

Family Well-Being in the Face of Economic Turmoil: Perspectives of Devoted Fathers as Mentors

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Abstract

This paper explores the perspectives of devoted and engaged fathers who provide emotional stability, financial guidance, closeness, spiritual strength (a core element), and moral support to their families during economic hardships. Currently, families are living in dire circumstances owing to economic turmoil, which not only presents significant challenges to their well-being but is also detrimental to their existence. In economic turmoil, resilience, shared responsibilities, collaboration, and open communication help families navigate difficulties while strengthening bonds and ensuring emotional and financial security for all. Devoted fathers view their role as vital and relevant in the current economic situation of families. They also serve as mentors and play a crucial role in fostering resilience. By examining their mentorship strategies, this research highlights how paternal involvement strengthens family cohesion, enhances children's emotional security, and mitigates financial stress, ultimately promoting a stable and nurturing home environment despite economic instability.

Key words: devoted fathers; economic turmoil; family well-being; mentoring; perspectives

J.E.L. classification: Z12, Z13

1. Introduction

Well-being and family well-being are key concepts in the context of this paper. Yaxley *et al.* (2012, pp.13-14) describe well-being as a state of good mental health characterized by an individual's recognition of their strengths, proficient management of everyday stressors, effective and efficient functioning, and contribution to the community. Yaxley *et al.* (2012, pp.13-14) consistently use the word "well-being" with varying interpretations contingent upon the context. Likewise, family well-being denotes the overall health, stability, and quality of life enjoyed by the members of a family, including physical, emotional, social, and economic dimensions. It encompasses robust connections, efficient communication, financial stability, and nurturing surroundings that foster resilience, growth, and comprehensive life satisfaction within the family unit. The significance of family constitutes a connection of affection, assistance, and cohesion, influencing our lives with compassion and tenderness.

What is family in the context of this paper? A family is defined as a group of people linked by blood, marriage, or adoption, often residing together and having emotional and financial bonds. Kath (2021, p.15) states that the term "family" originates from the Latin word *familia*, denoting "household" or "household servant," and from *famulus*, which translates to "servant." The term "family" refers to a distinct social group whose primary function is to offer nurturing care for the development of all its members (Kane, 2019, pp.65-67). It serves as the principal institution for personal growth, support, and protection (Saikia, 2017, pp.445).

The family's well-being is of the utmost significance. The family unit is esteemed in society, with the presence and accessibility of both parents being essential in children's lives. The absence of one parent creates a hole, complicating the attainment of familial harmony and happiness, which are vital for familial well-being and conflict mitigation. Barnard (2018, p.6) asserts that the integration of

family well-being within an ecological framework allows families to prosper despite numerous hurdles.

Prioritizing one's well-being amplifies one's ability to support others and contribute constructively to society in the face of economic and personal obstacles. Investing in well-being is a lifetime pursuit that promotes vitality, longevity, and deep contentment, allowing individuals to lead richer and more meaningful lives (Koen *et al.*, 2012). Family well-being is a crucial element that underscores the general health and unity of family groups, recognizing that families profoundly influence individual well-being. A family thrives when its members participate in emotional bonding, efficient communication, and mutual support. It involves creating a safe and nurturing environment where each member feels esteemed and recognized. This dynamic includes the satisfaction of essential requirements such as shelter and food, as well as the development of trust, affection, and communal happiness.

Strong familial bonds cultivate resilience, allowing individuals to navigate stress and misfortune through collective strength and comprehension. Fundamental factors affecting family well-being are stability, clear communication, shared responsibility, and significant time spent together. Financial stability, educational access, and health care are essential for creating the foundation required for families to prosper. Emotional intelligence in the family is essential, promoting conflict resolution and nurturing empathy. External variables, such as economic difficulties, community assistance, and societal policies, can affect family well-being. Access to family-oriented workplaces, mental health resources, and inclusive social institutions can significantly enhance the overall quality of life of families. The well-being of families is fundamentally connected to the entire well-being of society, underscoring the need to cultivate strong, supportive, and healthy family dynamics for the prosperity of people and communities (Koen *et al.*, 2012).

2. Theoretical background

The literature review of this paper comprises a metatheoretical examination of family well-being, the fluctuating economy, and devoted fathers as mentors.

2.1 Social issues and economic difficulties pose challenges to the implementation of family well-being

The primary social issues and economic difficulties confronting the youth in South Africa and globally include violence, gang rape, rave parties characterized by the unrestricted availability of drugs and sexual activities, social challenges, and a pervasive lack of mutual respect and regard for the environment (Carstens & Zwecker, 2013, p.2; Oladepo & Fayemi, 2011, p.8; Otto, 2013, p.4). Currently, parents experience significant challenges with the conduct and values of children both at home and in educational settings (Frecks, 2013, pp.11-12; White & Warfa, 2011, pp.45-48). It is widely believed that children and young people are incapable of making sound and effective value judgments, necessitating education, mentoring, and guidance to facilitate their decision-making (Georgiades *et al.*, 2013, pp.1473-1476; Logan-Greene *et al.*, 2012 pp.373-374).

The proximity of family residence correlates negatively with the likelihood of youngsters engaging in aggression and hazardous behaviors, including bullying. The prevalence of violence among children in educational institutions and domestic environments is emerging as a significant issue, prompting many to scrutinize the role of parents as main carers in fostering self-respect in their children. Young people with self-respect will demonstrate respect for the time, property, relationships, work, animals, friends, and family of others, refraining from "stealing" time at school through class disruptions, conflict with peers, inappropriate language, or other unacceptable behaviors (Pretorius, 2006, p.3). Llale (2003, p.3) asserts, "The manner in which you nurture your children unequivocally influences the trajectory of their future." Many of these issues and circumstances are attributed to the absence of fathers (Frecks, 2013, p.3; 2011, p.4). Reddick *et al.* (2011, pp.1-3) and Hazen *et al.* (2010, pp.51-55) assert that the lack of paternal presence results in ineffective father-child connections. Research conducted by Mandara *et al.* (2005, pp.207-220) and Steytler (2007, p.37) revealed that boys raised without a father are more susceptible to engaging in criminal behavior. The role of the father is sometimes assumed by surrogate fathers. In African rural

societies, for example, it is common for an older brother to assume the role of the missing or deceased father. This substitution engenders significant issues, including erroneous identification and inaccurate values (Olsen, 2007, pp.174-196).

The family, especially when the father serves as a mentor, ought to assume a much larger role in instilling values, as values have diminished in societal prominence (Schaps, 2005, p.1). From this perspective, mentors and mentoring pertain to connections; they unlock individuals' potential and enable them to achieve their utmost capabilities. This educational connection involves a mentor who imparts information, experience, and insights to a less experienced individual, the mentee, who is prepared to gain from this exchange (Tucker, 2007, pp.iii, vi). Despite the complexity of mentoring relationships, it is essential to recognize that their foundation is in daily encounters that facilitate growth and development (Wood & Duck, 2006, p.156). Children benefit significantly from paternal involvement and the demonstration of values by their fathers (Freeks, 2013, pp.75-77; Vogel *et al.*, 2006, pp.189-209). Fathers should not just fulfill the role of financial providers. Children require their fathers' presence in their lives to engage in meaningful interactions (Williams, 2008, p.18). The father's worth should be assessed based on material or financial contributions, alongside the affection and care he provides to his family and the standards he establishes for values.

Boys view their fathers as role models who exemplify principles via their actions. Eventually, they will assume their parenting responsibilities independently (Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2007, pp.221-225). Most children appear hesitant and perplexed, seeking their fathers' affiliation, presence, and lifestyle embodying positive values, as they need identification and a foundation of certainty (Ford *et al.*, 2008, pp.284-299). The aforementioned indicates a challenge stemming from the absence of the father. Hence, father absence exacerbates such issues. As a parent, it is essential to serve as a mentor within the household. The inquiry that emerges from the discourse is how devoted fathers perceive their responsibility as mentors to ensure family well-being in economic turmoil.

2.2 The historical notion of mentoring

The genesis of mentoring and the notion of a "mentor" can be elucidated via the lens of Greek mythology. Odysseus was a Greek warrior who participated in the Trojan War and entrusted his son to a confidant named Mentor. The war continued for a decade, and Odysseus required another decade to make his way home. Upon Odysseus's return, he saw that his son, Telemachus, had reached maturity and developed commendable morals, mostly thanks to Mentor's influence. This interpretation posits that a mentor exerts an immediate or direct influence on an individual's life; consequently, the concept of mentoring has garnered attention and evolved over time (Fourie & Van den Berg, 2007, pp.94-95; Freeks, 2013, p.32; Hendricks & Hendricks, 1995, pp.17-18; Steytler, 2007, p.12).

The notion and implementation of mentoring have been expanding both outside and within ecclesiastical contexts and leadership (Lewis, 2009). Lotter (2010, p.6) emphasizes the increasing significance of mentoring across various contexts, including the business sector, religious institutions, higher education, and diverse training modalities, spanning from commonplace to highly advanced forms of mentoring. What does the term "mentoring" signify within the scope of this paper? Mentoring is a reciprocal process in which the mentor (leader) and the mentee (follower) cultivate mutual understanding, establishing a relationship in which the mentor dedicates time to assist the mentee in achieving their potential (Freeks, 2023, pp.2-3). Mentoring necessitates the mentee's willingness and preparedness to actively participate in a learning relationship of dynamic interaction, entailing an exchange of learning, experience, information, and insights from which the mentee should gain significant advantages (Tucker, 2007, pp.iii-vi). Mentoring involves providing support and encouragement to individuals, enabling them to take charge of their learning, thereby maximizing their potential, enhancing their abilities, improving their performance, and evolving into their desired selves (MentorSET, 2008). The mentor serves as a guide, assisting the mentee in identifying the appropriate course. Mentors possess empathy for the mentee and comprehend their challenges. Furthermore, they instill self-belief in their mentees and enhance their confidence (MentorSET, 2008; Santora *et al.*, 2013, pp.427-428).

The prospective mentor is eager and driven to assist the mentee, as the mentor enables the mentee to recognize their potential through guidance, motivation, inspiration, and support, thereby facilitating the mentee’s attainment of their life goals. Freeks (2011, pp.53-54), Pue (2008, pp.16-18), and Lotter (2010, p.6) list the following activities in which mentors often engage:

- They assist individuals in acquiring the fundamentals of living with Christ (disciple).
- They help individuals achieve deeper maturity in their Christian life (spiritual guide).
- They assist individuals in acquiring skills (coach).
- They assist individuals by providing prudent advice to navigate challenging circumstances (counselor).
- They facilitate the acquisition of fundamental concepts and views (teacher).

In short, mentoring is a helpful, educational connection in which a mentor imparts information, experience, and insights to a less experienced individual. Consequently, it requires time and perseverance, as Pue (2008, p.13) rightly points out about the process of mentoring disciples and cultivating leaders, which can be seen as equivalent endeavors.

2.3 Devoted fathers: the heart of strong families

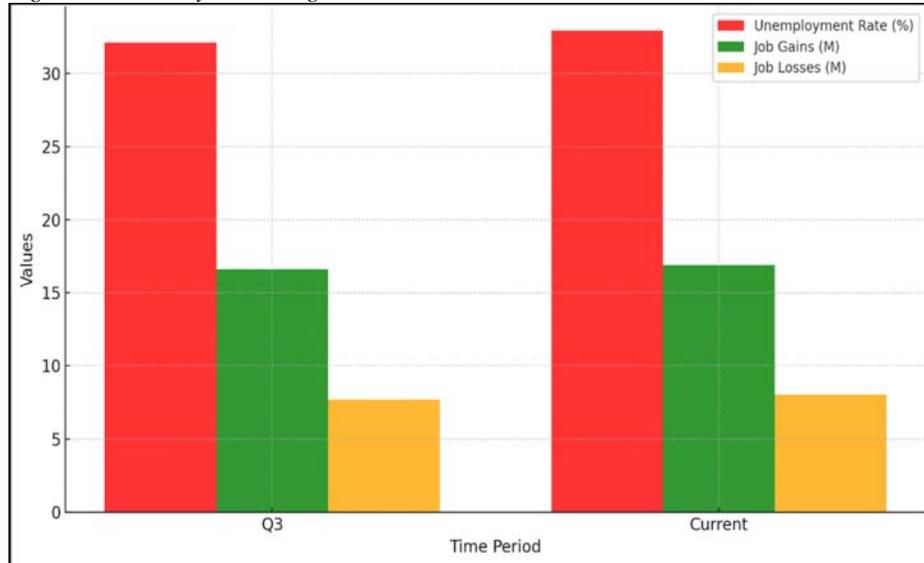
The author strongly believes that devoted fathers are pivotal in developing robust, resilient families and promoting family well-being (Freeks, 2024, pp.319-321). Their unwavering presence, emotional support, and active engagement foster a sense of security and belonging that children retain throughout adulthood. A present father fosters his child’s development and fortifies familial connections via affection, guidance, and collective responsibility. A positive relationship between fathers and their children increases the chance that these fathers will maintain an influential relationship and a connection with their children (Powell *et al.*, 2021, p.549).

Research indicates that children with involved and devoted fathers are more likely to achieve academic success, cultivate good relationships, and have sufficient confidence (Dunn & Maharaj, 2023, p.2133; Pfitzner *et al.*, 2017, p.538). Devoted fathers exemplify respect, discipline, and compassion, establishing a formidable standard for the entire family. Their dedication fosters equilibrium and resilience, assisting families in confronting economic turmoil and adversities with solidarity and fortitude. In a society where time is frequently constrained, a father’s deliberate endeavors to listen, guide, and nurture are the core of a flourishing household. In essence, devoted fathers not only support families but also contribute to their construction and maintenance (Alissa *et al.*, 2017, pp.191-193).

2.4 Family well-being in the face of economic turmoil

Economic turmoil profoundly affects family well-being, resulting in heightened financial strain, mental health issues, and alterations in family dynamics. In South Africa, increasing unemployment rates and wealth disparity intensify these challenges, leading to increased instances of depression and anxiety among people and families. The official unemployment rate in South Africa is 32.1% for the third quarter of 2024—a reduction from 33.5% in the preceding quarter. Financial limitations have had an impact on family planning choices worldwide, leading numerous millennials to prefer smaller families owing to the escalating expenses associated with housing, health care, and day care. Confronting these difficulties necessitates holistic tactics, including enhancing financial literacy, broadening access to mental health care, and enacting laws that bolster economic stability and familial welfare. Indicators of family well-being amid economic turmoil are presented in Figure 1.

Figure no. 1 Family well-being indicators amid economic turmoil.



Source: Author’s own compilation from data of Stats SA, 2025

In the figure, labor market stress indicators show a rise in official unemployment (now at 32.9%) despite incremental job gains. The simultaneous increase in job losses underscores the volatility of family well-being in economic turmoil. The bar graph illustrates markers of familial well-being under economic upheaval. It juxtaposes the third quarter (Q3) with the present time by illustrating the following: the unemployment rate (shown in red) increased from 32.1% to 32.9%; job gains (in green) rose to 16.9 million; and job losses (in orange) increased to eight million (Own compilation from data of Stats SA, 2025).

Unemployment has a profound impact on family well-being in South Africa. Devoted fathers, acting as mentors and pillars of strength, demonstrate resilience by providing emotional and practical support to their families, assisting them in overcoming the challenges posed by economic turmoil.

3. Research methodology

In this study, devoted fathers employed an interpretative descriptive methodology to investigate the notion of family well-being during economic distress. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with devoted fathers. The research committee of the Faculty of Theology and the participating fathers provided informed consent for conducting the research.

The aim of this research was to examine the perspectives of devoted fathers as mentors within the framework of family well-being.

The study population comprised fathers from the Tlokwe municipal region. Black participants from Ikageng, Colored participants from Promosa, and participants from the predominantly White population in the larger Potchefstroom area of South Africa took part in the research. Purposive voluntary sampling was used (see Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp.166-167; De Vos, 2005, p.202). A total of nine fathers participated; however, data saturation was reached after the sixth interview.

The researcher conducted interviews with the participants to see whether the acquired data met the goals of the research. The following inquiries were posed: “Describe your experience of being mentored as a child or adolescent by either your father or a paternal figure?”; “Elucidate how you, as a father, fulfilled the role of a mentor?”; “What is your perspective on the father’s role in the familial well-being context?”; and “Please explain the significance of mentorship in your role as a father in a familial well-being context.” The researcher fostered a rapport with the participants, cultivated a secure, non-threatening environment, and employed communication strategies to enhance the interviews. The interviews were recorded, and field notes were documented after the interviews, concentrating on personal, observational, and methodological insights.

The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. The researcher employed Tesch's (2003, p.192) delineation of the open coding technique. The procedures undertaken included arranging and preparing the data for analysis, generating an overarching understanding of the data, categorizing the data into subcategories and themes, and providing descriptions and representations of the topics. An impartial co-coder was used, and a consensus discussion between the co-coder and the researcher concluded the analysis.

Krefting (1991, pp.215, 222) refers to the Lincoln and Guba model to validate the credibility of a study. The emphasis of this study was on truth value, application, consistency, and neutrality, in line with Botma *et al.* (2010, pp.234-235). The researcher guaranteed the validity of the findings by extensive participation during semi-structured interviews and consistently employing reflexivity through field notes and interactions with stakeholders. The use of purposive volunteer sampling and a comprehensive description of the study methodology facilitated the application. An audit record and the use of an independent co-coder throughout the data analysis guaranteed consistency. Moreover, the audit trail and reflexivity resulted in impartiality.

The researcher conducted many sessions with the participants to elucidate areas of their engagement, participation, consent, protection, and confidentiality. The right to self-determination is grounded in the ethical concept of respect for individuals; hence, the researcher regarded all the participants as autonomous agents. The participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could leave the research at any moment without incurring any penalties (see Burns & Grove, 2005, p.101; Brink, 2007, p.32). All the participants were accorded with equitable treatment and dignity (see Burns & Grove, 2005, p.107).

4. Findings

The discussion of the results of the study is enriched with verbatim quotations. Ten main themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews with the devoted fathers.

Theme 1: Personal experiences of mentorship during childhood. The participating devoted fathers recounted their experiences of intimacy with their biological fathers or other paternal figures, including foster fathers and clergy. They gave the following remarks: *"We resided as a family, sharing meals and activities despite our financial limitations,"* and *"We developed a close-knit relationship, forging a strong bond amidst challenging economic conditions."*

Theme 2: Fathers establishing the foundations of the Christian faith. The participants said that their teachers were committed Christians who served God in distinct manners. For them, Christianity was a significant aspect of parenthood and imparting faith. They articulated their perspectives with statements such as *"[t]hey established the groundwork for the Christian faith, thus believing in it and perceiving a divine essence within,"* and *"[w]e were impoverished and residing in destitute communities; yet they imparted knowledge about the Bible and the principles of fatherhood."*

Theme 3: The significance of sharing and caring within the family unit. In this theme, the participants asserted that sharing and caring were essential within the family as they fostered cohesiveness among members and enhanced familial well-being. They articulated their perspectives through the following statements: *"Sharing and caring strengthen familial connections,"* *"Caring for one another is biblical, and financial resources are unnecessary for this"* and *"An individual cannot exist in isolation from others."*

Theme 4: Characteristics imparted by the mentor. The participants said that the mentor figures cultivated qualities such as humility, humor, and acceptance of others. Their remarks were as follows: *"Humility is a valuable attribute, as it facilitates the emergence of positive outcomes,"* *"Laughter should permeate the household, even amidst adversity and scarcity"* and *"Embrace the diverse viewpoints of various family members."*

Theme 5: Devoted fathers ought to provide discipline and patience as essential family virtues. The participants said that discipline and patience were essential values within the family. They advised fathers to nurture and discipline their children, administering punishment in accordance with biblical teachings. The participants articulated their perspectives as follows: *"Disciplining your child is crucial as it correlates with discipleship,"* and *"The formula for patience is diligent effort."*

Theme 6: The loving father's role as a mentor in fostering children's development to promote family well-being. Theme 6 delineates the participating fathers' anticipations as mentors in the lives of their children. Aspects discussed were children's voices, paternal affection, and the significance of discipline within the household. The devoted fathers felt that children ought to cultivate independent thought and articulate their viewpoints since they are persons in their own right. Individuals ought to possess the liberty to express themselves. The participants said, "*Children should have the liberty to express their beliefs and values among their friends and peers,*" and "*Children internalize lessons imparted by their fathers and emulate the examples set by them.*"

Theme 7: The significance of mentorship. This theme illustrates the significance of mentorship, which is essential for familial well-being. Mentoring influences lives, and the participants indicated that it was essential for children: "*Through mentoring, families can cultivate a generation,*" and "*Mentoring presents an opportunity to influence children's lives with values.*" Fathers bear an obligation to guide their families, and the participants underscored the necessity of remaining vigilant. Fathers must deter their children from emulating detrimental role models. The participants said, "*In the absence of a father, mentoring is lacking,*" and "*If fathers fail to mentor and guide their children, others will do so in a misguided and deceptive manner.*" They also asserted that mentoring youngsters was essential to safeguard them from becoming victims of others and said, "*Mentoring is crucial for children,*" and "*If we, as parents, remain inactive, our children will suffer consequences.*" Mentoring constitutes a collaborative effort in which the father, the mother, and the entire family should cooperate. The participants articulated their viewpoints as follows: "*Mentorship is not solely limited to fathers but also encompasses other parental figures,*" "*The father is not the only mentor within the family; the mother also plays a role,*" and "*Parents ought to mentor older siblings so that the extended family can serve as mentors to the younger generation.*"

Theme 8: Fathers are unable to fulfill their responsibilities. Many of the participants expressed the perception that fathers experienced a decline in their effectiveness. This engenders familial issues and endangers familial well-being. The absence of fathers is the most significant issue in contemporary life; this deficiency leads to complications, including marital discord.

Theme 9: Contemporary democracy engenders challenges. The participants contended that democracy engenders issues by diminishing parental influence over their offspring. They said, "*Democracy is a malevolent force as children exhibit diminished concern,*" "*It originates from infernal sources,*" "*We refer to it as democracy rather than democracy,*" and "*Democracy has usurped numerous parental responsibilities, particularly those pertaining to familial well-being.*" Democracy imposes stringent expectations on the moral integrity of individuals. Consequently, democracy would not prevail in the nation if the populace cannot exercise self-discipline.

Theme 10: Fathers ought to demonstrate commitment and dedication. The participants asserted that fathers must remain dedicated and attentive, acknowledging their responsibilities as paternal figures within the family amid the economic problems. Fathers should be fully devoted. According to the participants, a dedicated and devoted father ought to contemplate the following questions: "*What lessons am I imparting to my children to foster familial well-being?*" and "*Am I exemplifying these principles before my family?*"

5. Recommendations

The main recommendation is that devoted fathers should be empowered and informed of their mentoring responsibilities for their family's welfare throughout economic distress. This can be accomplished through seminars, conferences, workshops, men's retreats, church programs, training events, road shows, and community training initiatives. The findings of this research may facilitate the development of a model portraying devoted fathers as exemplary mentors within their families. This can assist society by raising appreciation of the position of devoted fathers as mentors in their children's lives. Motivating and encouraging mothers through similar programs and seminars may significantly benefit devoted fathers in their roles as mentors. Mentoring is a collaborative effort, in which the father, mother, and other family members should unite to enhance the efficacy of the mentoring process within the familial setting, thereby fostering overall familial well-being.

6. Conclusion

From the literature review and the findings, it can be concluded that the role of the devoted father is critical in the family context to promote family well-being. It is evident that devoted fathers feel forceful about mentoring in the family context, irrespective of economic turmoil. There is, unfortunately, a great need for devoted fathers as mentors in the family context and the broader society.

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