Fatherhood in Lesotho: The Effects of Children's Living Arrangements with Biological Fathers and Other Adult Male Relatives on Current School Enrolment

Introduction

As a result of non-marriage, separations, divorce and re-marriage, a lot of research has focused on the living arrangements of children and the impact of non co-resident fathers. Research on absent fathers highlight psychological maladjustments, school under-performance, anti-social behaviours and difficulty in establishing intimate relationships of children in non-intact families (Lamb, 1997). The high risk of behavioural problems and lower educational achievement are associated with absence of male sex role models (Biddulph, 1997), and the unfulfilled fatherly responsibilities as fathers fail to at least provide for their children when absent (Lamb, 1997). This research indicates that when fatherhood is not exercised in the family, the effects on the children can be damaging. However, this research mainly looks at single parent households in the West. It underestimates other forces that shape a child. It also fails to distinguish between biological fathers, social fathers as well as economic fathers. It has been argued that biological fathers can be secondary to the provision of love and support in South Africa (Townsend et al., 2002). In another research on time devoted to children, Folbre and colleagues (2005) argued that focusing exclusively on parents undermines the role of relatives and siblings as providers of child care in many households.

This understanding is particularly important in sub-Saharan Africa where many children live most of their childhood lives in households where one or both parents are absent. It has been shown that in Southern Africa, up to 30% of the children do not live with both parents (McDaniel and Zulu, 1996). In Lesotho this figure has been estimated at about 33.1% (Bureau of Statistics, 2003). As a result of high male labour migration to South Africa coupled with high adult mortality due to HIV/AIDS, many children do not co-reside with their fathers. However, these children live with their grandfathers, uncles, adult brothers and/or other older male cousins who may assume fatherhood responsibility in the absence, and presence, of the father. In this case, fatherhood would stress the importance of social relationships. Contrary to many Western societies, many people can assume fatherhood roles in African societies where extended family living arrangements are prevalent (Townsend et al., 2002). Therefore, in order to understand fatherhood in sub-Saharan Africa, it is important to account for the effects of other adult men who live with children.

While concerns about the role of social fathers have long been raised in family research, these claims have not yet been well documented. Current research often measures the role of step-fathers on child outcomes. For instance, research in the US has indicated inconsistent effects of step-fathers on children. In particular, child sexual abuse has been reported in step families (Margolin and Craft, 1989), while more recent research indicates warm relations between children and their step-father (Goldscheider, 2000). The important question that this research should poses is whether it is absence of a biological father per se or absence of a second parent that affects child outcomes? Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda (2004) argue that father absence maybe harmful not because a male sex role model is absent, but because many paternal roles, economic, social and emotional, go unfulfilled. In line with this argument, no research addresses the role of uncles, grandfathers, brothers, and other male cousins on children's outcomes. This is the niche which this paper aims to address. The objective of this study is to measure the effects of children's living arrangements with biological fathers and other male relatives on current school enrolment in Lesotho.

Data and Methods

This study uses data from the 2004 Lesotho Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS). This is a nationally representative household survey administered by Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and the Bureau of Statistics in Lesotho, in conjunction with ORC Macro International. The objective was to collect data on population and health issues. In addition, blood samples were collected for HIV testing.

A total of 8592 households were interviewed from a probability sample. Reports on fertility, living arrangements, education and other household characteristics were collected from all eligible women aged 15-49 and, a sub sample of men aged 15-59 years in the selected households. Information on usual household membership and visitors who stayed in the household the night before the interview was recorded. All the recorded individuals were then related to the head of the household. This makes it difficult to relate all individuals on the household roster with one another. Nonetheless, reports also included information about current spouse, which made it easy to link children with both their fathers and mothers as long as they were on the household roster. Since the data is cross sectional, current school enrolment is an appropriate dependent variable for measuring the effects of current living

arrangements on current school enrolment. Officially, schooling begins at age 6 in Lesotho, and there were 9452 children aged 6-14 years old in the survey, and only 9112 had reports on both current school enrolment and living arrangements with their fathers. Table 1 below presents descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Characteristics of School Aged Children (6-14 years) in Lesotho, 2004.

Variables	N = 9112	Percentage
Currently Enrolled in School		
Yes	7712	84.64
No	1400	15.36
Living Arrangements with father		
Father Co-resident	2778	30.49
Father not Co-resident but Member of Household	1779	19.52
Father Absent	2000	21.95
Father Deceased	2555	28.04
Other Household Living Arrangements		
Mother Co-resident	8301	91.10
Grandfather Co-resident	1004	11.02
Adult brother or Uncle Co-resident	625	6.86

Preliminary Results

The descriptive results above show variation in children's living arrangements, with more about 70% of children not living with their fathers. However, looking at the regression results in table 2 below, we observe that contrary to current theories on co-residence with a father, net of other variables, children whose fathers are not co-resident but household members are much more likely to be enrolled in school than children with co-resident fathers. In addition, contrary to this study's research hypothesis, presence of grandfathers, uncles and adult brothers is associated with less likelihood of going to school. Thus, presence of men in the household is generally not good for children in a context of limited job opportunities. Male labour migration results in remittances to households, which benefits children. This marks the division of labour in households where men are the economic providers and their absence is beneficial for children in households where they subscribe as members. Furthermore, the above results question the type of households in which children who co-reside with fathers live in. These could be poorer households hence further analysis of this research would be to account for other household characteristics like socio-economic status.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models Results on Children's Living Arrangements

	Model 1 (N = 9, 450)	Model 2 (N = (9, 112)	Model3 (N = 5, 999)	Model 4 (N = 5, 999)	Model 5 (N = 5, 999)	Model 6 (N = 5, 999)
Variables	**Odds Ratio**	**Odds Ratio**	**Odds Ratio**	**Odds Ratio**	**Odds Ratio**	**Odds Ratio**
Child Characteristics						
Age	1.24*	1.24*	1.31*	1.30*	1.30*	1.30*
Female	1.99*	2.02*	1.89*	1.89*	1.90*	1.90*
Living Arrangements with Father						
Father Co-resident (Reference category)						
Father not Co-resident but HH Member		1.69*	1.65*	1.64*	1.64*	1.65*
Father not HH Member		0.85*	1.10	1.18	1.24	1.25
Father Deceased		0.89	0.99	1.00	1.01	1.03
Living Arrangements with Mother						
Mother Co-resident			0.99	0.96	0.96	0.96
Living Arrangements with Other Adult Men						
Grandfather in Household				0.70*	0.68*	0.79
Uncle or Adult Brother in HH					0.43*	0.43*
Interactions						
Father not Co-resident but HH Member*Grandfather in HH						0.90
Father not HH Member*Grandfather in HH						0.83
Father Deceased*Grandfather in HH						0.77
Model Fit	P =	0.00	0.91	0.00	0.01	0.83

*Significance at P<0.05

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