buffer for economic stress. With respect to formation, young father talked about spending time teaching, taking a walk, and playing with their children while aspects of protection discussed by young fathers included taking their children to the clinic or hospital when they fall sick. Regarding
endowment, despite a few of them delaying the decision to accept paternity responsibility, they reported acknowledging their children as their own and their children were given their family name. Furthermore, despite perceiving caregiving as a woman’s responsibility, young fathers’ accounts demonstrated that they took part in caregiving activities such as cooking and bathing the child.

Nevertheless, despite most of the young fathers being actively involved in the upbringing of their children, it was apparent in their accounts that many of them faced myriad barriers that interfered with their involved with their children. Findings of this study chime strongly with the ecological framework within which father involvement is theorised as a product of individual, relational, and contextual factors that serve as both barriers and enablers for involved fathering (Castillo & Sarver, 2012). Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) acknowledged that an individual's behaviour or social experience (in the case of this study young father’s involvement with their children) can best be understood in relation to the ecological environment in which they occur. He theorised the ecological environment as a collection of ecological systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-and chronosystems) with the developing individual being an integral part of them. For the cohort of young fathers that took part in this study, their involvement with their children was influenced by individual and multiple ecological environmental factors. These included their personal attitudes and behaviours towards pregnancy and child paternity; individual’s socioeconomic status; family support; the quality of the relationship with the child’s mother and maternal family; lack of employment opportunities and access to economic support; the cultural practice of paying pregnancy damages; and consistencies and changes in relationship status of young fathers and the child’s mother. These factors represented the five ecological systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-and chronosystems). However, there were varying degrees of influence these ecological systems or factors had on young fathers’ involvement with their children. Analysis of young fathers’ accounts indicated that the most influential factors to father’s
involvement for young men in rural Zambia where this study was undertaken were their individual financial circumstances, cultural practices of paying pregnancy damage (macrosystem), and the quality and status of the relationship with the child’s mother and maternal family (meso-and chronosystems respectively) as discussed below.

9.1.4.1 The quality and status of relationship with the child’s mother and maternal family

In chapter eight, the findings showed that the quality and status of the relationship with the child’s mother and maternal family was the most important and influential determinants of some young fathers’ involvement with their children. Bronfenbrenner described the role played by changes or constituencies over time in the characteristics of the individuals and the environment in which individuals lived (chronosystems) and the interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person actively participate (mesosystems). For the cohort of young fathers in this study, the quality and status of the relationship with the child’s mother and maternal family determined their access to, contact, and interactions with the child. It was found that the child’s mother and the maternal family were well-situated to enact gatekeeping to the child, considering that they had the custody of the child, and they were the primary caregivers. Participants’ accounts showed that a poor or conflicting relationship with the child’s mother and maternal family or a breakdown of the romantic relationship, including the child’s mother getting married to someone else, made it difficult for some young fathers to have access to the child. It was found that sometimes, this prevented some of the young fathers from being involved with their children and fulfil their roles as fathers. Conversely, the study revealed that having a positive relationship with the child’s mother and the maternal family was beneficial as it resulted in meaningful involvement and engagement of young fathers with their children. Furthermore, it was found that involvement and engagement with the child was more enhanced when the child’s mother remained romantically involved or got married to the child’s father. It was suggested that
this created a conducive environment for young fathers to spend more time with their children, sometimes, even away from the mother and maternal family. Similar to Gavin et al.’s (2002) study in the US, what this study also revealed was the mediating role of maternal grandmothers in young fathers’ involvement with their children. The study found that when some young fathers happened to have a fragile relationship with other maternal family members, some maternal grandmothers sometimes, initiated contact with the young fathers and facilitated their involvement by allowing the child’s mother to let the child spend some time with the father or encouraging the young fathers not to worry about paying the pregnancy damage but to maintain a relationship with the child and provide support for the child. These findings provided further evidence of the previous studies in South Africa, the UK, and US (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Gavin et al., 2002; Lau Clayton, 2015, 2016; Neale et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2014; Swartz et al., 2013), suggesting that the quality and status of relationship with the child’s mother and maternal family are key to young fathers’ involvement with their children. However, the present study contrasts with findings from previous studies in the UK (e.g, Speak et al., 1997), which found that the perception of unsuitability of young fathers by the maternal grandparents was a source of tension or barrier to young father’s involvement with their children. Findings from the current study showed that being pressured to pay for pregnancy damages or to marry the child’s mother is what sometimes caused the tension between young fathers and maternal parents and forced some of them to temporarily disengage with their children for fear of being asked. This finding adds new nuances and perspectives, which are culturally situated to international young fatherhood scholarship regarding the sources of tension between the maternal family and unmarried young fathers.

9.1.4.2 Cultural practice of paying pregnancy damage

While it acknowledged that age and the economic status of young fathers can impact on young fathers’ performance of paternal functions, other factors such as cultural practices
which are important constituents of the macrosystem emerged as having significant influence on young fathers involvement with their children. Bronfenbrenner described the role played by broader ‘cultural-scripts’ such as belief systems or ideologies, norms, values, customs, and practices of society in shaping the lower order system (micro-, meso-, and exosystems). Across young fathers’ accounts, the impact of ‘cultural-scripts’ such as cultural practices of paying pregnancy damages on young fathers’ involvement with their children and how the maternal family behaved towards young fathers were apparent. In chapter eight, it was discussed that cultural gatekeeping (Makusha & Richter, 2016) by the maternal family had a huge impact on some young fathers’ involvement with their children. The study revealed that charges associated with pregnancy damage that the maternal family slapped on young men were quite exorbitant in many cases and most of the young fathers reported that they struggled to pay. Participants’ accounts demonstrated that failure to meet this cultural expectation, either in form of cash and cattle equivalent, created the conditions for cultural gatekeeping that is, access to the child being either restricted or blocked by the maternal family. This, in turn, interfered with other paternal functions such as caregiving and socialisation. This finding supports evidence from previous studies in South Africa on the negative impact of cultural practices such as paying of pregnancy damage on father involvement (Chili & Maharaj, 2015; Swartz & Bhana, 2009; Swartz et al., 2013). Like previous studies in South Africa, the current study revealed that failure to pay for pregnancy damage affects unmarried young fathers’ access to their children and prevents them from having meaningful involvement with their children. This research finding contributes to regional and international young fatherhood scholarship by providing insights into cultural differences and bringing out new perspectives on cultural factors that influence unmarried young fathers’ involvement with their children.
9.1.4.3 Young fathers’ financial circumstances

The findings of the study revealed that some young fathers in this study were to some extent responsible for their own lack of involvement with their children. Within the ecological framework, Bronfenbrenner’s considered individuals as part of ecological systems and saw their traits as playing a role in shaping their own social experiences. For young fathers in the current study, their economic status emerged as an essential individual characteristics that shaped their paternal behaviours. It was found that young fathers’ financial situation coupled with the significance they attached to economic provision determined the frequency of contact with the child for some of them. Their accounts demonstrated that when some of them did not have tangible things to offer or take for their children, they temporarily withdrew from making regular contact with their children to maintain a positive self-image. It was suggested that the inability to provide financial and maternal support for the child was a source of self-stigma for some young fathers. It was found that the fear of being asked for money or ridiculed or shamed by the maternal family for going to visit the child empty-handed was a powerful motivator for some young’s father to temporarily withdraw from making regular contact with the child. This precluded them from playing other paternal functions. On the other hand, it was found that being financially sound bolstered young fathers’ confidence and sense of self as men to maintain regular contacts with their children and ability to fulfil their roles as fathers economically. This finding echo those from previous studies in the UK (e.g, Speak et al., 1997), suggesting that financial constraints limit contact for some young fathers with their children because of eroded confidence when they have nothing to offer.

9.2 Theoretical relevance of findings

Findings from this study demonstrate that the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers can be viewed from the theoretical position of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory, Connell’s (1995) hegemonic masculinity, Elliot’s (2016) caring masculinity
and the transition theory, particularly Glaser and Strauss’s (1971) concept of status passage and Turner’s (1994; 1969) notion of liminality. These theories were not only useful, but also relevant to the understanding of young men’s experiences of fatherhood in rural Zambia. They enhanced the interpretation of young men’s transition to fatherhood, their conceptualisation and enactment fatherhood, and how they negotiate cultural expectations and masculine identity. Additionally, they enhanced understanding of what influences young fathers’ involvement with their children and informs their construction of fatherhood. For example, using the ecological framework in this study allowed me to move away from exclusively focusing on the role played by young fathers in their own lack of involvement with their children, to examining the interplay of young fathers’ individual characteristics, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors within the social environment in which they father, in influencing their involvement with their children. Furthermore, the framework was useful in exploring the role they play in informing young fathers’ conceptualisation and enactment of fatherhood. In the current study, all the Bronfenbrenner’s environmental or ecological systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystems) were applicable and found to have influence on young fathers’ involvement with their children. The microsystem in the present study included the social and dyadic relationship between the young father and his child, child’s mother, and the maternal family as well as the paternal family. On the other hand, Bronfenbrenner theorised the mesosystem in terms of the relationships between microsystems and other or a system of microsystems. For this study, the mesosystems comprised of the father-child relationship and its association with the young fathers’ dyadic relationship with the child’s mother and the maternal family highlighting how events in one dyadic relationship impact the other. The exosystem encompassed broader social and economic institutions, which determined young fathers’ access to social services, economic resources, and employment opportunities and interfered with young fathers’ ability to economically provide for their children. With respect to the macrosystems, these included cultural ideologies, norms and beliefs about fatherhood, masculinity, and gender as well as
cultural practices in Zambian society which influenced young fathers’ conceptualisation, expression, and enactment of fatherhood and their involvement with their children. Finally, the chronosystems in this study included life events or ecological transitions in the life of both the child’s mother and father. These encompassed changes in the financial situation of young fathers, changes in marital or romantic relationship status between the young father and the child’s mother, changes in place of residence, and changes in the relationship and marital status of the child’s mother which impacted on the young fathers’ access to and having a relationship with the child, as well as preforming paternal functions.

Theories of masculinity also offered an important perspective to the study of young fatherhood in rural Zambia. As discussed in chapter three, fatherhood is a resource for enacting masculinity. Employing hegemonic masculinity to this study allowed me to examine how cultural discourses of what it means to be a man influence young men’s choices, conceptualisation, expression, and enactment of fatherhood and fathering. Findings of the study demonstrated that across all young fathers’ accounts, the economic provider role was discussed and chosen as the most important and primary role of a man as father and all the young men aligned with it despite their economic circumstances. It seemed most young fathers felt pressured to be economic providers because society prescribed it as a successful way of ‘being a man’. On the other hand, whereas caring masculinity is a gender equality intervention and has largely been used with stay-at-home fathers or those on paternal leave taking up caregiving roles, findings of this study showed that it can offer useful insights for understanding young father’s subjective experiences. In the current study, it provided the prism through which to analyse how young fathers negotiate cultural expectations and masculine identity in the context of economic difficulties. It allowed for an appreciation of caring roles often associated with women that young fathers perform for their children in a traditionally patriarchal society and an understanding of how involved young fathers were in the lives of their children. Findings of this study reinforce Mvune and Bhana (2023, p.
assertion that ‘caring masculinities opens up the possibilities for understanding young fathers away from dominant stereotypes that position them as uncaring, irresponsible, and reckless’. Young fathers’ accounts demonstrated that they perform caregiving roles or tasks and value them as they help them to be involved in the physical care of their children and portray themselves as good and responsible fathers/men.

Finally, the transition theory, especially the concept of status passage, provided the lens through which to understand how young fathers interpret their transition to fatherhood or fathering a child in Zambian culture. It enabled an understanding of how these experiences influence young men to change their behaviours and become responsible economically and shapes how they are understood, viewed, and treated by society. Participants’ accounts demonstrated how fathering a child was a positive turning point for many young fathers as it influenced them to change their sexual behaviour pattern and became an impetus for them to engage in piecework to raise financial resources to meet the economic provider expectations and demonstrate ethical standards as expected on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions (Turner 1969). The notion of liminality on the other hand, provided an understanding of the complexity of the transition to fatherhood for young men.

9.3 Strength and Limitations of the study

One of the strengths of this study was my understanding of the cultural background of the participants. This meant I was able to conduct interviews and focus groups using the native language familiar to all the participants. This enabled an effective communication and flow of conversation to examine young fatherhood in-depth. In addition, data was translated and transcribed by myself, allowing me to be close to the data in ways which would not have been possible if another translator had been used.

Despite this strength, the study had its own limitations. This study explored the lived experiences of unmarried young fathers using the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which is qualitative in nature. Data was collected from a relatively small sample (24
participants) drawn from Sinda district, which is a rural area. With this size of sample, albeit in accordance with the phenomenological approach, and participants drawn from the same small geographical area, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to a large scale. Furthermore, given that the study was limited to young fathers who were unmarried at the time of pregnancy and birth of their child in a rural setting, their accounts and experiences may not reflect the full range of circumstances and experiences of young fathers in urban areas or those who are married. The results of this study mean that the phenomenon uncovered may only relate or be exclusive to this demographic and setting.

Another limitation of this study is that by conducting the study in Nsenga, a native language, and later translated to English, it is possible that some data or meanings might have been lost during translation, although steps were taken to reproduce the original content of participants’ accounts. Also, some English words or concepts used may not carry the same cultural relevance.

A further limitation of this study is that the findings reported only represent views of young men as fathers. Being able to interview their female partners might have provided a more holistic picture of the importance of relational aspects and how involved they are with their children.

9.4 Implications for policy and practice

This study suggested several recommendations for policy and practice. Findings from this study indicated that young fathers in rural settings have limited employment opportunities, lack access to economic support, and struggle to provide economic support for their children. Considering that the society in which they live underscores economic provision as constituting good fathering, failure to provide was found to be a source of embarrassment and cause for some young fathers to temporarily withdraw from regular contact with their children. So, one of the ways in which young fathers might maintain their involvement with their children is by improving their economic circumstances. Thus, there is a need for
government policies and interventions that would empower young fathers economically to improve their abilities to meet the needs of their children. This will not only benefit the child but also the child’s mother. Programmes designed primarily to support young fathers’ financial independence and more involvement in their children’s lives have been tried in the US. They have been found to increase young fathers’ access to resources to support their education, financial stability, and involvement in their children’s lives (Niland & Selekman, 2020). Lessons can be drawn from such programmes and adapted to suit local conditions.

This study also found that, like young motherhood, young fatherhood is also disruptive to young men’s education prospects and life trajectories. Young men from financially disadvantaged families often drop out of school to go and work to support their children and rarely return to school due to inadequate financial support from their parents. Current programmes in Zambia only focus on young mothers’ return to school and young fathers are marginalised. There is a need for inclusive policies and programmes that can also address the needs of young fathers and their children. In the UK, programmes supported by the government that offer education maintenance allowance or bursary fund exist for young parents who are studying. Good practices can be learnt from such programmes and adapted to local conditions.

The study findings further indicated that some (young) men who engage in care activities are often ridiculed, shamed, and laughed at by some community members. The emphasis placed on economic provision as the basis of good fatherhood and masculine identity has a danger and associated costs such as restricting or precluding (young) men from performing caring roles both in public and private spheres, to the detriment of the child. There is a need for the government to incorporate in the current policies measures that challenge gender norms that facilitate the exclusion of men from care activities. Considering that caregiving is shaped by cultural beliefs and norms (Cancian & Oliker, 2000), the government should also work with community leaders to educate communities on new practices that underscore
the benefits of men’s participation in childcare. Similar strategies used in promoting change in cultural and social norms that support gender-based violence can be used to challenge norms that prevent men from taking part in caregiving roles (Daka, Mwelwa, Chibamba, Mkandawire, & Phiri, 2020; Raifman et al., 2011). Additionally, the government encouraging new models of masculinity and policies that promote and call for families to encourage acceptance of both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ qualities regardless of gender in homes, starting at an early age, may be helpful. Similar to Robb et al.’s (2017) study with young men from fractured families in the UK, Evans (2016) found that men who grew up sharing care work with sisters on the Copperbelt in Zambia did not regard childcare as an expression of femininity. Furthermore, Evans’s (2016) study found those who grew up in homes where parents did not treat male and female children significantly different, they grew up believing that there is no difference between the sexes when it comes to care work.

The current study also revealed the importance and influence of grandfathers and uncles in young fathers’ understanding and enactment of fatherhood. They were found to be an important resource that young fathers drew on for advice. Many young fathers referred to these men as mentors and role models. Therefore, practitioners can use these relationships as an important base for developing community-based programmes that provide parenting classes to young fathers or expectant fathers using older fathers with good standing in the community.

Findings of the study also showed that exorbitant charges associated with pregnancy damages affected young fathers’ involvement with their children when they failed to pay. There is a need for the government and community leaders to revisit and re-examine such cultural practices that inhibit young fathers from having access to their children and being involved in the care and upbringing of their children.
9.5 Future research directions

This study raised several issues worthy of further research. While research in the recent past (including this study) has started investigating fatherhood in Zambia, there are still significant knowledge gaps. This study only focused on unmarried young fathers in a specific geographical area in a rural setting. The experiences of unmarried young fathers in other rural regions and urban settings remain unexplored. More qualitative research is needed. Comparing their lived experiences would add further understanding and insights to inform the development of policy and interventions.

Findings of this study suggested that many young fathers are involved with their children but some face relational and cultural barriers. A comparative study of unmarried young fathers and mothers would provide valuable insights into how involved young unmarried fathers are with their children. In addition, young fathers’ involvement with their children over time could be a subject of longitudinal study for future research.

9.6 Reflections on the research process

The research process was a transformative experience for me. To begin with, while my initial intentions were to investigate the parenting experience of both young mothers and fathers living in poverty albeit with teenage pregnancy and motherhood earmarked as the main areas of focus, I chose to focus on young fathers only. My decision was informed by a dearth of research on young fatherhood after a comprehensive review of literature. In the end, it turned out to be the best decision I made in the sense that it allowed me to make a meaningful contribution to knowledge in this arena.

Nevertheless, the journey was not straightforward. There were many twists and turns along with unexpected obstacles. Choosing the final methodological approach for my study was not easy. The more I read the literature, the more difficult it became to decide as many previous studies had used different approaches such as narrative, ethnography, and grounded theory based on their research aims. I would say, there was no clear ‘blueprint’. I initially
decided to adopt descriptive phenomenology, which I later changed and settled for hermeneutic phenomenology. Given that the literature reviewed was pointing to the importance of cultural context, I felt that descriptive phenomenology was not a good fit for my study. The choice of my methodological approach resonated well with the theoretical framework I intended to use. The research methods training sessions offered by The OU were key to the successful selection of the methodology. They enhanced my skills in understanding the relationship of three aspects: research questions, research methodology, and the theoretical framework.

The fieldwork phase of my PhD journey was characterised by uncertainties and anxieties when the world was hit with the Covid-19 pandemic. The imposition of travel bans cast doubts on conducting face-to-face fieldwork. The situation became more complicated after learning that it was not practical to employ internet-based methods of data collection due to lack of broadband internet in the proposed communities for the study. In addition, many of the potential participants in those communities did not own smartphones to facilitate online data collection. Frustration and anguish started building and hope of doing fieldwork started diminishing. When my travel was finally approved after the Covid situation slightly improved, it was an exciting time as hope of making progress was restored after enduring the frustration of postponing fieldwork. What this taught me was that a PhD journey can be an emotional rollercoaster with many highs and lows. You need to be open to unforeseen events.

Overall, the process of data collection was a success. I managed to recruit and interview 24 out of the 25 young fathers initially planned. Key to the success of data collection or fieldwork was my ability to organise a local contact prior to fieldwork and to communicate in the native language as well as using community gatekeepers such as community health workers and leaders of local social groups to recruit participants. Being an outsider to the communities under research, I was somewhat anxious of how I would manage to recruit
participants who are often described as a ‘hard-to-reach group’ (Bhana & Salvi, 2022). Contacting a nursing officer working at a local hospital in the area prior to fieldwork paid off as he was able to mobilise competent community health workers that helped with recruitment. What I learnt from this experience was that using people whom the locals know and trust in recruitment of participants, enhances trust and facilitates easy access. As earlier discussed, although this approach may have recruitment biases such as selecting people whom recruiters deem suitable, the use of multiple methods of recruiting participants helped to reduce such biases in my study.

Nevertheless, not everything went according to the plan or expectations during the recruitment phase. Firstly, I had planned to recruit some participants through teachers in schools, but it did not work out. The teachers failed to identify potential participants. I only managed to recruit two participants that attended the same schools where teachers failed to identify through snowball techniques and community health workers. Later, I learnt that childbearing outside marriage was a sensitive subject in those communities and many young fathers concealed their identity to protect their image and avoid being mocked by their peers at school. This taught me that recruiting participants through schools on sensitive topics when using qualitative methods may not be suitable as individuals may not be free to disclose their identity, especially if stigma is attached to their situation. Secondly, towards the end of fieldwork, it was difficult to get hold of some participants and many interviews had to be rescheduled due to political events and the general elections in the area. While it was inevitable for my plan to clash with elections due to Covid-19 that affected my initial schedule, in future research I would avoid research activities closer to or during the election period. Despite all the difficulties I faced, I was able to successfully undertake my research and conducted 24 interviews and two focus groups that I planned which was quite surprising but very gratifying.
One part of the methodology which worked well was the integration of photo elicitation methods into interviews and combining focus groups with interviews. I felt that this allowed me to collect richer data. I found the process of interviewing a fascinating experience. Listening to participants passionately share difficult and happy moments of their transition to fatherhood was quite emotional at times but interesting and fulfilling. To allow the participants to tell their stories, I constantly kept my emotions in check. I believe this process helped me to improve my skills in asking questions, probing, listening, thinking, and taking summary notes, although I could have done better with probing in one of the first interviews. I did not probe enough to understand why one of the participants rejected the pregnancy. I also experienced some technical challenges with access and transferring of photographs from participants due to faulty storage devices. Additionally, some participants could not provide the required 5 photographs as planned. Some only managed one or two photographs. Perhaps in future I can learn to be a little more tentative and avoid over-reliance on participants using their relatives’ or own smartphones to capture photographs and try using disposable cameras if processing services permit.

Though tedious, transcribing and translating data myself worked well as a first step to the process of data analysis. It helped me to get an overall picture of young fathers’ experience of the transition to fatherhood and their involvement with their children. However, the process of analysis and writing was time consuming, stressful, confusing, tedious, and at times, frustrating. I did not anticipate that the process would be that back-and-forth, rewriting, and reanalysing. However, I found the process mind transforming. I learnt that the back-and-forth process refined me and helped me to be more critical in the way that I think and write. As I now look back, it gives me joy and fulfilment that I undertook this study.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics approval-ERES

11th December, 2020.

Ref. No. 2020-Dec-004

The Principal Investigator
Mr. Aaron F. Mvula,
The Open University,
Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies,
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA,
UNITED KINGDOM.

Dear Mr. Mvula,

RE: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNMARRIED YOUNG FATHERS IN RURAL ZAMBIA.

Reference is made to your protocol submission dated 7th December, 2020. The IRB resolved to approve this study and your participation as Principal Investigator for a period of one year.

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<th>Fast Track</th>
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<td>Approval and Expiry Date</td>
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<td>Expiry Date: 10th December, 2021</td>
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<td>Protocol Version and Date</td>
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<td>10th December, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of participants approved for study</td>
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<td>10th December, 2021</td>
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Where Research Ethics and Science Converge
Specific conditions will apply to this approval. As Principal Investigator it is your responsibility to ensure that the contents of this letter are adhered to. If these are not adhered to, the approval may be suspended. Should the study be suspended, study sponsors and other regulatory authorities will be informed.

Conditions of Approval

- No participant may be involved in any study procedure prior to the study approval or after the expiration date.
- All unanticipated or Serious Adverse Events (SAEs) must be reported to the IRB within 5 days.
- All protocol modifications must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk (but must still be reported for approval). Modifications will include any change of investigator/s or site address.
- All protocol deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 working days.
- All recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
- Principal Investigators are responsible for initiating Continuing Review proceedings. Documents must be received by the IRB at least 30 days before the expiry date. This is for the purpose of facilitating the review process. Any documents received less than 30 days before expiry will be labelled “late submissions” and will incur a penalty.
- Every 6 (six) months a progress report form supplied by ERES IRB must be filled in and submitted to us.
- A reprint of this letter shall be done at a fee.

Should you have any questions regarding anything indicated in this letter, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us at the above indicated address.

On behalf of ERES Converge IRB, we would like to wish you all the success as you carry out your study.

Yours faithfully,

ERES CONVERGE IRB

Dr. Jason Mwanza  
CHAIRPERSON
Appendix B: Letter of research registration-NHRA

NATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH AUTHORITY
Paediatric Centre of Excellence, University Teaching Hospital, P.O. Box 30075, LUSAKA
Tell: +260211 250309 | Email: nhrascc@gmail.com | www.nhra.org.zm

Ref No: NHRA/00009/23/12/2020 Date: 23rd December, 2020

The Principal Investigator
Mr. Aaron F. Mvula,
The Open University,
Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies,
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA,
United Kingdom.

Dear Mr. Mvula,

Re: Request for Authority to Conduct Research

The National Health Research Authority is in receipt of your request for authority to conduct research titled “LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNMARRIED YOUNG FATHERS IN RURAL ZAMBIA.” I wish to inform you that following submission of your request to the Authority, our review of the same and in view of the ethical clearance, this study has been approved on condition that:

1. The relevant Provincial and District Medical Officers where the study is being conducted are fully appraised;
2. Progress updates are provided to NHRA quarterly from the date of commencement of the study;
3. The final study report is cleared by the NHRA before any publication or dissemination within or outside the country;
4. After clearance for publication or dissemination by the NHRA, the final study report is shared with all relevant Provincial and District Directors of Health where the study was being conducted, University leadership, and all key respondents.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Sandra C. Sakala
Acting Director/CEO
National Health Research Authority

All correspondences should be addressed to the Director/CEO National Health Research Authority
Appendix C: Information sheet/consent form for interview participants

**Information sheet**

In-depth interview participant

<table>
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<th>Project title:</th>
<th>What is it like to be unmarried and a father under 21 years in Zambia today</th>
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<tr>
<td>Researchers’ name:</td>
<td>Aaron Faro Mvula</td>
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</tbody>
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My name is Aaron Faro Mvula a PhD student at the Open University (OU) in United Kingdom. On this date: __________/______/_______ you are invited to take part in this research study that explores the lived experiences of young Fathers. Before you decide whether or not to take part, please take time to read this information carefully or I can read it in the local language for you if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like some extra information.

Due to your fathering situation, you have been identified as suitable participant for this study. I believe you and other invited men that become fathers between the age of 16-20 years can provide valuable information that can help in understanding the lived experiences of young fathers.

This research is looking to find out what it is like to be a father before the age of 21 whilst you are not married from your point of view. It seeks to understand the roles you play in your child’s life, what your community expect you to do and how involved you are with your children’s care. The findings will be given to support services and policy makers to help support others in future. This study has been reviewed by and received a favorable opinion from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee in UK (Ref. No HREC-3807-Mvula); ERES Converge IRB (Ref No. 2020-Dec-004) and registered with the National Health Research Ethics Board (NHREB) in Zambia (Ref No: NHRA00009/23/12/2020).

This study involves one to one interview and taking photographs with your phone or identifying and bringing some of your existing photographs that represent you experiences of being a young father. No images of individual faces or identifiable features should be taken. Those that have will not be selected for use from any you allow us to use in future dissemination.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do not wish to take part, community leaders will not be informed of your decision and there will be no negative consequences. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form later. However, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. There will be no consequences. However, you cannot withdraw consent after 30th November 2022 after data has been analysed. Once data has been anonymised and has been analysed, it can no longer be identified.

If you decide to take part, you will be given a week to take photographs using you phone, and then we will meet either at your home, community centre and school centre privately to discuss your
experiences. We will talk for around an hour. I will ask about your age, ethnic group, level of education etc so that I can understand things that could affect you in fulfilling your role as a father. I hope you will agree that I can audio record our conversation so that I have an accurate record of everything you say. Should any part of the process upset you, you can stop the interview at any time.

The study does not include any material benefits. However, it is hoped that this study will help to inform service providers and policy makers in Zambia to understand issues surrounding young fatherhood and help them in the development of interventions or programs that can respond to the needs and challenges of future young fathers.

In this period of the Covid-19 pandemic, if you have any symptoms for COVID 19 or any other health condition that put you at risk, then you shouldn’t participate. If not adhering to Covid-19 prevention measures, there is risk of contracting the virus if one of us has it. However, prior to the interview, a face mask and a bottle of sanitizer will be provided to you and temperature will be checked by a healthcare worker that I am working with.

I will use the information you and other participants give to write the report that will be submitted to the university as part of my course. Your information will also be used in scientific publications and conference presentations. You real name will not be used and confidentiality will be ensured in the publications.

All the recordings will be kept under lock and key and stored on the Open University password protected laptop and USB flash drive. All the information given will not bear your name or address, it will be anonymous, password protected and encrypted. Furthermore, your personal identifiers such as names will be given fake names to protect your identity during any dissemination process including scientific publications. Additionally, all the interviews recorded digitally, will be stored on the password protected Open University server and after transcribing, the recording will be destroyed. Transcribed data will be archived at the Open University research repository (OU ORDO) which is a university data storage library. Data will only be destroyed after 10 years as other people may want to use the anonymized data.

By signing the attached consent form, you agree to take part in this study

If you have questions about your rights or if you feel you have not been treated fairly or if you have other concerns, you may contact the Director of Postgraduate Research Studies Dr Inma Alvarez, email: imma.alvarez@open.ac.uk or my supervisor Dr. Philippa Waterhouse, email: Philippa.Waterhouse@open.ac.uk at The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom, MK7 6AA. or the Chairperson, ERES CONVERGE IRB, 33 Joseph Mwilwa Road, Rhodes Park, Lusaka, Zambia Tel: 0955 155633/4, and email: eresconverge@yahoo.co.uk

Thank you for your time to ready this information sheet.
Consent Form

Project title: What is it like to be unmarried and a father under 21 years in Zambia today

Researchers’ name: Aaron Faro Mvula

Please circle the appropriate answer

I have read and understood the study information dated _____/_____/____ or it has been read to me. YES/NO
I have asked questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. YES/NO
I understand that participating in this study involves one to one interviews and discussing my photographs YES/NO
I agree to the interview being audio recorded. YES/NO
I understand that my participation will be confidential and the researcher will ensure that I cannot be identified in subsequent writing, publication or presentation YES/NO
I understand that the information I provide will be used for the purposes of discussions, writing the report, publications and presentations at conferences YES/NO
I agree that what I have said can be quoted or used in the research reports and publication. YES/NO
I understand that I cannot withdraw consent after 30th November 2022 after data has been analysed. After that date my contribution will have been anonymised and it will be impossible to identify. YES/NO
I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary, I can refuse to answer questions and stop the interview without giving a reason and face no consequences YES/NO
I understand that all data supplied by me will be securely stored within the Open University server (archived at OU ORDO) and destroyed after 10 years. YES/NO
I give my consent/permission to my selected photographs to be used in future dissemination YES/NO
I waive all my right to all the selected photographs YES/NO

Signature (participant): ___________________________ Date: ____________

For participants unable to sign their name, mark the box on the right with a thumb instead of signing

Name in Block Letters: ___________________________

Signature of Aaron Faro Mvula (Researcher): ___________________________ Date: ____________

Thank you for taking part in this study
## Appendix D: Photo selection and consent/permission Form

### Photo selection and consent/permission Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project title:</th>
<th><em>What is it like to be unmarried and a father under 21 years in Zambia today</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Researcher:</td>
<td>Aaron Faro Mvula,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This form refers to photographs you took on your lived experience of being unmarried and a father before the age of 21 years. All the photographs will be securely stored by the researcher. I would like to use some of the photographs in the future disseminations with your permission. No photograph taken that contains individual faces or identifiable features will be accepted and selected for use in future dissemination. Please indicate in one of the boxes below whether you are happy for me to do this. I have numbered the photographs to assist you. I won’t use any photographs without your permission.

I give consent and permission for the following photographs to be used for research purposes as outlined below in the above project. I waive all my rights to these selected photographs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sn.</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
<th>Used for research purposes: Future dissemination such as conference presentation</th>
<th>Please circle the appropriate answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>YES/NO</strong></td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td><strong>YES/NO</strong></td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td><strong>YES/NO</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
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<td><strong>YES/NO</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
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<td><strong>YES/NO</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Name of participant:  
Date:  
Signature: 

Aaron Faro Mvula  
Date:  
Signature: 

*Thank you for taking part in this study*
Appendix E: interview guide

Lived experiences of unmarried young fathers in rural Zambia

In-depth interview guide

A. Introductory questions
1. Tell me something about yourself? age, ethnic group, level of education, occupation, marital status, living arrangement etc
2. Can you tell me about your circumstances at the time you found out that you were going to be a father? How old, was it planned?
3. How did you react to the news that you were going to become a father?
4. How do you feel being a father? how important is being father for you?
5. In what ways, if any, has the coming of the child (becoming a father) changed you as person?
6. How are you perceived as a young father in your community? why is it so? Probe on shame and stigma on fathering child outside wedlock?

B. Understanding fatherhood roles
1. Tell me what it means for you to be a father?
2. Before we proceed, I would like you to choose 3 photographs from the ones you shared with me that you feel most represent your experiences of being a father
   - Which photograph is the most important to you? Why?
   - Tell me about the [first/second…last] photograph. What does this tell me about you as a father? How does it feel talking about this photo?
   - Which photograph is least important to you? Why? How come you still chose to photograph/take it?
   - Was there anything that you couldn’t photograph that you would like us to talk about?
3. How have your experiences of being a father to your child/children been?
4. What would you say is your role as a father in the life of your child? probe how he has affected/impacted his child(ren) as a(young) father)
5. In your view, who, is a good father? Can you give examples? Anyone you know who is a good father? What makes these men good fathers?

C. What informs understanding of fatherhood roles
1. In what ways are you a good father? Probe what does a good father do and how does he behave around his child?
2. How would you describe a bad father?
3. How do you know what to do as a father?

D. Views and expectations of fatherhood
1. How do you view yourself as a father?
2. What were your expectations of fatherhood before your child was born?
3. How has your experience of fatherhood compared with your expectations of it? How has that affected you?
4. What do you think is expected of a father these days? How does that influence you? Probe expectations of men (e.g., what does it mean to be ‘manly’) and how does being a father link in with that?

E. Negotiating and dealing with difference in fathering practices and cultural expectations
1. Tell me, what do you do when you spend time together with your child?
2. What do you think society hopes that you will do as a father? Does that affect what you think? / How does that influence you? Probe frustrations so far.
3. Do you agree with what society says? What do you think a father should be like or behave like around his child?

F. Barriers and facilitators to involvement with their children
1. How often do you see your child? If not has it always been like that? how come?
2. Think about the time when you become a father – what has made your relationship with your child easier or good? and what has made it difficulty?
3. Can you tell me about the relationship you have had with the mother of your child- how are things going? What is good? what is difficult?) Has this affected your involvement with your child? In what ways (probe relation at conception, at time when child was born and now and also with maternal family
4. Earlier on you told me about your education, occupation ...... etc. Tell me how these situations have affected the relationship or involvement with your child? Probe also on payment of damages.
5. What things do you think would help you to have a better relationship with your child or to be a good father?

Thank you
Appendix F: Information sheet/consent form for focus groups participants

Information sheet

Focus Group participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project title:</th>
<th>What is it like to be unmarried and a father under 21 years in Zambia today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researchers’ name: Aaron Faro Mvula,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My name is Aaron Faro Mvula a PhD student at the Open University (OU) in United Kingdom. On this date: _____/_____/______ you are invited to take part in this research study that explores the lived experiences of young Fathers. Before you decide whether or not to take part, please take time to read this information carefully or I can read it in the local language for you if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like some extra information.

Due to your fathering situation, you have been identified as suitable participant for this study. Your perspectives based on your experiences and understanding of young fatherhood is important and can help us understand the experiences of young fathers in your community.

This research is looking to find out what it is like to be a father before the age of 21 whilst you are not married from your point of view. It seeks to understand the roles you play in your child’s life, what your community expect you to do and how involved you are with your children’s care. The findings will be given to support services and policy makers to help support others in future. This study has been reviewed by and received a favourable opinion from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee in UK (Ref. No HREC-3807-Mvula); ERES Converge IRB (Ref No. 2020-Dec-004) and registered with the National Health Research Ethics Board (NHREB) in Zambia (Ref No: NHRA00009/23/12/2020).

This study involves a focus group discussion with other fathers in a group of 5 on yours and their experiences of unmarried and a father under 21 years.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do not wish to take part, community leaders will not be informed of your decision and there will be no negative consequences. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form later. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason by informing me. There will be no consequences. However, you cannot withdraw consent after 30th November 2022 after data has been analysed. Once data has been anonymised and has been analysed, it can no longer be identified.

If you decide to take part, we will meet with four other men either at the community centre or school centre in outdoor space privately for the discussion on being father before the age of 21 whilst you are not married in your community. We will discuss for around an hour. I hope you will agree that I can audio record our discussion so that I have an accurate record of everything everyone
will say. I will contact and inform you of the meeting place. Should any part of the process upset you, you can withdraw from the discussions at any time. The study does not include any material benefits. However, it is hoped that this study will help to inform service providers and policy makers in Zambia to understand issues surrounding young fathers and help them in the development of interventions or programs that can respond to the needs and challenges of future young fathers.

In this period of the Covid-19 pandemic, if you have any symptoms for COVID 19 or any other health condition that put you at risk, then you shouldn’t participate. If not adhering to Covid-19 prevention measures, there is risk of contracting the virus if one of us has it. However, prior to the discussions, face masks and a bottle of sanitizer will be provided to everyone and temperature will be checked by the healthcare worker I am working with.

I will use the information you and other participants give to write the report that will be submitted to the university as part of my course. Your information will also be used in scientific publications and conference presentations. You real name will not be used and confidentiality will be ensured in the publications.

Significantly, all the participants will be asked not to discuss anything they hear in the focus group with anyone outside the group. All the recordings will be kept under lock and key and stored on the Open University password protected laptop and USB flash drive. All the information given will not bear your name or address, it will be anonymous, password protected and encrypted so that no one without permission can access it. Furthermore, each participant will be given a fake name to protect his identity during any dissemination process including scientific publications. Additionally, all the discussions recorded digitally, will be stored by the Open University server and after transcribing, the recording will be destroyed. Transcribed data will be archived at the Open University research repository (OU ORDO) which is a university data storage library. Data will only be destroyed after 10 years as other people may want to use the anonymised data.

By signing the attached consent form, you agree to take part in this study. If you have questions about your rights or if you feel you have not been treated fairly or if you have other concerns, you may contact the Director of Postgraduate Research Studies Dr Inma Alvarez, email: inma.alvarez@open.ac.uk or my supervisor Dr Philippa Waterhouse at The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom, MK7 6AA, email: Philippa.Waterhouse@open.ac.uk or the Chairperson, ERES CONVERGE IRB, 33 Joseph Mwilwa Road, Rhodes Park, Lusaka, Zambia Tel: 0955 155633/4, and email: erescon verge@yahoo.co.uk

*Thank you for your time to ready this information sheet.*
# Consent Form

**Project title:** What is it like to be unmarried and a father under 21 years in Zambia today  
**Researchers’ name:** Aaron Faro Mvula,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please circle the appropriate answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have read and understood the study information dated <em><strong><strong>/</strong></strong></em>/____ or it has been read to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have asked questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that participating in this study involves focus group discussions as well as audiotaping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to the focus group discussion being audio recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that my participation will be confidential and the researcher will ensure that I cannot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be identified in subsequent writing, publication or presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that the information I provide will be used for the purposes of writing the report,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>publications and presentations at conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree that what I have said can be quoted or used in the research reports and publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I cannot withdraw consent after 30th November 2022 after data has been analysed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After that date my contribution will have been anonymised and it will be impossible to identify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary. I can refuse to answer questions and stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the interview without giving a reason and face no consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that all data supplied by me will be securely stored within the Open University</td>
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<tr>
<td>(archived at OU ORDO) and destroyed after 10 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to not disclose any information shared in the group to non-participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature (participant):</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For participants unable to sign their name, mark the box on the right with a thumb instead of signing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Name in Block Letters:                                                                    |                             |
| Signature of Aaron Faro Mvula (Researcher):                                               | Date:                       |

*Thank you for taking part in this study*
Appendix G: Permission letter to hold Focus groups

SINDA TOWN COUNCIL

19th April, 2021

Mr. Mvula Aaron Fum
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
United Kingdom
MK 76AA

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: PERMISSION TO HOLD FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSIONS - YOURSELF

Kindly refer to the above captioned matter.

Reference is drawn to your letter dated 19th April, 2021 in which you sought permission of the council to conduct research in the district as part of your PHD Research.

I wish to inform you that the council has no objection to your application. However, you are advised to follow all the Covid-19 guidelines as tabulated by the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, you are advised to follow traditional practices of the target village if need arises.

Yours in National service,

SINDA TOWN COUNCIL

Grace M.M Kanyata (Ms)
COUNCIL SECRETARY

Cc. File
Appendix H: Focus Group Guide

Lived experiences of unmarried young fathers in rural Zambia
Focus Group Guide

A. Introductory questions
1. Tell me, what does it mean to be a father in your community? how important is being father in your community?
2. How is the ideal way of fathering in your community?
3. How are (unmarried) young fathers perceived in your community? Probe on childbearing outside wedlock?

B. Fatherhood roles and expectations
1. What roles do fathers play in the life of their children in your community?
2. What are the community’s expectations for men as fathers when they have children? Probe participants’ views on what society says, what they think a father should be like or behave like when with the child? What it means to be ‘manly’ and how being a father is link in with that?
3. In your community who is regarded a good father or what makes one a good father? prob; community definition a bad father? How do these affect young fathers?
4. In your community, how do young men learn the role of fathering or fatherhood?
5. What are the community or societal expectations for young men who become fathers?
6. How do young men meet those expectations concerning fatherhood? How does that affect young fathers?

C. Barriers and facilitators to involvement with children
1. What are the things that make it difficult for the young men as fathers to be involved with their children in your community? Probe what makes it easier for those involved?
2. What would help young men as fathers to have a better relationship with their children or for them to be good father in your community?
Appendix I: Confidentiality Agreement Form

Confidentiality Agreement Form

(Research Assistant)

By signing this confidentiality agreement, you are committing yourself to all the research project ethical obligations.

This Confidential Agreement is made between the researcher/PhD student at Open University: Aaron Faro Mvula and the research Assistant: ___________________________ Address: ___________________________ Mobile: ___________________________ for the research project: lived experiences of unmarried young fathers in rural Zambia.

This PhD research project seeks to examine and understand the lived experiences of young fathers from their standpoint. The study will involve in-depth interviews, photo elicitation and focus group discussions as well as safeguarding participants. In your duty, you will be checking participants’ temperature and contacting potential participants to ask about personal information regarding health matter to assess if they are considered at high risk to Covid-19. Participants who consider themselves at high risk to Covid-19 should be excluded. You are likely to hear participants sensitive personal information. Therefore, you are expected to exhibit high profession behaviour by ensuring participants’ confidentiality, privacy and that consent is sought before engaging participants in any discussion. You are also expected to return all research materials in your custody at end of data collection and destroy those not returnable.

I agree to:

- Seek consent from participants prior to any engagement.
- Keep all the research information shared with me confidential. I will not discuss or share the research information with anyone other than with the Researcher.
- Keep all research information secure while it is in my possession.
- Return all research information to the Researcher when I have completed the research tasks or upon request.
- Destroy all research information regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researcher after consulting with the Researcher.
- Comply with the instructions of the Researcher in accordance with ethical requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Research Assistant</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Faro Mvula</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date | Signature

Thank you for your cooperation
Appendix J: Summary tables of themes derived from focus groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condensed meaning units</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Being able to take care of the child</td>
<td></td>
<td>Identity and status of a father</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being able to provide for the child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being able to take care of everyone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being Marriage expectation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being respected</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Having a child</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being capable of reproducing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Able to provide for the child</td>
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<td>Being a father</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being grown up/adult</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being independent</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Having a child within marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being shamed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being incapable of managing adult expectations</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being incapable of providing</td>
<td>Community perception of young fathers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being incapable of taking care of the child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being too young to father a child</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Having rushd</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Providing for the child</td>
<td></td>
<td>Being an economic provider</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Supporting the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Providing the means for the child to go to school</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demonstrating respect for the child</td>
<td>Being a role model</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teaching the child</td>
<td>Being a teacher</td>
<td>Construction of fatherhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Able to demonstrate respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Able to provide for the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Able to spend time with the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Able to teach the child</td>
<td>Being a good father</td>
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<td>• Being unkind to the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unable to provide for the child/family</td>
<td>Being a bad father</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unable to support the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being taught</td>
<td>Learning what to do</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Consulting</td>
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<td>• Observing and imitating</td>
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<td>• Providing for the child</td>
<td>Cultural expectations of a father</td>
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<td>• Kusamaalia the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Spending time with the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Supporting the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Providing the means for the child to go to school</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teaching the child</td>
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<td>• Doing piecework</td>
<td>Meeting expectations of fatherhood</td>
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<td>• Having parental/family support</td>
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<td>• Having strong desire to be involved</td>
<td>Attitude towards paternity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Unable to provide</td>
<td>Economic ability</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good relations between paternal and maternal family</th>
<th>Quality of relationship between paternal and maternal family</th>
<th>Barriers and enablers to involvement with the child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Poor relations with the maternal family</td>
<td>Quality of relationship with the maternal family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having good relations with the maternal family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condensed meaning units</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Being a father/stepfather  
  • Being grown up/adult  
  • Being the head of the house  
  • Being responsible of looking after the child  
  • Being respected | Identity and status of a father | Being a father |
| • Being grown up/adult  
  • Having a child within marriage | Acceptable way of becoming a father | Community perception of young fathers |
| • Being destructor  
  • Being confused  
  • Being naughty  
  • Having no manners | | |
| • Being stubborn and deviant | Burdening the family financially | Impact on the family |
| • Engage in theft  
  • Becoming a hard worker  
  • Panicking to take care of the child | Impact on young fathers | |
| • Providing for the child  
  • Supporting the child  
  • Providing the means for the child to go to school | Being an economic provider | |
| • Teaching the child  
  • Guiding the child | Being a teacher and guide | Construction of fatherhood |
| • Able Kusamalila a child  
  • Able to teach and guide the child  
  • Able to provide and support the child | Being a good father | |
| • Unable kusumalila the child   | Being a bad father |
| • Unable to provide and support the child | |
| • Guiding and teaching the child   | Cultural expectations of a father |
| • Providing financial and material support for the child | |
| • Having family support | Managing fatherhood expectations |
| • Being fed love portion   | Community reactions to men's participation in childcare |
| • Cause of shame | |
| • Expression of love | |
| • Being taught and guided   | Learning what to do |
| • Observing and imitating | |
| • Accepting pregnancy and child paternity | Attitude towards pregnancy and paternity responsibility |

| • Denying pregnancy and child paternity | |
| • Conflicting child paternity | Barriers and enablers to involvement with the child |
| • Able to provide for the child | Economic ability |
| • Intimidation by paternal family | Lack of family support |
| • Good relations between paternal and maternal family | Quality of relationship between paternal and maternal family |
| • Poor relations with the maternal family | Quality of relationship with the maternal family |
| • Having good relations with the maternal family | |