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Research Article

The experiences and perceptions of employed Black African men on Paternity Leave in Gauteng, South Africa

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Published online: 31 Mar 2025

Cite this article https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2025.2479466 Check for updates

abstract

This article examines the perceptions and experiences of paternity leave among employed Black African fathers in Gauteng, South Africa. Utilising a qualitative research methodology, the study involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six participants to gather rich, nuanced data. The findings reveal significant socio-cultural and economic barriers that hinder the uptake of paternity leave, including traditional

legislative support, some fathers remain uninformed about their rights and the benefits of paternity leave. The study suggests that addressing these barriers through increased awareness, employer resources, and challenging gender norms can create a more supportive environment for fathers. Practical recommendations are provided to guide stakeholders in implementing effective strategies to enhance fathers' engagement in childcare and family responsibilities.

keywords:

Paternity leave utilisation | Black African fathers | Gauteng | gender norms | childcare | family responsibilities | socio-cultural barriers

Introduction

The issue of paternity leave has gained significant attention in recent years as societies strive to achieve greater gender equality in the workplace and promote active fatherhood (O'Brien et al., 2007) (Morrell & Jewkes, 2011). However, perceptions of paternity leave by men, particularly Black African employed fathers in South Africa, remain relatively understudied and poorly understood. Research shows that cultural and societal expectations play a significant role, as traditional gender roles, particularly in South Africa, often pressure men to conform to the breadwinner role, making paternity leave seem less acceptable (Tladi, Nkatane, 2017). Additionally, the implementation of paternity workplace policies and support vary widely across regions, with some countries/employers being more supportive than others (Hyland & Shen, 2022). This inconsistency leads to varied experiences among fathers, further complicating the understanding of perceptions of paternity leave. This article reports on a study conducted to explore the perceptions of paternity leave among Black African fathers in Gauteng (Diphoko-Phetla, 2024). The study's findings revealed a need to

enhance awareness and support these fathers to understand the nature and benefits of taking paternity leave.

According to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) (No. 75 of 2018), paternity leave refers to the time off granted to fathers after the birth or adoption of a child, allowing them to be actively involved in childcare and family responsibilities (BCEA, 2018). Paternity leave, as provided under Section 25 of the amendments in the BCEA (No.10 of 2010), represents a significant shift in South African labour laws, promoting gender equality and encouraging fathers to participate actively in childcare. However, the uptake and utilisation of this leave by Black African fathers is influenced by various socio-cultural and economic factors.

Prior to the amendments to Section 25 of the BCEA, South Africa's paternity leave regulations were minimal and not well-defined. The BCEA primarily addressed maternity leave, offering four months of unpaid leave for female employees. Fathers, however, were not specifically provided with paternity leave under the original BCEA provisions. Instead, they had to depend on family responsibility leave, which granted three days of leave per annual leave cycle for events such as the birth of a child, a child's illness, or a family member's death. This limited provision was insufficient for fathers to take time off to bond with their newborns or support their partners during the early stages of childcare. The absence of specific paternity leave entitlements revealed a significant gap in the legislation, failing to acknowledge the growing societal recognition of the importance of fathers' involvement in early childcare and the need for gender equality in parenting roles (BCEA, 2018).

While the concept of paternity leave has gained recognition and support in many countries, challenges persist in terms of its implementation and acceptance. The policy research working paper by Hyland & Shen (2022) indicates that high-income economies, especially in Europe and Central Asia, have experienced the most significant growth in parental leave days. However, gender disparities remain evident, with a notable difference in the allocation of leave days between mothers and fathers. Although the

number of leave days for mothers has risen considerably, the increase for fathers has been much smaller.

The historical context of fatherhood in South Africa, particularly among Black African communities, has been profoundly shaped by colonialism and apartheid. These eras disrupted traditional family structures and imposed severe challenges on Black families, including fathers. The forced separation of families and the economic exploitation during these periods eroded the traditional roles of Black fathers as providers and protectors (Ratele, Shefer & Clowes, 2012; Madhavan, Townsend & Garey, 2008). Statistics indicate that White South African fathers often have more access to resources and support systems, which can positively influence their involvement in child-rearing. These fathers are more likely to take paternity leave and participate in early childcare activities due to less economic pressure and more supportive workplace policies (Stats SA, 2024b).

These historical injustices continue to influence contemporary fatherhood dynamics, making it essential to understand how current employment policies like paternity leave are perceived and utilised within this context. While paternity leave is now legally mandated in South Africa, its implementation and acceptance within the employment policy arena can vary significantly. This variation necessitates a closer examination of how different workplaces and sectors support or hinder fathers' utilisation of paternity leave, as reported with organisations that offer progressive parental leave for all employees, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, or length of service, in contrast to the BCEA that mandates only 10 days of paternity leave (Bussinesstech, 2020).

A recent legal development has aimed to improve parental leave policies 2023. In the matter of *Van Wyk and others V Minister of Employment and Labour (2022-017842) [2023] ZAGPJHC 1213 (25 October 2023)*, the Johannesburg High Court (HC) addressed allegations of unconstitutionality in sections of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 concerning maternity, adoption, commissioning surrogacy, and parental leave. The judgment declared certain provisions of the BCEA unconstitutional, as they unfairly

(e.g., biological, adoptive, and surrogate). One of the reasons the court said there is unfair discrimination in the provisions was that: "*To accord a paltry 10 days' leave to a father speaks to a mindset that regards the father's involvement in early parenting as marginal. In my view this is per se offensive to the norms of the constitution in that it impairs a father's dignity. Long-standing cultural norms which exalt motherhood are not a legitimate platform for a cantilever to distinguish mothers' and fathers' roles*". This ruling has led to interim measures allowing parents to share a four-month parental leave period more flexibly.

Despite these advancements, practical challenges remain. Employers need to adapt their policies to comply with new regulations, and there is a need for clear communication between employers and employees regarding leave-sharing arrangements (Naidoo, 2020). Additionally, socio-cultural norms and economic factors can influence the acceptance and utilisation of paternity leave (Tladi, Nkatane, 2017). In many Black African communities, traditional gender roles may discourage some fathers from taking leave, while economic pressures may make it challenging for families, particularly Black African Fathers to afford time off work (Osborne & Ahinkorah, 2024). These complexities highlight the ongoing need for legal reforms and societal shifts to ensure that paternity leave is both accessible and accepted across different contexts in South Africa.

In Gauteng, South Africa, Black African employed fathers face unique socio-cultural and economic factors that influence their perceptions and utilisation of paternity leave. Traditional cultural gender roles and expectations often assign primary caregiving responsibilities to mothers, including raising the children and socialising them, while fathers are expected to focus primarily on the financial provision, being the main decision-maker and also the protector of the family (Akinnusi et al., 2018). These cultural gender norms and expectations often prohibit some Black African fathers' understanding and willingness to take paternity leave to actively partake in the caregiving and emotional bonding of a child during the first years, as demonstrated in Makusha & Richter (2015), where fathers who have less or no financial muscle to provide

that Black African fathers often face societal pressure to fulfill the role of the primary breadwinner. This cultural expectation may discourage them from taking paternity leave, as they feel their primary responsibility is to provide financially for their families. As a result, they miss out on the opportunity to engage in early caregiving and emotional bonding with their children (Osborne & Ahinkorah, 2024). Furthermore, this also plays out in the gender inequalities at both the workplace and home, where fathers, in certain socio-economic brackets are seen to be absent in the caregiving and raising of their children, as they have to keep on working to ensure economic stability. Examples may include households where only the father is employed or cultures that stigmatise fathers who are involved and are supportive to their partners during pregnancy and early years of a child's life (Nambile Cumber et al., 2024). These dynamics highlight how cultural norms and workplace policies can influence the involvement of Black African fathers in early childcare.

According to the findings in this study, limited understanding and awareness of paternity leave among Black African employed fathers may further contribute to the low uptake and negative perceptions about paternity leave and its benefits. It was found in the study that some fathers are not always fully informed about their paternity leave rights, or the potential benefits of taking paternity leave to them, their families, and the broader society. Consequently, one of the study's main recommendations is that there is a need to address these barriers and create a more supportive environment that encourages fathers to participate in childcare and family responsibilities through the uptake of paternity leave.

Study Objectives

The study's primary objective was to explore the perceptions of paternity leave among Black African employed fathers in Gauteng. Gauteng was a significant focus for this study because it is South Africa's economic hub and the most populous province,

report by Statistics South Africa, Gauteng remains the top destination for internal migrants (Stats SA, 2024a). The province has seen a significant influx of people from rural areas seeking better economic opportunities. The province's unique socio-economic landscape provides a rich context for examining the interplay between traditional cultural norms and modern employment practices. Understanding the perceptions and experiences of Black African employed fathers in Gauteng can offer valuable insights into the broader challenges and opportunities for implementing paternity leave policies across South Africa.

By examining their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences related to paternity leave, the study aimed to identify barriers,challenges and potential strategies for enhancing awareness and support for the uptake of paternity leave. Despite the legislative framework supporting paternity leave, there remains a gap in understanding how these policies are perceived and enacted by the intended beneficiaries. This paper addresses this gap by reporting the investigation of two primary research questions of the study:

How do Black African employed fathers understand and experience paternity leave? This question aimed to uncover the personal and cultural perceptions that Black African fathers hold regarding paternity leave. It attempted to understand their awareness of paternity leave entitlements, their attitudes toward taking leave, and their experiences during the leave period. By addressing this question, the study aimed to provide a detailed understanding of the factors that influence fathers' decisions to take or not take paternity leave.

What challenges do Black African employed fathers face in utilising paternity leave? The second question focuses on identifying the specific barriers that hinder the uptake of paternity leave among Black African fathers. These challenges may include socio-cultural norms, economic pressures, workplace policies, and lack of awareness. By exploring these obstacles, the study aimed to highlight the areas where interventions are needed to support fathers in taking paternity leave and to propose strategies for overcoming these barriers.

The concept of “social parenting”, where caregiving responsibilities are shared among extended family members, is prevalent in many Black African communities. This communal approach to parenting can both support and hinder the utilisation of paternity leave. On one hand, it provides a network of support for fathers; on the other hand, it may reduce the perceived necessity for fathers to take formal leave, (Garcia, Pence, and Evans 2018).

The socio-economic context and status may also play a significant role. High unemployment rates and economic pressures can make it challenging for certain fathers to take time off work, even when legally entitled to do so. The need to provide financially for their families often takes precedence over the opportunity to engage in childcare. (Makusha, & Richter, 2015)

Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the importance of fathers’ involvement in childcare for the well-being of children and families. Studies have shown that paternity leave can promote gender equality, improve parental involvement, and enhance family health (Heymann et al., 2017); (Meeussen, Van Laar, & Van Grootel, 2020); (Fleming, 2024). For Black African fathers in Gauteng, taking paternity leave can be a step towards redefining fathering and challenging traditional gender roles.

Moreover, despite the limited studies of perceptions and experiences of Black-African men about paternity leave, the literature reviewed highlights several key themes relevant to this study. Firstly, the understanding and knowledge about paternity leave among Black African fathers is influenced by their awareness of the legislative framework and the socio-cultural context in which they live. Studies have shown that political parties, NGOs, and academic researchers have played crucial roles in advocating for paternity leave legislation in South Africa (Grobler, 2018; Hosegood & Madhaven, 2012). Lamb, 2000; Maluleke & Moyer, 2024 highlight the complexity and evolving nature of fatherhood and underscore the importance of understanding the various dimensions of father involvement.

Secondly, the experiences and challenges in utilising paternity leave are multifaceted. Economic pressures, social expectations, and the legacy of apartheid significantly impact fathers' ability to participate in their children's lives (Freeks, 2017; Law, 2019). The literature suggests that addressing these challenges requires a broader shift in societal attitudes toward fatherhood and the recognition of the importance of fathers' involvement in childcare.

This research adopted a social science perspective and delved into the social, cultural, and economic factors that influence the utilisation of paternity leave among Black African fathers. The study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding paternity leave and contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality, family well-being, and social policies in South Africa.

The findings from this research are expected to offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of paternity leave policies and suggest potential enhancements to support Black African fathers in balancing work and family responsibilities. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study captured the diverse experiences and challenges faced by these fathers, thereby informing future policy developments and interventions aimed at promoting inclusive and supportive family policies.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research methodology, utilising in-depth interviews to gather rich and nuanced data from a sample of six Black African employed fathers in Gauteng. The study focuses on Black African employed fathers residing in Gauteng, South Africa. Six participants described as Patricipant 1 (Para), Participant 2 (Parb), Participant 3 (Parc), Participant 4 (Pard), Participant 5 (Pare) and Participant 6 (Parf) were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they met specific criteria: employed, living with their partners and children, and having taken or being eligible for paternity leave.

This targeted approach ensures that the participants could provide relevant insights into the research questions (Taherdoost, 2016).

Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This method allows for flexibility and depth, enabling participants to share their experiences and perceptions in their own words. Depending on the participants' preferences and COVID-19 safety protocols, the interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via Zoom and Microsoft Teams virtual platforms, and they were between forty-five minutes and an hour long.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the interview data, involving the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the data. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first step, familiarisation with the data, involved reading and re-reading the transcripts to become deeply acquainted with the content. The second step, generating initial codes, entailed systematically coding interesting features of the data across the entire dataset. The third step, searching for themes, involved collating codes into potential themes. The fourth step, reviewing themes, required checking if the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset. The fifth step, defining and naming themes, involved ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme. The final step, producing the report, involved weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts to address the research questions.

These themes provided valuable insights into the factors influencing perceptions of paternity leave by participants and made appropriate recommendations for greater awareness and utilisation of paternity leave. The themes addressed in this paper are: Understanding and Experiences of Paternity Leave and Challenges in Utilising Paternity Leave

Several measures were taken to ensure the study's credibility and reliability. For credibility, triangulation was employed by comparing the findings with existing literature and theories, and member checking was conducted by assuring the sharing of the

1982). To enhance transferability, detailed descriptions of the research context and participants were provided, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Dependability was ensured by providing a clear and detailed description of the research process, enabling replication. Lastly, confirmability was maintained by the researcher through the use of a reflexive journal to document personal reflections and potential biases throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant ethics committee. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by using pseudonyms and securely storing data.

This methodology provided a robust framework for exploring the understanding and experiences of Black African employed fathers regarding paternity leave, as well as the challenges they face in utilising it.

Limitations of the study

This research, conducted as an exploratory study for a master's dissertation, acknowledges several limitations that may impact its findings; the small sample size of six Black African employed fathers in Gauteng limits the representativeness of the results, making it difficult to generalise to the broader population. While providing rich, nuanced data, the qualitative methodology is subject to biases and interpretation. Additionally, the study's focus on a specific cultural and socio-economic context may not capture fathers' experiences from different backgrounds. The temporal context of the study means that the findings may not reflect future changes in societal norms and policies related to paternity leave. The absence of longitudinal data limits the understanding of the long-term effects of paternity leave. Future research should consider larger, more diverse samples, mixed-methods approaches, longitudinal

designs, and cross-cultural comparisons to address these limitations and provide a more comprehensive understanding of paternity leave and gender equity in childcare.

Theoretical Framework and Research Design

This study is anchored in two essential theoretical frameworks: symbolic interactionist theory and liberal feminism. Symbolic interactionist theory focuses on individual societal relationships and how social interactions create meanings and roles (Nilgun et al., 2009; Simpson, 2014). This perspective is particularly relevant in exploring how Black African employed fathers perceive and experience paternity leave through their interactions with family members, employers, and broader societal norms. However, its focus on individual perspectives can sometimes lead to an overemphasis on subjectivity, potentially neglecting broader social structures and power dynamics (Carter & Montes Alvarado, 2019)

The symbolic interactionist framework is highly suitable for this study as it focuses on the meanings and interpretations that individuals attach to their social interactions and experiences. This framework was particularly relevant for understanding how Black African employed fathers perceive and experience paternity leave. The findings from the study reveal that participants have varied understandings and experiences of paternity leave, shaped by their interactions with family, employers, and societal norms.

For instance, Participant 1 (Para) described paternity leave as "*the time where after both parents have had a baby to be there for the newly born baby*," highlighting the social expectation of shared parenting roles. Participant 2 (Parb) emphasised the recognition of fathers as primary caregivers, stating, "*Paternity leave is about remembering and recognising a person as a parent*." These interpretations are influenced by the participants' social interactions and the meanings they derive from them.

The symbolic interactionist framework allows for an in-depth exploration of these

to uncover the social barriers, such as cultural stereotypes, that participants identified as challenges. Participant 1 (Para) mentioned, "*I think cultural stereotypes have to be confronted, they are the elephant in the room,*" indicating the impact of societal norms on their experiences.

Liberal feminism, on the other hand, emphasises the need for equality between men and women, particularly in the division of labour within the home (Lober, 2010). This theory highlights the importance of policies that encourage greater equality within relationships and support men in their roles as caregivers. By challenging traditional gender norms and advocating for inclusive policies, liberal feminism provides a critical lens through which to examine the utilisation of paternity leave among Black African fathers.

The liberal feminist framework also supports the participants' recommendations for extending the duration of paternity leave and ensuring it is paid. Participant 2 (Parb) pointed out, "*The disadvantage is time, you know, in relation to days, it must be extended to more days,*" while Participant 4 (Pard) emphasised the importance of paid leave. These suggestions aim to create a more equitable environment for fathers to participate in early childcare, aligning with the goals of liberal feminism.

Beyond the two theoretical frameworks applied in the study, it also employed a qualitative research design, specifically using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA was chosen for its strength in exploring how individuals make sense of their lived experiences within their social and personal contexts (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This approach is particularly suitable for understanding the nuanced experiences and perceptions of Black African employed fathers regarding paternity leave.

The use of IPA Research Design in this study is justified as it focuses on exploring how individuals make sense of their lived experiences. This approach was particularly suitable for understanding the nuanced experiences of Black African employed fathers regarding paternity leave. The findings revealed that participants have diverse and

deeply personal experiences, which are best captured through an interpretative phenomenological lens.

IPA allows for a detailed examination of participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they attach to them. For example, Participant 4 (Pard) described his motivation for taking paternity leave as, "*My wife was pregnant, and she was giving birth. So, I applied so that I be there for her as well*." This personal narrative provides rich insights into the emotional and practical reasons behind taking paternity leave.

Furthermore, IPA's emphasis on the interpretative process aligns with the symbolic interactionist framework, as both approaches focus on understanding the meanings individuals derive from their social interactions. The liberal feminist framework also benefits from IPA's detailed exploration of participants' experiences, as it provides a deeper understanding of the challenges and barriers to achieving gender equality in parenting roles.

Therefore, the symbolic interactionist and liberal feminist theoretical frameworks, combined with the IPA research design, provided a robust and comprehensive approach to exploring the understanding and experiences of Black African employed fathers regarding paternity leave. These frameworks and methodologies complement each other, allowing for a nuanced and in-depth analysis of the participants' perspectives and the social and cultural factors influencing their experiences.

Findings

There is a notable lack of awareness and clarity about the specifics of paternity leave entitlements. Participant 5 (Pare) admitted, "*I was not aware that we have the so-called paternity leave for men to take,*" indicating a gap in knowledge that could affect the utilisation of such leave. The study: "A father's right to paternity leave in the South African workplace" by (Naidoo, 2020) discusses the amendments to the Labour Law and

the BCEA, highlighting the lack of awareness and the challenges in the utilisation of paternity leave.

Challenges in Utilising Paternity Leave

The challenges faced by Black African employed fathers in utilising paternity leave are multifaceted. A significant issue is the insufficient duration of the leave. Participant 2 (Parb) pointed out, "*The disadvantage is time, you know, in relation to days, it must be extended to more days*." This sentiment was echoed by Participant 4 (Pard), who noted, "*For me, the disadvantage is the number of days allocated to paternity leave and that it's not paid leave*."

Cultural stereotypes and workplace support also play crucial roles in the challenges faced. Participant 1 (Para) mentioned, "*I think cultural stereotypes have to be confronted; they are the elephant in the room,"* suggesting that societal expectations about gender roles can hinder fathers from taking paternity leave. Additionally, Participant 4 (Pard) highlighted the need for better support from employers, saying, "*The support an employer can give is affording me enough time to adjust to the new role of a parent*."

Participants provided several recommendations to enhance the utilisation of paternity leave. Education and awareness about the availability and benefits of paternity leave are crucial. Participant 3 (Parc) suggested, "*Maybe there should be some sort of training where you go attend something during the 10 days,*" indicating a need for structured support and information.

Moreover, extending the duration of paternity leave and ensuring it is paid were common suggestions. Participant 2 (Parb) advocated for more days, while Participant 4 (Pard) emphasised the importance of paid leave. These changes could significantly improve the uptake and effectiveness of paternity leave, allowing fathers to provide better support to their families during the critical early days of a child's life.

In conclusion, while Black African employed fathers recognise the importance of

through better education, extended leave duration, and cultural shifts can enhance fathers' experiences and support their crucial role in early childcare.

Discussion

Understanding and Experiences of Paternity Leave

The findings from this study reveal a nuanced understanding of paternity leave among Black African employed fathers. Participants generally perceive paternity leave as a crucial period for bonding with their new-borns and supporting their partners. This understanding aligns with the broader goals of paternity leave policies, which aim to promote gender equality and encourage fathers' involvement in early childcare (Heymann et al., 2017).

Participants highlighted the importance of being present during the early stages of their child's life. For instance, Participant 1 (Para) emphasised that both parents should be present for the new- born, reflecting a shared responsibility in childcare. This sentiment is echoed by Participant 2 (Parb), who noted that paternity leave is about recognising fathers as primary caregivers. These perspectives underscore the significance of paternity leave in fostering a supportive family environment and enhancing father-child bonding.

However, there is a notable gap in awareness and understanding of paternity leave entitlements. Some participants, like Participant 5 (Pare), admitted to not being aware of paternity leave before their child was born. The article by Behari, (2016) explores the promotion of paternity leave and its impact on family dynamics. It discusses the importance of awareness and the need for better communication about paternity leave entitlements to ensure fathers can fully utilise their rights. This lack of awareness can hinder the effective utilisation of paternity leave, suggesting a need for better dissemination of information regarding paternity leave policies and benefits.

Challenges in Utilising Paternity Leave

The study also sheds light on the various challenges Black African employed fathers face in utilising paternity leave. One of the primary challenges is the insufficient duration of paternity leave. Most participants expressed that the current leave duration is inadequate to meet their family's needs. They lamented the short duration, advocating for an extension to allow fathers more time to support their partners and bond with their new-borns.

Cultural stereotypes and workplace support are significant barriers to the effective utilisation of paternity leave. Participants pointed out that cultural stereotypes need to be confronted to normalise the use of paternity leave. This sentiment highlights the societal expectations that often place the burden of childcare primarily on mothers, thereby discouraging fathers from taking paternity leave.

Workplace policies and support also play a crucial role in utilising paternity leave. Participants noted a lack of supportive workplace policies and practices. For instance, they emphasised the need for employers to provide more information about paternity leave and support fathers in taking it. This lack of support can create an environment where fathers feel discouraged from taking paternity leave due to fears of job insecurity or negative perceptions from colleagues.

Recommendations for Enhancing Paternity Leave Utilisation

To address these challenges, several recommendations emerged from the study. Primarily, there is a need for better education and awareness about paternity leave. Providing comprehensive information about paternity leave entitlements and benefits can help fathers make informed decisions. One participant suggested that training or orientation programs for fathers during paternity leave could enhance its utilisation by equipping fathers with the necessary skills and knowledge to support their partners and care for their newborns.

Extending the duration of paternity leave and ensuring it is paid are also crucial steps. Participants advocated for longer paternity leave to allow fathers more time to bond with their new-borns and support their partners. They emphasised the importance of paid leave, noting that financial considerations can be a significant barrier to taking paternity leave.

Addressing cultural stereotypes and promoting a supportive workplace culture are essential for normalising the use of paternity leave. Employers can play a pivotal role by creating an environment that encourages fathers to take paternity leave without fear of negative repercussions. This can include flexible work schedules, equal opportunities for both men and women, and workshops to educate employees about the importance of paternity leave. Brough & O'Driscoll (2010) provide valuable insights into the types of interventions that can help balance work and home demands, the challenges in evaluating these interventions, and the importance of organisational culture in supporting work-life balance.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into how Black African employed fathers understand and experience paternity leave and the challenges they face in utilising it. The findings highlight several key themes that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of paternity leave within this demographic.

Understanding and Experiences of Paternity Leave

Black African employed fathers generally perceive paternity leave as a crucial period for bonding with their new-borns and supporting their partners. This understanding aligns with the broader goals of paternity leave policies, which aim to promote gender equality and encourage fathers' involvement in early childcare (Heymann et al., 2017). Participants emphasised the importance of being present during the early stages of their

in awareness and understanding of paternity leave entitlements, which can hinder effective utilisation.

Challenges in Utilising Paternity Leave

The study reveals several challenges that Black African employed fathers face in utilising paternity leave. One of the primary challenges is the insufficient duration of paternity leave, which participants felt was inadequate to meet their family's needs. Cultural stereotypes and workplace support also play significant roles in hindering the effective utilisation of paternity leave. Participants noted a lack of supportive workplace policies and practices, as well as societal expectations that often place the burden of childcare primarily on mothers.

To address the challenges identified in this study, several recommendations are proposed, including areas for further exploration and future research.

Education and Awareness: There appears to be a need for better dissemination of information regarding paternity leave policies and benefits from the data collected in this research. Providing comprehensive information can help fathers make informed decisions. Future research could investigate effective strategies for increasing awareness and understanding of paternity leave rights and benefits after identifying the employers who cannot provide information to those in need of it.

Extended and Paid Leave: Extending the duration of paternity leave and ensuring it is paid can alleviate financial burdens and allow fathers more time to bond with their new-borns and support their partners. The financial implication of paternity leave for Black African family's needs further exploration to understand its impact on the intended purposes of paternity leave. This could involve studying how different financial situations impact fathers' decisions to take leave and how financial support mechanisms could be improved to encourage more fathers to utilise paternity leave.

Cultural Shifts: Addressing cultural stereotypes and promoting a supportive workplace

pivotal role by creating an environment that encourages fathers to take paternity leave without fear of negative repercussions. Future Research can delve deeper into how cultural norms can be challenged and changed to support greater acceptance and utilisation of paternity leave.

Support Structures: Training or orientation programs for fathers during paternity leave can enhance its use by equipping fathers with the necessary skills and knowledge to support their partners and care for their new-borns. Further investigating the specific types of workplace and home support systems that are most effective in encouraging fathers to take paternity leave, such as flexible work schedules, employer-provided information sessions, and general supportive management practices could assist.

While Black African employed fathers recognise the importance of paternity leave, various challenges hinder its effective utilisation. Addressing these challenges through better education, extended leave duration, and cultural shifts can enhance fathers' experiences and support their crucial role in early childcare. The findings from this study provide valuable insights that can inform policies and practices aimed at promoting the utilisation and potential of paternity leave among Black African employed fathers.

By advocating for policy revisions, empowering programs, societal shifts, individual empowerment, and continued research, we can cultivate an environment where paternity leave is not merely a provision but a celebrated and integral part of work, family, and societal well-being. These efforts can bring about a new era of equality, support, and fulfilment for Black African employed fathers and their families.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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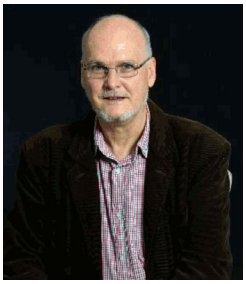

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