

# PROJECT PORTRAIT

Exploring the Meaning of Fatherhood in Guguletu

#99 (2013)

## What is this project about?

This was a study conducted by a Gender Studies Honours student who collaborated with the NGO Ikamva Labantu in Guguletu. The NGO was interested in understanding men's involvement as fathers and what support they needed for this role.

The aim of the study was two fold:

- to explore the experiences of fathers who were permanently involved in their children's lives, and
- to unpack how fatherhood is practiced in South Africa.

This was done by examining how these men assumed their role, how their experiences were shaped, the demands that follow fatherhood, and highlighting some of the support structures they relied on in times of hardships.

## The research

To answer the research questions, interviews were conducted to gain insight into the level of understanding, knowledge, awareness, attitudes and opinions among men the regarding their role as fathers. The sample of fathers used for the study consisted of 4 Xhosa men aged 32-38. These participants were made available to the researcher through the NGO Ikamva Labantu; all of them were parents of children in Ikamva Labantu's preschools.



**Fathers are involved in caring for their children**

## What you need to know:

The research dispels some negative stereotypes attached to men who are fathers: absent, emotionless, abusive, incapable, unwilling to accept responsibility. Instead it shows that fathers want to be involved with their children, practically, emotionally as well as financially. And they need support for coping with this role.

## The research findings

The following themes became evident in the analysis of the data:

- There are multiple ways of Fathering
- Challenging the idea that nurturing is a woman's role
- Availability of support structures.

In studying the practice of fathering, the notion of Ubuntu came through very strongly: a man is not just responsible for his biological child, but he also had a duty toward setting an example for other children in his community.

In addition, fatherhood, according to the study's participants, meant more than being able to financially support your child. They placed a strong emphasis on emotional nurturing and unconditional love.

This was shown to challenge the common idea of nurturing being a 'woman-only' role. The fathers were eager and fully capable of emotionally supporting their

children's development.

The research further shows that fathering is not done in isolation. The fathers in the study were always able to call on various support structure. The members of the extended family were most important in this regard and offered financial assistance, babysitting, provision of toys etc.

## Using the research

The findings from this research reveal a positive shift in the ideas and meanings attached to Fatherhood. This is especially useful in an era such as ours where paternal rights are limited due to the negative stereotypes attached to fathers. Research findings such as this can then be used to support campaigns that aim to secure more rights for fathers or support them in their fathering role.

This study was completed in [October 2013](#).

## Want to know more?

A Gender Studies Honours student, Thembelihle Bongwana, completed this study in collaboration with the NGO Ikamva Labantu. She was supervised by Dr Adelene Africa. The thesis will be made available on the Co-op website

**Keywords:** Fatherhood, masculinities, traditional norms, Ubuntu, support.

To [reference](#) this Project Portrait, cite UCT Knowledge Co-op as the author.

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