

Male engagement in caregiving

By

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Southern African ECD Conference 28-30 March 2023
Lusaka, Zambia



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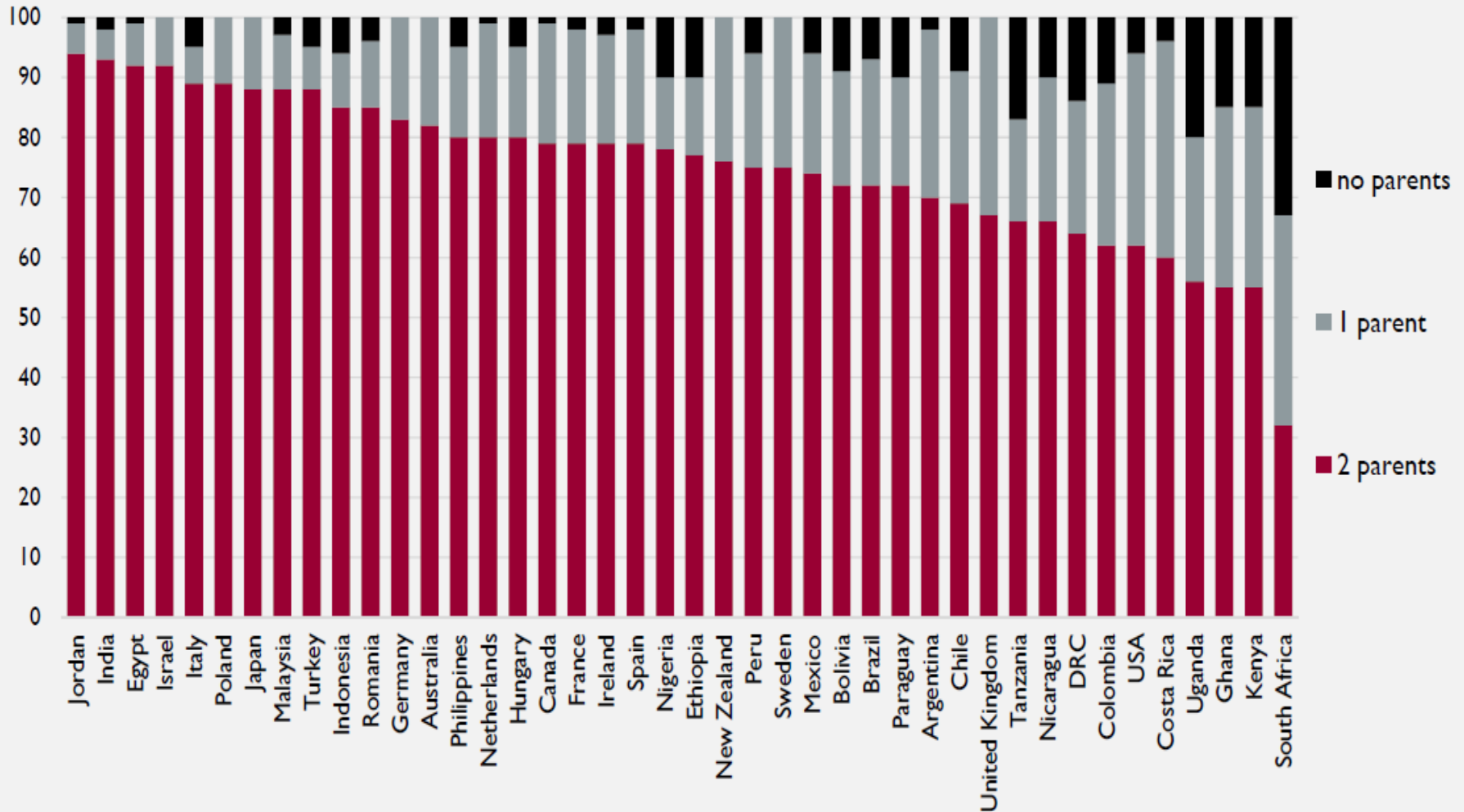


What we know...

- **Families across the world are changing!**
 - The diversity of family arrangements and household forms.
 - High rates of migration and mobility (incl children).
 - Unusually low marriage rates.
 - High rates of informal kinship care.
 - High rates of poverty, inequality, and violence.
 - Increase in labour force participation by women.
 - And extremely low rates of parental cohabitation with children – **particularly fathers.**



Children's co-residence with biological parents: evidence from the World Family Map (42 countries)



Source: World Family Map 2017

Implications for men and caregiving

- **Men's participation in caregiving is increasing...**
- **However, women still carry the burden of caregiving.**
- Significantly associated factors to male engagement in caregiving are:
 - Educational attainment
 - Employment status
 - Social class



Why male engagement is important

- Male engagement – loving, equitable, and nonviolent does contribute to improved outcomes for children, women, men, families, and communities.
 - **HOWEVER...**
- **THERE IS NO MAGIC BULLET TO MALE ENGAGEMENT!!!**
- Families should be supported to make the decisions that work best for them.
- Critical is that men are supported to redefine ways of caregiving that enable better and more meaningful connection with their children, and families.

The benefits of male engagement in caregiving



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Male caregiving benefits for children

- After conception, support for mothers reduces depression, anxiety, and risky health behaviours detrimental to foetal development.
- After birth, contributes to exclusive breastfeeding and breastfeeding duration, birth registration and better nutrition for infants and their mothers.
- Men's care and interaction contribute to infants and toddlers' cognitive, social, and emotional development.
- Male caregiving also contributes to children's readiness for school and later educational achievements.

Male caregiving benefits for children

- Men's care and direct interaction with their children in early childhood can also support their children's mental health.
- It is associated with fewer behavioural problems in boys and psychological problems in young women.
- It can also help to develop children's empathy for others.



Val Adamson - Bongani Ngwenya and daughter Sibonisile (1)

Male caregiving benefits for women

- Male engagement during the prenatal period is associated with the mother being more likely to receive antenatal care, childbirth and postnatal care.
- Male engagement during pregnancy can encourage women to seek prenatal care earlier, eat healthier, exercise more.
- Male engagement during pregnancy also contributes to women avoiding harmful behaviours such as alcohol, drug abuse and smoking, which have a dose-dependent relationship with childhood obesity.

Male caregiving benefits for women

- Male engagement after conception is associated with the family being more prepared for any complications during pregnancy and at birth.
- It can also contribute to reducing maternal postpartum depression.
- Male presence at birth is also associated with a reduction in stress and discomfort for women.
- **More importantly – a pathway to greater gender equality, and women supported by men derive greater satisfaction from their roles as mothers.**
- Men's investment in the family has been found to buffer against the effects of harsh parenting by a distant, demoralised or overburdened mother.



Male engagement benefits for men

- Male engagement, beginning in pregnancy, can improve their relationships with their partners and children.
- It can contribute to the man's physical and mental health, and happiness.
- Early paternal attachment has been associated with reduced risk of future child abuse by the father.
- Active male engagement counters forms of masculinity that emphasise male control, lack of emotional availability and limited involvement in the family and domestic sphere.

Male engagement benefits for families

- Male involvement in caregiving improves couple and family relations.
- The positive impacts include:
 - **Strengthened communication.**
 - **Equitable decision-making.**
 - **Healthy relationships between men and their partners.**
 - **Reduction in violence against women and children (including children witnessing violence against their mothers).**





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Barriers to male engagement in caregiving



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Barriers to male engagement

- **Cultural or circumstantial gatekeeping.**
 - The widespread perception that women are naturally more capable of caring for children and supporting their health and development.
 - And men are ill-equipped to do this – or incapable of it, or not interested.
 - Reproductive health care messages, especially for pregnancy and ECD are often targeted to women who are considered the primary caregivers of children.
- **Maternal gatekeeping – mothers may prevent fathers from caring for their children.**
- **Biological father non-residency.**

Barriers to male engagement

- **Negative perceptions of men and masculinity.**
 - Children live in families where men (not necessarily their fathers) are generally unacknowledged sources of care for them.
- **Structural barriers – Economic constraints make it difficult for poor and young men to take up fatherhood roles and responsibilities.**
- **Institutional and policy barriers.**
 - Most maternal and child health care programmes focusing on preconception, prenatal, postnatal or inter-conception care are tailor-made to address only the needs of mothers and children.
 - Little or no attention to the needs of fathers.

Recommendations for promoting male engagement in caregiving



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Defining the intervention targets

- Defining the target population for promoting male engagement in caregiving.
- Understand and appreciate that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work.
 - Different messages, intervention and delivery mechanisms would need to be designed for different groups of men, families, communities, all according to their needs.
- It is important that the heterogeneity of men, families, and communities are appreciated and considered every time when deciding on programmes, interventions and policies for male engagement in caregiving.

Male engagement beyond residency

- Male engagement extends beyond father-child residency.
 - We have now come to a point where most of us agree that **father-child co-residency does not always equate to involvement.**
 - **AND father-child non co-residency does not always equate to absence, lack of involvement, lack of care, and lack of love.**

Acknowledging that caregiving is important for men

- We need to acknowledge that **most fathers are and want to be involved in their children's lives in some way or another.**
- We recognise the **key challenges that men face in their fathering roles and need to establish how these may be addressed.**
- Mechanisms and policies promoting male engagement in caregiving need to be put in place – paternity and parental leave policies.
- Introduction of social security policies for men who do not necessarily benefit from current systems.

Take home message

1. Focus on the positive.
2. Highlight benefits for men as caregivers.
3. Elaborate the benefits for children, women, & families.
4. Stress the importance of involved social fatherhood.
5. Provide access to visual images and archetypes.
6. Use the communicative continuum through public events & small group activities.
7. Ensure participants have “voice” – e.g., children, men, and women.
8. Engage with academics, researchers, implementers and policymakers.

Take home message

1. Build relationships with local communities – fathers, mothers, children and community members.
2. Build relationships with implementation stakeholders.
3. Collaborate with research and academic partners in designing male engagement in caregiving indicators.
4. Build relationships with various government stakeholders.
5. Capacity building and development for fathers, mothers, and communities on male engagement in caregiving.

Take home message

- **Dedicated efforts are needed to meet the individual, familial, context- and age-specific needs of men and fathers to promote their positive engagement in caregiving!!!**
- **Establish proper monitoring, evaluation and learning components on male engagement in caregiving programmes, interventions and policies.**

Finally!!!

- **Leave no one behind...**
- Create complementary rather than competing interventions for mothers and fathers.
- These interventions are critical even in contexts of competing socio-economic, structural, and health priorities.

Thank you for your attention!



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