

Father-Involvement Challenge South Africa

Participatory Action Research Report SEVEN SENSES



SEVEN
SENSES

Tackling
complex
challenges.
Together.

Summary

What

The Father-Involvement Challenge aimed to contribute to the understanding of the behaviour, fears, needs and desires of men in South African communities in order to ultimately find a way to increase fathers' involvement in the lives of their children.

Why

In communities all over the world, one finds father-child dynamics to be complex, often problematic. In South African communities, young men, women and children state to be dissatisfied with the way fathers are currently involved in the lives of their children. Strangely enough, researches on father-involvement so far, rarely consider the point of view of the men and fathers themselves. Knowledge of their perspectives is necessary to be able to encourage fathers to become – and stay – involved in the lives of their children.

How

Participatory Action Research (PAR) offers a strong combination of using a multi-disciplinary team of (partly local) researchers to acquire understanding from different aspects of the community, and immediately translating the gained knowledge into concrete solutions; all the while being in conversation and collaboration with the local community.

When

The research was carried out in January, February and March of 2018.

Conclusion

Looking back on the community data presentation and the discussions with and between community members, we can see a clear connection between the needs, the present assets and the solution the community came up with. Where our main topic was the lack of father-involvement, the community pointed out that physical and emotional safety as well as unintended (teenage) pregnancies also play a significant role in family life in Hammanskraal. They chose healthy and safe sexual behaviour as starting point for tackling the lack of father (or actually parental) involvement. They found that organizing sport events would enable conversations and hence a safe environment to talk about sex education. They believe this could lead to a decrease in unintended pregnancies which in turn will lead to more conscious parental involvement. Eventually, this hopefully will lead to reducing the obstacles found in this research and hence increase father-involvement in the long run.



image 1: FIC logo. Drawing made by a high school learner in Hammanskraal during the Appreciative Inquiry session

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1. Introduction

In the first half of the year 2016 an anthropological master's thesis was written, called *Caring about Care: reflections of mothers and children on care arrangements in South African communities*. The research was based on three months of fieldwork in Hammanskraal, South Africa. In this thesis, it was argued that both people living in these communities and people writing about and working in these communities (academics and professionals, for instance) view the mother of a child as its primary caregiver – and thereby the father as subsequent. Two reasons for this were mentioned. The first reason is that because fathers are often absent, the women in the community learn at an early age to become independent mothers who do not *need* the father of their child to be involved. Father-absence, in this way, turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy. This seems to bring about a vicious circle: fathers are not involved, women learn from a young age that men will often not be involved and that they will 'have' to survive without them, and hence they become so independent that men become (or at least *feel*) unnecessary or unwanted – and with the next generation the cycle will start over again. The second reason for viewing the mother of a child as the primary caregiver, could be simply because fathers are (often) absent. The interesting thing found out about this 'reason', though, is that both women and men stated to be discontent with the fact that this was happening: both women and men wanted parents to equally contribute to the upbringing of children. Both men and women wanted more father-involvement.

The described research was carried out by Laetitia Simorangkir, the initiator and coordinator of the 7Senses Father-Involvement Challenge (FIC). Having spoken to the people in the communities of Hammanskraal, she realized that more research on father-absence was needed, and preferably in a way that would empower men to become more involved in their families and communities. Involving and empowering local stakeholders in the process of research, that is exactly what the organisation 7Senses does. As the 7Senses Academy trains people in conducting action research, the match was quickly made: Laetitia would follow the 7Senses Academy, be trained in conducting action research and leading an intercultural-, interdisciplinary team in the field, and combine that with her own experience in academic anthropological research. She recruited three researchers from the Netherlands and seven local researchers from Hammanskraal. The 7Senses Father-Involvement Challenge was executed from the 10th of January until the 25th of March 2018.

1.1 The team

The research team existed of eleven people who were involved in the project. Some worked less often or joined the team at a later stage, but all of them made a valuable contribution. A short introduction of everyone in the picture (from up left to bottom right):

Wickey Mahlayeye (up left)

Radio presenter at the Moretele Community Radio in Hammanskraal. Wickey was not an 'official' local researcher but did contribute to the Challenge in a later stadium and is still involved with the project right now.

Laetitia Simorangkir

Graduate from Anthropology at VU University. Coordinator of the FIC-team.

Kgothatso Elias Tshabalala

Driver for the team in the second half of the Challenge. Provided a lot of background information on cultural traditions. Kgothatso has a daughter himself and it is their picture on the front of this report.

Solly Maluleke

Studied Political Sciences at UNISA (University of South Africa) and became a local researcher in the second month of the Challenge. Solly has a wife and three children. He introduced the team to the local community and joined the team in speaking on the local radio.

Irmarie Luijk (up right)

Graduate from International Studies at Stellenbosch University, born in South Africa but living in the Netherlands. Part of the 'Dutch' team.

Cynthia Rambau (bottom left)

Works with Nkele at the After School. Part of the team as local researcher from the beginning.

Carine Rozema

Master student in Social and Cultural Anthropology at VU University, writing her thesis on the research of the Father-Involvement Challenge. Part of the 'Dutch' team.

Kefiloe Bopape

Graduate from Sociology at University of Pretoria. Tswana teacher for the Dutch part of the team.

Suzan Ngoben

Known to us as Mmamoruti, meaning 'wife of the pastor'. Mmamoruti was our first driver, and helped out as local researcher in the second half of the project. Her church, located in the middle of the community, was a very useful location in organising the interviews and community events.

Nkele Maubane

Early Childhood Development-practitioner who owns an After School and Day Care. Brought the team in contact with a local high school.

Katlego Mokoena

Graduate from Social Work at Mafikeng University. Part of the team as local researcher from the beginning.

Busisiwe Oosthuizen

Busi, as we call her, was not part of the team but enjoyed being in this picture. She lives at the Butterfly farm and is the foster daughter of our host.

Ayda Abdan Kondori (bottom right)

Bachelor student Cultural Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam. Part of the 'Dutch' team, but also active as the team's photographer and filmmaker.



1.2 Regional background

The research was conducted in two communities that are located within a semi-rural area called Hammanskraal. These two communities are of similar size and consist on average of about 17.000 inhabitants. Hammanskraal is located about an hour northeast from Pretoria, which is one of South Africa's biggest cities. It is positioned closely to the Dinokeng Game Reserve, a nature reserve rich in all kinds of wild animals such as giraffes, zebra's, lions and elephants, that freely roam around there. The racial make-up of the two communities is almost identical, in both communities around 98% of the population is African. The other 2% of the racial makeup consists of Afrikaner, Indian, Asian and coloured people. As for gender, in both communities the ratio between males and females is about 50/50.

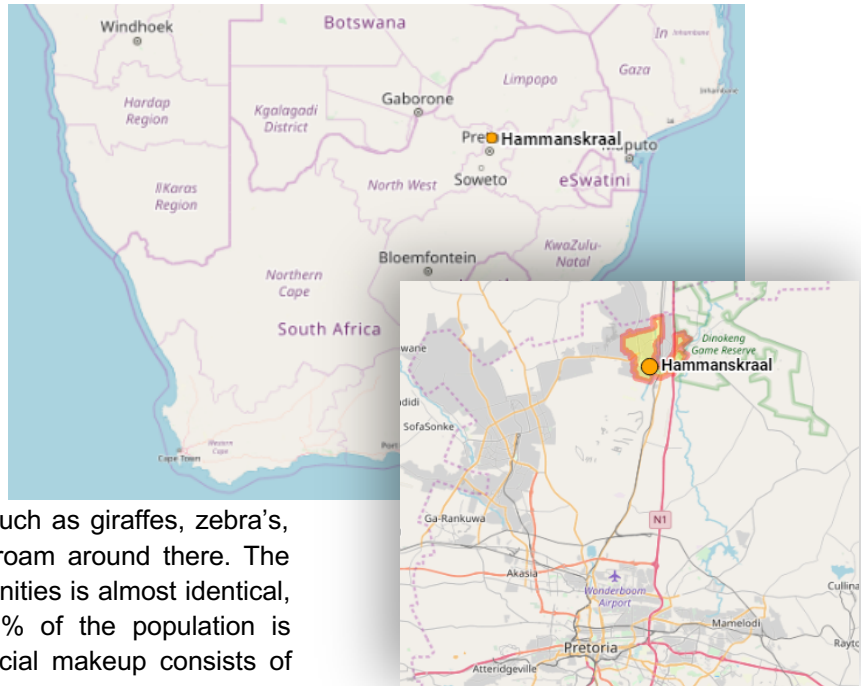


image 2: map

During the fieldwork, the Dutch researchers stayed on the Butterfly farm in Hammanskraal that was about fifteen minutes away from the communities where the research was conducted. In general, the inhabitants of Hammanskraal always treated us with smiles. They were interested in- and open to the work we did, they were generous and helped us to find other respondents with whom we could discuss father-involvement. (Based on Carine's thesis, 2018)

1.3 Research question

The main question during the Father-Involvement Challenge was:

What are the reasons for fathers in the community of Hammanskraal, South Africa, to be (un)involved in the lives of their children and what tools can be co-created in order to get them more involved?

Multiple sub questions were formulated in order to gain knowledge and understanding around father-involvement and to find a possible way to increase this involvement¹. For the sake of comprehension of this research report, the many sub questions are narrowed down to two main questions:

1. What is the current role of fathers in the community and what are reasons for fathers to be (un)involved in the lives of their children?
2. What assets are already present in the community and what tools can be co-created in order to get fathers to be more involved?

1.4 About the research report

This research report was written to inform all the stakeholders of the Father-Involvement Challenge about the research process and findings. A (rough) outline of the research execution, an explanation of the methods and a presentation of data and findings can all be found in this document. What *cannot* be

¹ The sub questions are divided in different categories and can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

found, however, is a theoretical framework and analysis of the research. This is done in order to keep this report concise and accessible for everyone who might be interested – non-academics included.

For whoever is interested in the theoretical analysis: a thesis has been written about the research of the Challenge. On the 7Senses Website, a page is dedicated to the Father-Involvement Challenge. This page contains information about the Challenge, as well as four (informal) blogs that were written during the research. For whoever has questions about (parts of) this document, as authors of the report we aim to be as accessible as possible for further discussions. Please find our contact details below.

We hope this report will give you new insight in the daily lives of the people in the communities of Hammanskraal, South Africa. When you are one of those people: we truly hope we have represented you and your surroundings properly.

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https://www.7sens.es/dt_galleries/father-involvement-challenge/

2. Executing the research

Research conducted by 7Senses is not (only) done in a 'traditional' way: we conduct *Participatory Action Research*, meaning that after gathering and analysing data, we present our results back to the community and look for the best fitting interventions and ways to take action together. In this chapter an overview of our respondents, methods and weekly schedule is given.

2.1 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The idea of action research is that the community decides for themselves on the issues they want to tackle. As action researchers, we facilitate this by conducting interviews and gathering data concerning the topics that community members want to discuss. Appendix 2 contains the PAR-design that was used as a starting point for the research. This design was filled in in advance of the research in the Netherlands by Challenge coordinator Laetitia, as well as at the start of the research in South Africa, by the entire team. Brainstorming together on the actual problem definition, goal of the research and possible stakeholders gave a lot of clarity and was essential for this part of the research: the Dutch researchers had more theoretical points of view, while the South African researchers brought in their own life experiences and professional expertise from their own work areas.

2.2 Respondents

In total, 47 people were interviewed in an individual interview. They are adolescents, middle-aged or elderly people and have in common that they live in the communities of Hammanskraal, South Africa. Many more people got in touch with our research and the topic of father-involvement through other research methods.

2.3 Methods

A couple of methods were used to gather data, of which the individual face-to-face interviews were the most important. Through these methods, we gained understanding of daily life in the communities and the views of parents and adolescents on the motivations of men. We then analysed the data and discussed this in a community meeting, after which we asked the community to think together about possible solutions. The following methods were applied:

- Individual, semi-structured interviews
- Questionnaires
- Focus groups/Group sessions
- Drama/theatre role plays
- Radio interviews

Individual, semi-structured interviews

Most of our data was gathered through individual, semi-structured interviews. We invited the respondents to meet us at a central place: at the HOG-church in the street of the radio station. Most of the people knew the church, and otherwise they would know the radio station and find the church from there. When people arrived, we would offer them a *cooldrink* and a cookie, and we would take them to sit inside the church or outside under the shelter. We would ask their permission to record the interview and then start asking questions, starting with some factual basic questions, and then moving towards the more personal questions about their own life or feelings. Every interviewer had their own set of questions, but we adapted the questions or their order if we felt this was 'necessary'; for example if the respondent seemed or stated to feel uncomfortable or needed to be led more in telling their stories.

Questionnaires

In order to get to know our respondents, we asked the local researchers to introduce us to some people in the community that would be willing to talk to us and could provide some starting points for discussion and thought. One of these people was Solly, who later became part of the team as a local researcher.

We met Solly in the second week of our research, and he proposed to introduce ourselves in the coming community meeting. A very practical way to get from a community meeting to concrete interview appointments with individuals, was by creating a questionnaire.

At the community meeting, we introduced ourselves and our research. We explained we wanted to get to know more about the community and that we wanted to do that by interviewing as many people as possible. We handed out questionnaires with some basic questions: male/female, marital status, amount of children, daily activity (work/school/unemployed), why they had come to the community meeting that day and whether they allowed us to contact them for an interview. That day, we got back 58 questionnaires, of which 47 People stated they were willing to be interviewed.

Focus groups/Group sessions

We intended to do focus groups or group sessions to observe group dynamics and possible discourses or ideas that are present in the community. One formal focus group with men was organized as part of our data-gathering and multiple group sessions were held through community meetings and high school visits. In the focus groups we discussed topics concerning gender role division, teenage pregnancies, alcohol/drug abuse and family life in general.

Drama/theatre role plays and Appreciative Inquiry

In total, our team visited the high school in one of the communities four times. At first, the drama class was meant as an orientation and teambuilding activity, since the team consisted of researchers with different cultural and professional backgrounds. We wanted to get to know each other and each other's ways of working, as well as get an idea of what was important to the young people in the community. The sessions were very successful. Not only did the students turn out to be great actors, they were immediately very open about their experiences with parental involvement and their struggles in their daily life.

Radio interviews

The radio interviews were very interesting and again, very useful. From the moment we started talking to locals, people pointed us towards the local radio station. They told us we should be on the radio to announce our research and to ask people to contribute. At first, we were a bit shy to talk to the people from the radio station, but at a certain point so many people recommended it to us, that we decided to give it a try. Although we were all very nervous about being on air, the radio broadcasts were very interesting. During our first two visits, the radio presenters shared some of our questions concerning father-involvement with the audience: "what does the word 'father' mean to you?", "what could you as (future) parent do to make sure you are involved in the life of your child?" and "are men allowed to express emotions in front of their children?". Listeners could phone the radio station and give their answer live on air. Later on, we invited Solly, the researcher from our team and a father of three children, to join us in the radio interviews. The radio presenters asked him questions about fatherhood and he would give advice to the listeners.

Participatory observation

For a team including three anthropologists, very little (intentional) participatory observation was done. There is a simple, but important reason for this. In the beginning of our research, some interesting conversations took place between the Dutch and the local South African researchers. It became clear that the local community did not want to get a 'Dutch' or 'Western' view or assessment of their problems. They wanted to know what happened in their community – they wanted to understand each other. When we discussed our data with our respondents, which we will also share in this report, we were glad to tell the people that whatever results we were showing them, it was all their own responses and ways of thinking. We strongly believe that this contributed to the way the community took us and our results seriously.

2.3 Weekly schedule

The Father-Involvement Challenge was a three-month during project. In those three months we conducted interviews, analysed the results and discussed these results with the local community, with the goal for the community to create their own solutions. Below, an overview is given of our activities per week.

Week	Activities	Most important
0	Laetitia finding local researchers, preparations arrival girls	Ayda, Carine, Irmalie arriving in SA
1	Adjusting, getting to know the farm and area, workshop 1 (Teambuilding), Tswana lessons, first community visit	Meeting local researchers
2	Tswana lessons, workshop 2 (PAR Design & Drama Class), workshop 3 (Interviewing & Data Analysis), High School Visit 1	Preparing fieldwork
3	Interviewing, transcribing, Community Meeting 1	Introducing ourselves in Community and interviewing
4	Interviewing, transcribing	Interviewing
5	<i>Holiday</i>	Resting
6	Workshop 4 (Appreciative Inquiry), transcribing, interviewing, Mini Conference with NOVA Institute	Transcribing, meeting NOVA Institute
7	Interviewing, transcribing, High School Visit 2, meeting Radio Station	Interviewing, High school, radio station
8	High School Visit 3, Visit Radio Station 1, analysing	Start analysing, first radio broadcast
9	Analysing, Visit Radio Station 2 Data Presentation Community	Analysing and presenting data to community
10	High School Visit 4, filming and interviewing experts NOVA, writing blogs	Implementation Community Action Plan
11	Filming local researchers, preparing Goodbye Party, Visit Radio Station 3, Goodbye Party	Wrapping up and saying goodbye
12	Saying goodbye, packing, back to the Netherlands	Dutch part of team Father-Involvement leaving

3. Data presentation

In order to present our data to the community in a way that the information was comprehensible and the assignment around it would be fun, we visualised our findings in so-called 'Challenge Trees'. In this chapter, we will present our research findings using the same framework.

3.1 Challenge Trees

Challenge Trees are a visual representation of a problem – that we prefer to call 'challenge' – with its causes and results. The middle of the tree, the trunk, represents the *challenge* itself. The roots represent the *causes* and the fruits, logically, the *results* or the consequences that that challenge brings forth. During the community meeting, we showed the community members three different challenge trees.

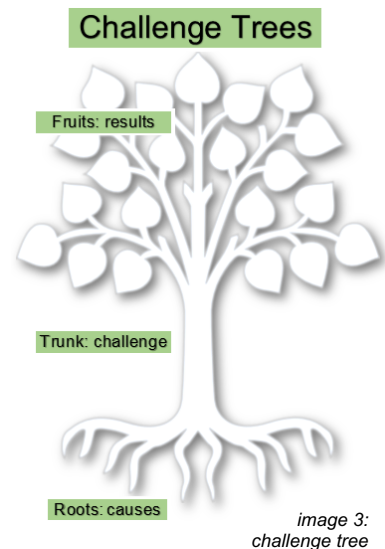
Choosing the challenges and building the trees

During the data analysis, we could distinguish 28 different themes that had been discussed during the interviews with the community members. Grouping these themes together resulted in ten broad categories, that we were able to narrow down to five after another round of critical selection. Eventually, three of these themes formed an issue that could be addressed by the community members themselves²:

- Lack of father-involvement
- Lack of safety
- Teenage pregnancies

Each issue became a 'challenge', and thereby the trunk of their very own Challenge Tree.

After having determined the challenges, we had to 'fill' the rest of the tree. Eventually, after analysing all our data, we managed to distinguish the causes³ of each challenge. These causes were mentioned by the people we interviewed – sometimes because we inquired about them, other times because they addressed it before we could. We then did the same for the 'fruits' of the tree: we analysed and looked for mentioned results or consequences of the issue of the specific tree. In the next chapter, the three challenges, together with their causes and results, will be explained.



² The fourth and fifth theme were 'lack of jobs and financial issues' and 'history and culture', of which we recognized we could not or did not want to influence them. We were not in a position to create more jobs for the people in the community; we could not change the history of Apartheid; and in the light of action research and wanting to conduct our research in an ethical way as well, we did not want to address the cultural traditions in a way that would force the community members to make big changes in their cultural behaviour. For these reasons, we chose to work with the remaining three issues, of which we thought addressing them would leave enough room for the community members to choose their own way of tackling them.

³ As stated before, we found it very important that the data we presented to the community would be based on what the community members had told us – not on our own interpretations. When we speak about 'the causes we found', we therefore speak about things literally mentioned by the community members.

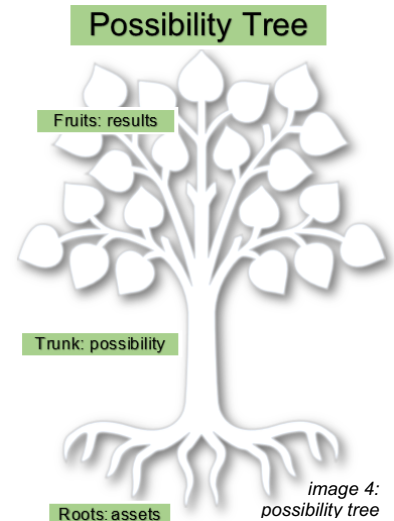
Possibility Trees

An essential part of action research concerns the way you frame the issues you want to tackle. By calling a lack of father-involvement a problem all the time, you imply that a lack of father-involvement is a negative matter that needs to be solved. Even though most people in the community do see father-absence as something negative (as that is the whole reason why we started this research in the first place), we deliberately choose to frame our research(findings) as positive as possible. Hence, we chose to name our research the Father-Involvement Challenge – instead of, for example, the ‘Father-Absence Problem’.

During the data analysis and the ‘construction’ of the Challenge Trees, we realised that we had not merely found problems and challenges in the community. From the beginning of the research, we had applied the *appreciative inquiry*-method: we looked for the good things in the community. We asked the interviewees not only about the challenges, but also about the assets – talents, skills, sources, existing projects – that they thought were present in their community. What were they proud of or happy with? As we had gathered lots of data around all these positive aspects, we decided to visualise them as well: in Possibility Trees. Possibility Trees are the positive opposite of Challenge Trees, with opposite themes/goals:

- Father-involvement
- Safety
- Healthy and safe sexual behaviour

We used them during the community meeting with a specific goal: we had left the ‘Roots’-part open and asked the community members what other assets or solutions they could think of in order to get to this positive opposite. In these trees, the (intended) results were derived from the research data as well: we had asked people about their wishes for their community and what they thought would happen if the positive opposite was achieved.



3.2 Current role of fathers

What is the current role of fathers in the community and what are the reasons for fathers to be (un) involved in the lives of their children?

We believe that the data we gathered during our research reflects the current role of fathers in the community. We had, however, gathered so much data in the three months that we were in Hammanskraal, that we decided to divide it in different themes. As explained above, three of these themes formed a challenge that could be addressed by the community. An overlap between these challenges is self-evident. In order to undertake the main challenge, the lack of father-involvement, other issues, such as teenage pregnancy and lack of safety, are addressed separately.

Lack of safety

I got attacked and I was in hospital because of people, they wanted money and cell phone from me. And I'm sure they were using it for buying alcohol. There is a lot of violence, almost every month a dead person. I don't feel safe, you cannot go out after eight because it's not safe. – Boy, 20

In many of our interviews the issue of safety came up, often without us asking about it. Many community members pointed out that they do not feel safe when walking in the streets of Hammanskraal, especially at night. One of the main reasons for this is the high crime rate. People are either afraid to leave their house as someone might break in and take all their belongings, or because they could get attacked on

the street. According to many community members, one of the main reasons for these high crime rates is unemployment. Young boys quit school, or finish Grade 12 (last year of high school), and do not know what to do next. Being unemployed often leads to boredom, which in turn leads to other problems, such as substance abuse. Substance abuse is a rather frequently mentioned topic when it comes to the youth of Hammanskraal.

A bad man is those who drink and when they come back home they will fight and the kids have to run away. A lot of alcohol abuse, even kids now they can get alcohol and smoke. It's a problem because they disrespect elders. (...) They even beat their own mother for Nyaope or to go and buy beer. Boys and Girls. It's a big problem, they end up stealing. Breaking in. - Woman, 54, three daughters

Nyaope is a self-made street drug, commonly used by youth in South Africa. Users can easily be identified and often assemble at the local mall or in the parcs and taxi ranks in and around the mall. It is a dangerous drug, not only because addiction is fierce, but also because, once you are addicted, it will not take much to resort to stealing and selling stolen goods in order to sustain your habit. Additionally, there are many taverns in Hammanskraal where they will sell alcohol to anyone, regardless of their age. According to many respondents, there is a lot of alcohol abuse because there are too many taverns. Alcohol abuse is not only a problem, but it causes many other problems as well. It is one of the main reasons for crime and father absence.

The above-mentioned issues are physical factors causing the lack of safety in Hammanskraal. However, many important causes can be explained through emotional matters, such as gossip, betrayal or men being unable to show their emotions. Community members frequently indicated that they do not trust their neighbours or people in their neighbourhood. This lack of trust causes people to live in fear and feel unsafe; unsafe to speak about their problems, open up their hearts and minds and confide in someone.

I'm not trusting so many people, because people are talking too much, they gossip. And then talking in the wrong direction. You cannot really say something about it, because when you say 'he is talking too much', he will start a fight with you. – Man, 39, two children

As is visualised in the 'Lack of Safety' challenge tree, not only the causes, but also the results of lack of safety in Hammanskraal can be translated in emotional and physical factors. Gossip and distrust are deeply rooted, and it leads to a closed community. Friends betray friends and laugh at one another if one fails matric or is struggling to find a job. Consequently, the causes of emotional unsafety have a direct influence on the results of emotional unsafety, such as having few friends or not having a good relationship with your neighbours. Physically not being, or feeling, safe in Hammanskraal has developed various issues, such as violence, rape and, once again, crime. It is said that pedestrians are being held at gunpoint for their money, and that young girls and women get (gang)raped almost daily.

One of the most noticeable consequences of lack of safety we encountered during our research, is teenage pregnancy: "We see a lot of teenage pregnancies. Young men and, also, older men who are taking advantage of younger girls" (Boy, 20). In fact, according to many respondents, the impact is so great that we decided to focus on this subject separately in the form of a challenge tree.

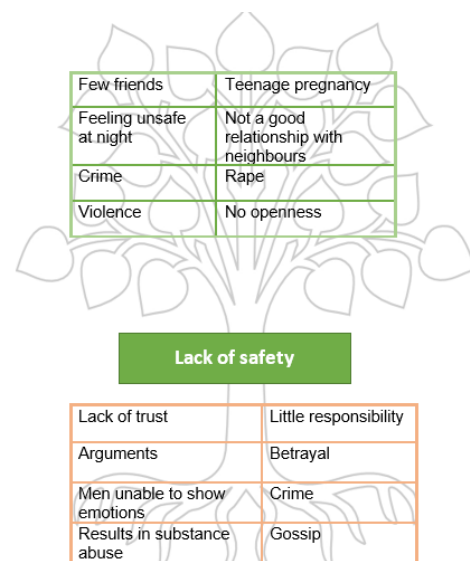


image 5: challenge tree: Lack of Safety

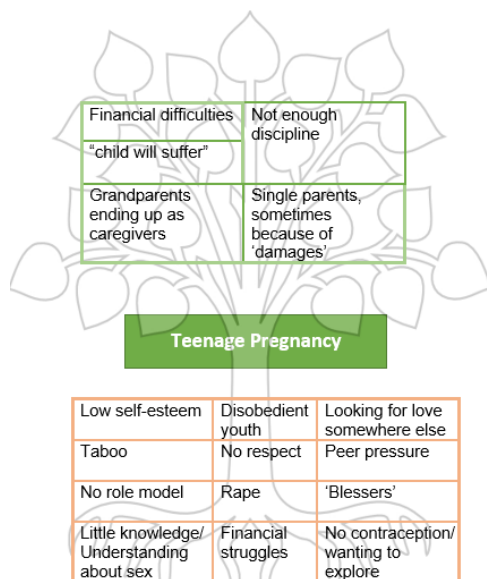


image 6: challenge tree: Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy

Although this subject was frequently mentioned during interviews, high school meetings and focus groups, it seemed taboo to talk about it with each other or with one's parents. During the drama classes at the high school in Kekana, a group acted out a girl who was struggling with the consequences of being impregnated by her boyfriend. In this play, there were four important characters: a pregnant teenager, a boyfriend and the girl's parents. The play started with the boyfriend and girlfriend flirting. The boyfriend does not want to use protection, because 'he doesn't feel comfortable wearing those things' and 'he won't get her pregnant anyway'. He promises to marry her if she somehow does get pregnant. The next scene shows how the girl is at home and starts to vomit. She tells her parents that she is pregnant, but her parents do not want to accept it. "You're what? I don't want a pregnant teenager in my house! You can get out!", says the mother. Her boyfriend denies getting

her pregnant, and the play ends with the pregnant girl being alone.

The play shows that the students are familiar with the situation. Afterwards, they explained that they have seen the situation many times before. While we were there, one of the students was pregnant. She was, however, very open about it and wanted to help and warn other girls about the risks of having unprotected sex. One of the causes of teenage pregnancy is little knowledge and understanding about these risks. There is no, or limited, sexual education, with the discussion of these issues being considered taboo. Additionally, contraception is often not being used because they want to experience sex without it. In this scenario, the father of the unborn child is often a teenage boy.

It's because of the children they don't have self-esteem, and they don't protect themselves. They don't use condoms, because they want to experience it without. We don't have projects to prevent teenage pregnancy. – Man, 33, three children

Low self-esteem, little knowledge about safe sexual behaviour and the will to explore are emotional factors causing teenage pregnancy. More examples are peer pressure, no respect for girls or parents and not having a father (figure): "If a girl grows up without a father, she can go looking for the love of a father from the boyfriend" (Boy, 24). The consequences for a girl growing up without a father (figure) in her life are said to be tough and troublesome.

During our research, teenage pregnancy turned out to be understood as pregnancy in a young female still dependent of a caregiver. The father of her unborn child is seldom present during and after the pregnancy. As illustrated in the high school play, a teenage girl is often impregnated by a teenage boy. However, there are other causes more intricately linked with the challenge of lack of safety in Hammanskraal, such as rape. Girls get raped in the streets or taverns, but also at home. Furthermore, there is the issue of the so-called 'blessers'.

...and there are blessers that say 'I will take care of your family,' and you fall for it. He makes love with you, he gives you money, he goes home. You become pregnant and he will run away. It happens quite a lot, but it is not discussed a lot. – Woman, 27, one child

Generally, in such a situation, the girl chooses to be with the blesser because she does not have a father (figure) and is looking for love somewhere else. Another reason to fall for these men is money. Money for clothes, food, or to pay for education. Struggling financially is undeniably one of the reasons for teenage pregnancy. In South Africa, pregnant women can get social assistance from the government in the form of a social grant: "You see a person just getting pregnant because they are getting a grant. [...] One child gets R350 each month" (Man, 50+). To (young) people who are in need of money, it often

seems like the only solution to solve their financial issues and it motivates them to get pregnant. However, more often than not, teenage pregnancy is not the solution, but the cause of financial problems. The money they receive from the government seems like a lot at first, but one way or another, they will need all of it (and more) to support their child. The challenge of teenage pregnancy has become a vicious circle, hence the importance of focusing on this challenge separately.

Struggling financially is not the only result of teenage pregnancy. Teenage girls drop out of school because they cannot participate in everyday schoolwork. Many community members mentioned that the child of a teenage mother will 'suffer' more, because a teenage mother often does not have the financial and emotional means to raise a child. As a result, grandparents are repeatedly ending up as primary caregivers. Because the father of the child often disappears after impregnating the girl, many households consist of a grandmother, a single mother and her child(ren). During our interviews with male community members, we asked what they think is the reason for lack of father-involvement. We received many different answers, often blaming the fathers, but one of the answers that frequently recurred was ascribed to culture and tradition: "if a girl gets pregnant, and you're not married yet, one must pay for your damages and lobola" (Man, 30).

Traditionally, when a child is born out of wedlock, the father of the child is obliged to pay her family so-called 'damages'. The sum of the damage is dependent on different factors and usually the father of the girl decides how much money or how many livestock the father of the unborn child needs to pay. To pay a damage is an important aspect of many African cultures and is still practiced today. "As long as the man has not paid the damages, he cannot see the child," says a female respondent (21, one child). Which brings the problem back to financial issues and the challenge of unemployment.

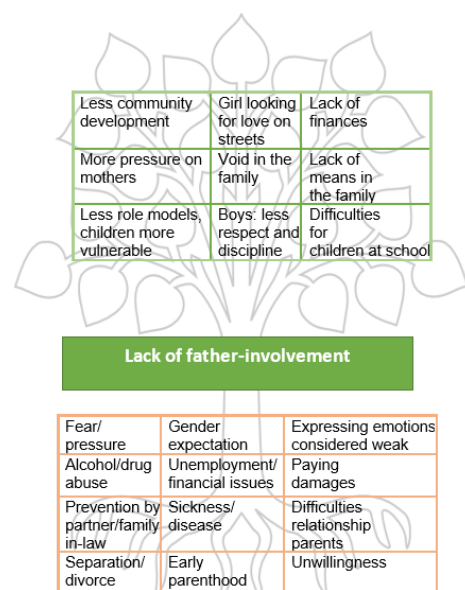


image 7: challenge tree: Lack of father-involvement

on the financial side. He has to get a job, work, and bring the money home. Pay for all the other expenses. Having a father in the family is necessary. Because if we don't have the father... when we come to conflicts, it is generally known that, when a woman tries to intervene in matters of conflict, no one will listen to her. - Man, 40, two children

Lack of father-involvement, causes and results

We knew that our research would mainly focus on the role of the father. Still, it was surprising to hear that the lack of their involvement was such a big challenge to many members of Hammanskraal. We spoke to people from many different backgrounds, age groups and in different kinds of situations. Therefore, the answers people gave us were, sometimes significantly, different. For example, to one of our main questions: "What does the word father mean to you?", the answer of someone around the age of fifty would be remarkably different than a teenager's. We found that, generally, community members around the age of fifty would answer more conservatively. One could call their ideas about the role of fathers and mothers in the household and in the community more 'traditional' in a sense.

A father is the one that takes care of the family. He is the one that is responsible to see that everything is in order in the family. Especially

In this case, the father is seen as the sole provider and head of the family. His responsibility mainly lies in taking care of his family financially. The role of the mother is to take care of the household, to look after the children and to cook, but it is the role of the father to discipline and protect the household. It is thus very important for the father to be present. Many men we interviewed acknowledged the fact that there is a lack of father involvement in Hammanskraal. They also confirmed that this often results in financial struggles for many families, but also children having less discipline and respect for their elders and mothers experiencing high pressure to run the household.

When we talked to teenagers and adolescents during our interviews and high school meetings, however, the answers were almost opposite. They rarely mentioned the importance of financial support when asked about the responsibilities of a father.

A character that I am looking for in a father, a father that loves you unconditionally. That's one thing I need, that's one thing I even today cry for. Just to love me unconditionally, to talk to me, to guide me, to show me the way, and not just come to me and yell at me. More important: give attention to me when I come from school. - Girl, 21, one child

To this girl, the description of a good father can be summarized in one word: love. Unconditional love. For her, financial support or discipline are not a priority. And she is not the only teenager who expressed this desire for a father's unconditional love. In the short documentary Ayda put together at a high school in Kekana, we asked the Grade 12's (final year of high school) what they need from a father. The answers were almost identical to the above quote. Many of these teenagers grew up without a father, and were brought up by their mother, grandmother or, sometimes, a stepfather.

However, the lack of father involvement does not only refer to physical father absence. A father can be physically present, and care for you financially, but be emotionally and mentally absent. When talking about this during the interviews, it was often brought up that children are vulnerable. They need a good role model. Oftentimes, the only 'fatherly' role model many children can compare themselves with, either drinks too much, abuses them, or does not want to be emotionally involved with them. According to many, this likely results in substance abuse, teen pregnancy, crime and disrespecting elders.

My own husband also drinks in the weekends. Children are learning more from their parents. So, when you are drinking every day, the children are going to look up to you, that you are drinking. - Woman, 40, two children

Alcohol and drug abuse were frequently mentioned reasons for father absence. Men work during the day, but in the evenings drink up all their hard-earned money in one of the many taverns in Hammanskraal. In the weekends, especially the last weekend of the month, when their salaries are paid, one could hear the loud music until the early hours. We learned that, even though this mainly concerned the men in the community, there are also women and young teenagers who adopted this lifestyle; young boys who smoke drugs and get into crime, teenage girls who get pregnant and drop out of school, mothers who are unable to take care of their children. It is thus not only a *reason* for the absence of fathers but can also be a result. It is, again, a vicious circle. Children are influenced by the behaviour of their parents and grow up thinking it is how life works, according to a mother of two children:

If my father wouldn't give me that father figure, I would not know what to do as a father. So they lack that knowledge from their fathers. Example: if my father beats my mother, I (as a boy) think this is the way to solve things and will also beat my wife. - Girl, 21, one child

One of the most apparent results of father absence, either physically or emotionally, is the effect it has on his children. As discussed before, not having a (good) role model makes children vulnerable and likely results in substance abuse, teen pregnancy, crime and bad friends. One of the mothers we interviewed confirmed this by stating that a father is a child's first role model, especially for boys.

Having an absent father does not only affect his children, but also puts more pressure on the (grand)mother. It is usually seen as a man's duty to provide for his children financially while the mother is at home and cares for the household and children. However, if the man of the house is not present, the financial burden befalls the mother. Consequently, she works more hours a week and the grandmother then often fulfils the initial tasks of the mother: raising the children.

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, in order to undertake the main challenge, the lack of father-involvement, other issues, such as teenage pregnancy and lack of safety, have been addressed separately throughout this chapter. In conclusion, as visualised in the challenge tree, having an absent father could have many different causes: paying damages, gender expectation and pressure

around this expectation, financial struggles and unemployment, experiencing emotional absence because expressing one's feelings is considered weak, alcohol and drug abuse, disease, early parenthood (teenage pregnancy), prevention by partner or family in-law, divorce, difficulties in the relationship of the parents, and unwillingness.

However, our data found and proved that the causes and results for father-absence are intertwined. In addition, an 'absent father' does not only refer to 'physical absence', but also 'emotional absence'. Many men we interviewed acknowledged the fact that there is a lack of father involvement in Hammanskraal and expressed their concern around this challenge. It is therefore important to mention that this study also proves many fathers, or father-figures, to be present and involved in the lives of their family and children. These father-figures can serve as example for young men and women in the communities of Hammanskraal.

3.3 Present assets

What assets are already present in the community and what tools can be co-created in order to get fathers to be more involved?

In the previous chapters, we presented our research data and looked into the reasons for fathers to be (un)involved in the lives of their children. We explained why we chose to discuss the three main themes (safety, teenage pregnancies and father-involvement) with the community. In this chapter, we will elaborate on the Possibility trees – that have been mentioned before briefly – and we will outline the way we presented our data to the community during the community gathering.

Although we wanted to know what the community deemed to be the most important issues to tackle, we did not only inquire about problems. During the interviews, we would ask respondents about the successes and positive developments in the community. We asked them what they thought would be good solutions for the issues they indicated, and we would talk to them about their hopes and dreams for their community. Their answers made up the possibility trees we shared with them during the Community data presentation.

Safety

One of the community's major successes in light of safety and security is the community board committee and its meetings that take place regularly: "we have community block meetings, to talk about problems. We share our struggles and ideas" (man, 46, 4 children). At some point, whistles were distributed among the families. If anyone gets in trouble, for example when they are being robbed or in case of medical emergencies, they can blow the whistle. Community members that are close by will then help out. The community also turned out to be really good at mobilizing. Whenever a meeting was required for the research, we would discuss it with some of our contacts and in no time a meeting could be arranged. Although this might seem in contrast with the safety issues that were described in the previous chapter, we would argue that these community meetings make a huge difference already.

In many conversations, *communication* was brought up as an important theme. For example in order to understand each other's situation and give a hand when needed, but also towards the youth:

We talked about opening a project as a community that will teach young ones about the challenges that we get. Even the abuse.. you see, cause there are some who have been abused but they are afraid to talk. And sometimes neighbour knows that that person had been abused but they also afraid to come in front and talk so that that person can get help. – Woman, 27, one child

Although it was feared that discussing family or household issues made you more vulnerable to gossiping, many respondents saw the benefits as well. They would mention more openness, more trust and mutual understanding as possible and desired results of a (psychologically) safe environment.

Healthy and safe sexual behaviour

We found two particularly interesting things when it comes to (healthy and safe) sexual behaviour in the communities. The first one is that there are many factors that lead to an increase of unintended (teenage) pregnancies, like poverty, peer pressure and a longing for company and love. We discussed this already in paragraph 3.2. The second one is that many respondents refer to the role and responsibility of parents to teach children about healthy and safe sexual behaviour:

Maybe teach your children about these things of – we call it things of street. And when you talk to your child, you need to explain what can happen. You need to teach them about sex and sexual diseases that they can get, like HIV. That I think that the community and people from the church, they need to call the youth and they can address them about that. Set a date and have a meeting about it, invite them with their parents. – Woman, 47, three children

This would show that community members do believe that informing teenagers about the risks of unsafe sexual behaviour could lead to a decrease of diseases and unintended pregnancies. What is interesting about this, is that many community members recognize the importance of talking to children about sex. And in order to talk to your children about a topic like sexual behaviour – that is quite sensitive, maybe even a taboo in the community – you need to have a relationship in which both parents and children feel free and safe enough to discuss the topic. In the next paragraph we will show how the needs for safety, healthy and safe sexual behaviour and parental involvement were brought together when the people from the community sat down to discuss the topic of father-involvement.

Community data presentation

One of the most essential elements of participatory action research is the part where researchers give back the research results to the community. This way the community gains insight in the issues they want to tackle and immediately sit down together to think about the actions they want to undertake.

We already explained the Challenge and Possibility Trees that we used to give back our data to the community. Irmarie wrote a blog on the [7Senses website](#) on the way we did this:

For the data presentation, we had hired a tent and four tables, that Solly, one of our local researchers, had set up with some guys from the community. (...) We counted about 20 people when we decided to begin with the first round of discussion. We divided the group into three smaller groups, and each group could choose a table to start at. Each table was hosted by at least one local researcher. Cynthia and I were hosts at the “Lack of Safety” table. (...) Each group started their discussion with the “Challenge Tree”. I asked them if they recognised the challenge, the roots and the fruits. One of the older men immediately answered with a firm “Yes, we recognise all of them”. They started to examine and review the tree.

After a minute or so, I asked them to look at the next drawing, the “Possibility Tree”. (...) I invited them to have a look at this tree and, after that, to put their heads together and brainstorm about possible solutions. What activities could they think of as members of the community to improve safety in their neighbourhood, households, schools, etc.?

A good 20 minutes of discussion passed by when the groups had to move on to the next table. Here they were given the same set-up and questions, though with a different theme. (...) Even though the discussions had already begun, more and more people started to fill the tent. At some point, we counted about 40 people present.

[When every group had been at every table] we asked every small group to present the solutions they came up with to the rest of the community. We wrote them all down on a big piece of paper. Many solutions were a picture of how the ‘ideal situation’ would look like – very ambitious. Some, maybe, a bit too ambitious to start with. After every solution was presented, we asked them to think about one activity that could be done in the coming two weeks. One small activity that would be easy to organise and could be the first step to help realise the bigger ‘possibility’; the ‘ideal situation’. Laetitia tried to explain – with Mmamoruti translating every few words into Tswana – that each individual only has a limited circle of influence. However, if you can influence the people in your circle, they can influence the people in theirs and so on and so forth.

(Blog [Father-Involvement Challenge Data Discussion: where collaboration with local stakeholders is the most essential part](#), Irmarie Luijk)

Interesting to highlight here is the way the community members got to the idea of organising their ‘family day-event’. When you ask people to think of possible solutions and you do not give them any constraints for this at first, they will come up with a great variety of options. As action researchers and facilitators of the meeting, it was our job to guide these ideas into feasible, concrete plans for action. That is why we talked to the community members about (a simple version of) the ‘circle of influence’ (image 8). We discussed how there are some things in your situation that you have direct influence on, and other things you do not have any influence on. But within your circle of influence there are people with own circles of influence as well – and their circle might reach further than yours. If we, for example, want fathers in the community to become more involved in the lives of their children, we cannot just tell them to become more involved. At least, we will not have that kind of influence on most fathers around us. However, if the fathers that do want to be involved in the lives of their children manage to do so, they might inspire other fathers as well. For this reason, we asked community members to think of simple solutions that they could implement themselves in a short period of time. We also asked them to focus on one issue for now, the one they deemed most important. The community members chose for the theme of ‘Healthy and safe sexual behaviour’:

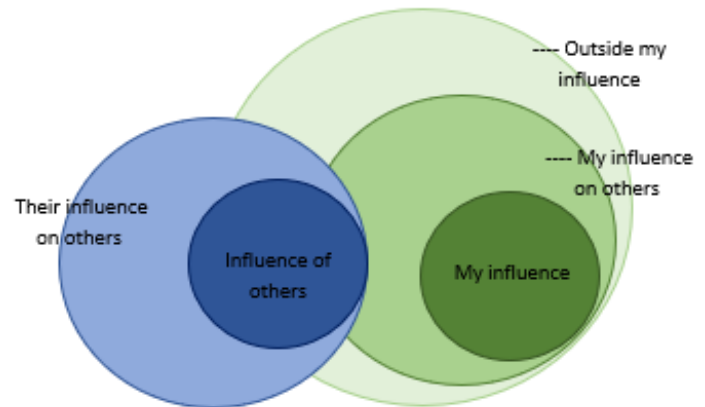


image 8: circle of influence

Time flew by. It was already about 17:00h and it still looked as if not much would come out of it. Then one woman raised her voice and suggested that they should organise a ‘Mother-Daughter’ day. A day where the women in the community could bond with their daughters. Where, with the idea of creating a stronger bond in the future, it would become easier for daughters to talk about sex and sexual behaviour with their mothers, and vice-versa. After that, the men thought it good to organise a ‘Father-Son’ day as well. After much discussion and suggestions, the date was set. The two events would be organised on the same date – Saturday the 24th of March (the Saturday before we leave!) – on the soccer ground next to the church. Lucky for us, Wickey was also attending the meeting. Wickey is the DJ at the local radio station. They immediately arranged for him to announce the event on the local radio.

Three days after our data presentation, we met with Solly again. Solly, being as enthusiastic and passionate as only he can be, told us that the day after our presentation the community had had another meeting. In this meeting, they continued Saturday’s discussion! “We informed all the people who were not there on Saturday! Even the people who were there, they also stayed to listen to it again,” he said. “I’m still spreading the word!”.

Looking back on the community data presentation and the discussions with and between community members, we can see a clear connection between the needs, the present assets and the solution the community came up with. In order to achieve healthy and safe sexual behaviour among the youth in Hammanskraal and to avoid unintended pregnancies as much as possible, people feel a need for sex education. The community sees the parent as the designated person to educate their child, but recognises that to do this properly, there should be a relationship between parent and child in which both feel comfortable enough to discuss this subject. Hence a logical step would be trying to improve the parent-child relationships in the community – by having them spend time together. As many people in Hammanskraal value and enjoy playing sports and games, organising sport events are a great solution.

4. Conclusion

We started this research by asking what the reasons are for fathers in the community of Hammanskraal, South Africa, to be (un)involved in the lives of their children and what tools can be co-created in order to get them more involved.

Looking back on the community data presentation and the discussions with and between community members, we can see a clear connection between the needs, the present assets and the solution the community came up with. In order to achieve healthy and safe sexual behaviour among the youth in Hammanskraal and to avoid unintended pregnancies as much as possible, people feel a need for sex education. The community sees the parent as the designated person to educate their child, but recognises that to do this properly, there should be a relationship between parent and child in which both feel comfortable enough to discuss this subject. Hence a logical step would be trying to improve the parent-child relationships in the community – by having them spend time together. As many people in Hammanskraal value and enjoy playing sports and games, organising sport events are a great solution.

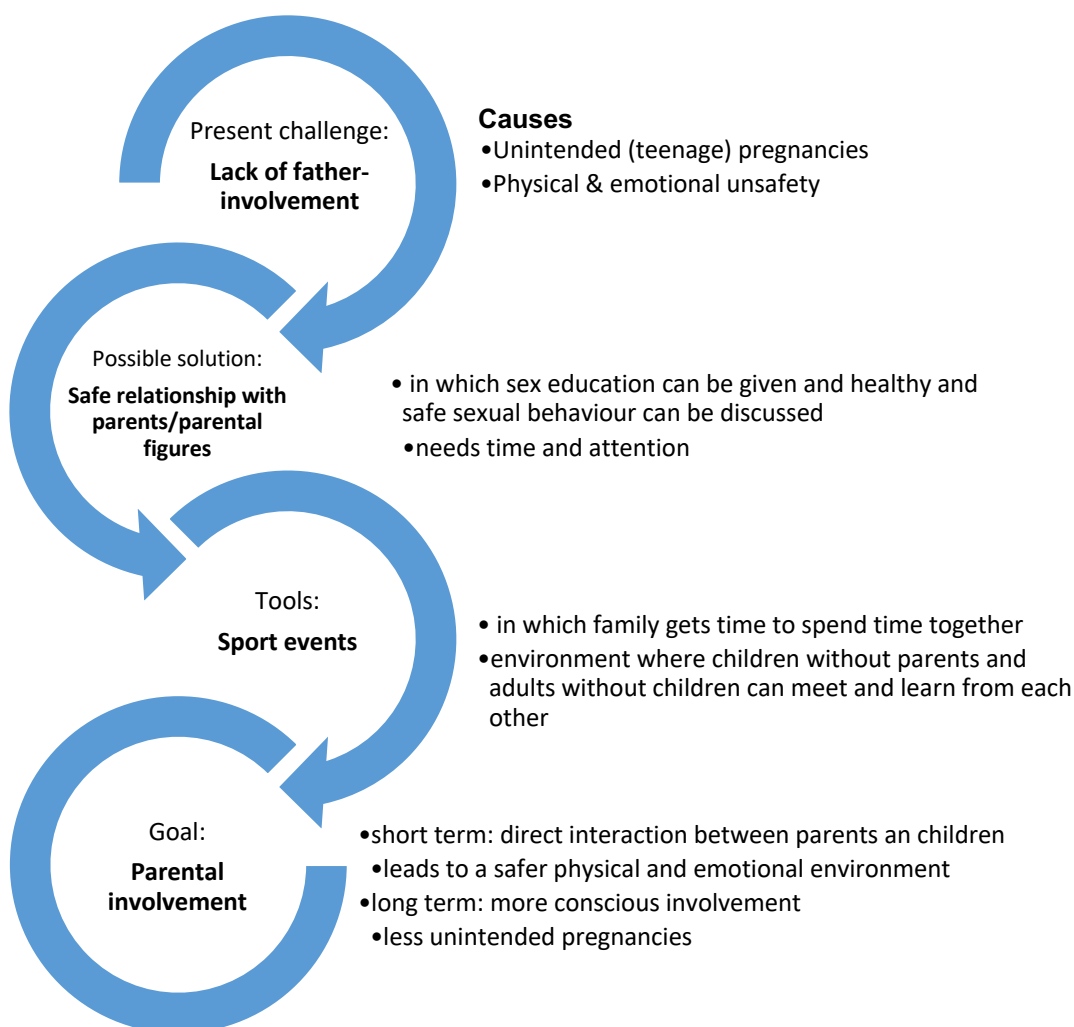


image 9: visual representation of the outcomes of the research

But we believe the chain does not end with the sport events. The sport events – having parents and children spend time together – are a tool to get to safer relationships within families. Safer relationships will lead to more parental involvement on the short term as they literally get more involved in the lives of

their children by simply interacting with them more. On the long term, the safer relationships might help decrease the unintended (teenage) pregnancies because children grow up 1) talking to their parents and being able to ask their advice, 2) getting emotional support from their parents and 3) thereby will be less likely to engage in (forced) unsafe sexual behaviour. If we may assume that this will lead to more conscious parental involvement, and thereby to more intended pregnancies, this then might eventually lead to reducing the obstacles found in this research and hence increase father-involvement in the long run.

Appendix 1: Action research sub questions

1. *Current situation*

- a. What is the current role of fathers in the community and how is this viewed by men, women and adolescents?
- b. What are the reasons for fathers to be (un)involved in the lives of their children?
- c. What is the role of local traditions and culture in the involvement of fathers?
- d. How does South Africa's 20th century history influence the current role of black South African fathers (according to men)? (Main question of Irmarië)

2. *Assets*

- a. What assets (talents, expertise, skills, manpower, sources, things people are proud of/ happy with/feel comfortable with) are present in the community and among the different stakeholders?

3. *Social relations*

- a. How do fathers relate to mothers/children/adolescents in their family and in their community?
- b. How does gender inequality affect the involvement of fathers in communities in Hammanskraal? (Main question of Ayda)
- c. What is the role of fathers in the communities and how is this related to views of fathers and adolescents towards masculinity and fatherhood? (Main question of Carine)

4. *Ideal situation*

- a. What does family life in the community look like in an ideal situation according to men, women and adolescents?

5. *Co-created solution*

- a. What is needed to create the ideal family life-situation and which of these things are feasible to reach or create?

6. *Conditions intrinsic motivation*

- a. What are the conditions for people in the community to be able and willing to contribute to their ideal family life-situation?

7. *Future*

- a. What needs to be done to guarantee the continuation of improving family life in the community?

Appendix 2: PAR-Design

Problem definition

What is the problem/challenge?

- o Culture, traditions
 - Ignorance
- o Lack of father-involvement/knowledge of how to be a father
- o No confidence/identity as a father
- o Normalisation of absent fathers
- o Stereotyping/expectations/parental restrictions
- o Passing on from generation to generation
- o Lack of role models
- o (un)employment
 - Financial issues
- o Teenage pregnancies
- o Drug/alcohol abuse
- o 'even women contribute to this'

Goal

What do you want to achieve (and why)?

- o More involvement of fathers in their children's lives, in the community
- o 'Drink responsibly'
- o Father-involvement in early childhood development
- o Young men being educated about their role as a father
- o Raising awareness about importance of father-involvement
- o Focus on skills and 'get their mind out of alcohol'
- o Understand and raise awareness about ascribed/forced gender roles
- o Getting fathers involved in finding the solution which makes the solution sustainable
- o Finding out why, describe and explain
- o Finding out how we can get fathers involved
- o Focus on future fathers as they can still be 'influenced'

PAR Main Question

Which question needs to be answered to reach the goal?

What are the reasons for fathers in the community of Hammanskraal, South Africa, to be (un)involved in the lives of their children and what tools can be co-created in order to get them more involved?

Sub-questions

Which questions need to be asked in order to answer the main question?

- o What are the reasons for fathers to be uninvolved in the lives of their children?
- o What are the reasons for fathers to be involved in the lives of their children?
- o What tools can be co-created in order to get fathers to be more involved in the lives of their children?

Stakeholders

Which people can answer the questions and have interest in achieving the goal?

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| o Fathers | o Mothers |
| o Children | o Adolescents |
| o Community leaders | o Church leaders |
| o Social workers | o Teachers |

Methodology

Which methods can be used to answer the questions and involve the stakeholders?

- | | |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------|
| o Informal conversations | o Interviews |
| o Focus groups | o Radio |
| o Church announcements | o Drawing exercises |
| o Community meetings | o Games |
| o Drama class | o Observing |
| o Finding role models/specific people? | o Village map |
| o Word cards | o Questionnaires |
| o Appreciative inquiry | |

Concepts

Which concepts need to be defined first?

- o Upbringing
- o Absence
- o Involvement
- o Solution
- o Father(hood)? → social fathers
- o Child (age)
- o Tradition