LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A Study of Fatherlessness in the African-American Community in Relationship to the Positive Role of Christianity

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Kevin A. Smith
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THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

Mentor; Dr. Steve Vandegriff
Professor
School of Divinity

Reader; Dr. David Wheeler
Professor
School of Divinity
Abstract

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Kevin A. Smith
Liberty University School of Divinity, 2017
Mentor: Dr. Steve Vandegriff

The following study is a qualitative investigation into the issue of fatherlessness among African Americans and its relation to the positive role of Christianity. The primary objective of the study is to determine, understand, and describe the circumstances that brought about fatherlessness and what role Christians may play to help address the problem. Also, the study focuses on developing a deep understanding of the consequences of fatherlessness and what role Christians may play to help mitigate these consequences. The results of this research will reconnect, revitalize, recover trust, ease the pain, and implement healing for fathers, children, and all involved. This researcher will show possible positive impacts of fatherlessness in African-American communities. The resources about fatherlessness will assist in the research showing the positive effects. Case studies regarding African Americans were also conducted to supplement the findings of the literature review further. The case studies include prominent and non-prominent African-American figures who have grown up without fathers.

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To my family, nothing I could say would change how August 16, 2017, impacted my loving wife: first lady of our church, grandmother of our children, and courageous breast cancer survivor. The sincerest faithfulness of God surrounds my wife, Janice, and by God’s grace, she is a blessed woman of God. A “plan B” was not in the picture for me if I did not finish my thesis. God made a way to allow David, an academic advisor; Dr. Steve Vandegriff, my mentor; and my wife, Janice, to support me. Throughout all the daunting research, financial instability, and mental agony, and despite the devil’s schemes for defeat, I am claiming victory in Christ, completing my thesis with hopes God will use it for good. All this came to the point of decision on August 16, 2017. Again, I thank God for my testimony of encouragement
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Chapter One: Introduction

Fatherlessness is a widespread problem that affects all aspects of society, including politics, culture, and most of all, religion. The issue of rampant fatherlessness and its dire consequences in society is solved by applying Christian truths and principles. The following dissertation aims at examining fatherlessness in the African-American community and its relationship to the positive role of Christianity. Few other issues attract as much public attention as the issue of fatherlessness. The question of fatherlessness has generated much heat since the 1990s until now. Before then, people focused more on the challenges of single motherhood; now, however, the societal, political, and religious lens has shifted to focus more on the role of the father in the lives of children and women. One theory proposes that the absence of the father has resulted in grave social consequences such as increased crime rates, drug abuse, early pregnancies, and sexual promiscuity among children. Also, the family may experience poverty because of the father’s absence. The remedy for fatherlessness and its resulting problems is applying the positive roles or guidance of Christianity. As such, Christians should intervene to resolve fatherlessness and its resulting social consequences. This dissertation begins by first exploring the issue of fatherlessness and then discusses the distinct roles that Christians may play to bring healing and practical solutions to a fatherless society.

The African-American community is leading in the rate of fatherlessness, which is why this community chose as the catalyst for this contention. The black male depicts as a media caricature, sociological construct, or crime statistic, and therefore is perceived as lacking emotional embodiment. As such, most people rarely perceive the black male as a father; thus,

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2 Ibid., 1180.
many consider “black fatherhood” an oxymoron. The role of the African American is perceived more as a verb than a noun since assumingly he “fathers” children but often neglects to stick around as a “father” to the child. In her article, “The Absent Black Father,” author Dorothy Roberts mentions that black men have become a symbol of fatherlessness in society. Most people, therefore, fail to perceive the black male as a family figure; this notion has become embedded in people’s minds to the point that when a black man sees parenting, he is deemed worthy of receiving a Nobel prize or other accolade. He sees an anomaly, not the norm.

However, the stereotype given to the African-American male did not arise from anywhere. Statistics alone show that in 2000, only 16 percent of African-American households constituted married couples with children and were living together. This statistic of 16 percent was the lowest among all racial groups; furthermore, women headed 59 percent of African-American households since the man was no longer around. The statistic of 59 percent was also the highest among all racial groups in America. Furthermore, single mothers were raising 50 percent of African-American children in 2004, highlighting the fact that fatherlessness is indeed a huge issue among African-American communities.

In the past, most children were left fatherless as a result of the father’s premature death. Nowadays, children are living fatherless while the father is still alive somewhere. The main reason for contemporary father absence is the decline of the marriage institution through a divorce. The rate of divorce has skyrocketed in the past few decades, and so has the rate of

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6 Ibid., 4.
absent fathers; these two phenomena connect. Statistics alone show the prevalence of the issue; in the last few decades, the percentage of African American fatherlessness has more than doubled, from 17 percent to 36 percent in America. Such an alarming increase in fatherlessness shows that the number of fatherless children might reach 50 percent in the years to come. Of more concern are the consequences of the removal of the father from the family; evidence suggests that fatherlessness is a strong contributor to many of the major problems affecting society today.

Christians have a role to play in helping to prevent the rise of fatherlessness and reducing its consequences on society. First, marriage and divorce are deeply rooted in Christian teachings; Christians are taught to respect the marriage institution while divorce is discouraged. Christians can, therefore, focus on revitalizing the marriage institution and supporting married couples to stay together.7 Such a move can help couples restore and refresh their commitment to one another, helping to alleviate the upward spiral of fatherlessness. Christians can also help reduce the consequences of fatherlessness, such as drug abuse, crime, and sexual promiscuity, by guiding fatherless people to consider God as their Father. In this way, they will give the fatherless someone to look up to for guidance, reducing the rates of crime and its consequences.

As such, the church has taken part in discussions and debates focused on how to get fathers to combine their role as breadwinner with that of the child-care provider. Traditionally, men are perceived as the providers of the family while women the providers of child care. Consequently, more men are absent from their children’s lives with an excuse that they must be out in the marketplace looking for a means to feed their family.8 Therefore, the family

8 Ibid., 8.
experiences fatherlessness since the father is absent most of the time. The voice of women in the ongoing debate has been loudest; women argue that they need a new concept of fatherhood. In other words, women are calling for a “new father,” one who shares work at home. Women specifically want men to help in caring for the children and support these demands by pointing to their useful role in the workplace; hence, they say men should contribute to home-care chores.

The societal expectations of fathers have therefore changed, with fathers now required to participate more in housework. Some fathers have embraced this new role though perhaps not as much as many women would prefer. However, the acceptance of this view has exceeded what past generations of fathers thought possible.9

Certainly, the changing role of fathers has been received positively in most societies; yet, with more concentration on role equality, the view of modern fatherhood is ushering in an ominous trend. The new father figure has gradually been emerging but with an increased emergence of the absent father. The absent father sometimes remains part of the family yet vacates his role due to work commitments and other activities. His mindset and neglect impact the children most, contrary to widespread belief that children grow up unaffected. As a result, the issue of fatherhood needs further research and evidence-based interventions that will enable fathers to spend more time with their children and families.

The issue of fatherlessness does not discuss without first talking about David Blankenhorn’s book *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem*. The core question addressed in the book is the father’s function in his children’s lives. Blankenhorn poses the question of whether children need fathers; surprisingly, most people answer “no” or

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“not necessarily.” In fact, most people answer “yes” only with qualifying statements. Hence, Blankenhorn is surprised by the study’s answers. The paradigm shift in the view of the father’s role in a child’s life may prove consequential in ways unanticipated. At stake is the meaning of fatherhood, how children will develop with healthy emotional and relational capacities as adults, and the future of society. As such, Blankenhorn’s book is not a criticism of the issue of fatherlessness so much as a reproof of the culture of fatherlessness that seems to be permeating the culture. More and more, people do not acknowledge the vital role of fatherhood, and addresses this need. According to Blankenhorn, failure to address the issues of fatherlessness has led to an increased absence of fathers in children’s lives. However, the most massive loss lies in the idea of fatherhood. Unlike previous generations, homes today face something more significant than the physical loss of the father. This decline is affecting millions of homes in America. For this reason, addressing not only the issue of fatherlessness but the pervading skepticism in the importance of fathers proves critical.

Blankenhorn argues that fatherhood comprises a biological and social dimension just like motherhood does; as such, it is as equally important. However, mothers in societies around the world are more successful at combining these two aspects into a consistent parental identity. The father makes only one vital contribution—that of conception; what the father contributes to a child after birth is entirely dependent on cultural devising. What people do not realize is that children’s well-being, as well as societal success, are highly reliant on investment from the paternal side, the willingness of fathers to devote time and energy to caring for their children.


11 Ibid., 4.

12 Ibid., 7.
Regardless, human fatherhood has become a problem since more adult males are indeed increasingly unable or unwilling to devote themselves to caring for their offspring.

Blankenhorn concludes his book by pointing out that since fatherlessness is a problem recognized universally in different societies, there is need to mobilize cultures to define and enforce the fatherly role of men. Blankenhorn gives an example that men can be coaxed or guided into accepting their responsibility as fathers through legal pressure that requires them to be close to their children and family. Also, extra-legal forces such as religion can be used to facilitate fatherhood by pushing men to become close to their wives and invest in their children.\(^\text{13}\) Only through such authoritative cultural reforms can the idea of fatherhood be fused biologically and socially to redesign a coherent paternal identity.

To support the restoration of the idea of fatherhood, Blankenhorn identifies eight types of fathers.\(^\text{14}\) The fathers are categorized based on the kind of fatherlessness they help create. The eight types of fathers include the sperm father, the stepfather, the new father, the unnecessary father, the old father, the deadbeat father, the visiting father, and the good family man. The sperm father represents the biological father of the baby. However, this father completes his role as a father even before childbirth; his entire fatherhood consists of the natural activity of ejaculation. The stepfather, also known as the nearby guy, is a substitute father; in other words, he is not the biological father but serves the role of father figure in the family. As such, unlike the sperm father, the protective role the stepfather plays is strictly social. The stepfather is also defined as a non-father helping raise the children of another man.

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\(^{13}\) Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 101.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 101.
The new father, on the other hand, is the type of dad nurtured by society over the last few decades due to its changing expectations of fathers. The contemporary society applauds fathers who will be deeply involved in home care tasks such as helping with the child. As such, the new father is a caring dad who expresses emotion and is always willing to go beyond helping out to share equally with his wife in housework responsibilities. However, Blankenhorn argues against this type of father by mentioning that he ignores the historical meaning of fatherhood. Furthermore, the new father model also ignores the needs of children since its basis lies solely on the needs of the adult. As such, the model has ignored the concept of the different gendered parental roles; over time, fatherlessness may result as this father may forget his role in the child’s life.

The unnecessary father is a concept resulting in a contemporary society where proponents claim that there are not, and should not, be any parental roles belonging solely to the father. Fatherhood as a gender-based role is superfluous, these advocates argue. Also, fathers exacerbate the problem of fatherlessness since all men are inclined to sexual promiscuity, Blankenhorn asserts, leading to the destruction of marriages. The premise of the unnecessary father finds its roots in the argument that the progress of society depends on transforming fatherhood to fit the idea of gender equality. The main proposition of the unnecessary father is that men delegate gender-specific male roles in favor of a gender-neutral human society; in doing so, men will benefit themselves, women, and society.

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15 Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 100.

16 Ibid., 102.

17 Ibid., 102.
The old father is often unavailable emotionally for his wife and children. He concentrates more on his needs and work demands and is therefore physically absent from the house most of the time. Families expect fathers to be more involved in the family; old fathers are unable to do so. Hence, they are poor role models for their children. The deadbeat father, on the other hand, is present in the life of his children but refuses to pay for anything.\textsuperscript{18} The issue here signifies money absence rather than father absence. The fatherhood category exemplifies the visiting father who is a displaced man trying to re-join his family. In other words, he is a father removed from the premises; he often stops by but does not stay over.

Finally, there stands the right family man, often deemed as the necessary father. Although not perfect as a father, his motives align with God’s Word. He enjoys a stable marriage, devotes time, energy, and resources to the family, and is there when his wife and kids need him. For him, his children are a top priority, and therefore he cannot make a distinction between biological and social fathering; these two tightly fuses as one. He believes he is doing a man’s work in society, and hence he wields authority in the home. The good family man knows that his wife also plays a vital role in the family although one not identical to his.\textsuperscript{19} As such, he also knows his wife has authority in the home, so she is equally important and hence irreplaceable. Christians can particularly play a role in restoring the idea of the good family man since he also fits the model of good fathers according to Christian teachings. I Timothy 5:8 tells Christian fathers to provide for their households since failure to do so is denying faith in God. Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers not to abandon their children; instead, they should raise them and train them according to God’s instructions. The Bible, therefore, gives men authority in the household.

\textsuperscript{18} Blankenhorn, \textit{Fatherless America}, 103.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 105.
provides authority that should never diminish. Christians should do all in their power to restore the father figure in families around the world and hence eliminate the social consequences brought about by fatherlessness.²⁰

Reasons for Initiating This Ministry Project

This primary reason for this project is due to the high number of children struggling in life with no father. Because the African-American community claims the highest number of these fatherless children, the focus sets on this community. Furthermore, the Bible asserts that the father is the one who connects the family to God. In other words, he is the spiritual or religious leader. Without a father, the family lacks a key teacher to guide them spiritually; hence, immorality is bound to arise. Immorality manifests in the form of crime, drug use, and sexual promiscuity. As all these immoralities surface within the African-American community, then conducting research into fatherlessness among African Americans and its relationship to the positive role of Christianity proves reasonable.

The secondary reason for this ministry project is that fatherlessness affects marriage, a fundamental element of the Christian family. The rise in fatherlessness has brought about a culture of divorce since children growing up in broken families may not see the need for a unified family. As a result, they also end up breaking their families, and the cycle continues with their children. However, Christians should hold sacred the institution of marriage, and hence this ministry project was conducted to determine ways in which Christians can help end this cycle of fatherlessness and divorce. Finally, the role of every Christian includes helping orphans and widows; to this end, Christians should research and examine topics that lead to the discovery of ways in which Christians can fulfill their obligations. Solving the issue of fatherlessness will lead

—Bennett, A Passion for the Fatherless, 13.
to stronger families: families with fathers. Consequently, the number of widows and orphans will decline.

Ministry Setting

This ministry is set in the rural community of Bedford, Texas, in between Dallas and Ft. Worth. The place boasts a mixed community of people including African Americans, this study’s focus. The vision statement that guides this ministry is “encouraging faith and the effective building of relationships.” The statement derives from the biblical teachings of 1 Thessalonians 3:7-12, which instructs believers to build faith as well as the relationship with God and other people. This statement guides all activities of the ministry within the community; the ministry strives to build effective relationships with God and the community’s people by promoting faith in Jesus Christ. As such, the mission of the ministry is to teach people to love Christ wherever they are in life. This mission is in line with the teachings of Matthew 28:19-20, which instructs Christians to earn disciples for Jesus. Finally, the purpose of the ministry is to witness the Living Word for God’s kingdom purpose. This purpose is by the teachings of 2 Timothy 1:9-10, stating that God calls believers to a holy life, which involves fulfilling His purpose and grace.

The study on fatherlessness fits into this ministry setting since the results will help improve relationships between fathers and their families in the community. Also, since the Bible emphasizes the value of family, reinstating the values of marriage comprises a core responsibility of every Christian. Also, the results will highlight other ways that Christians can help solve the issue of fatherlessness and its consequences. The ministry can, for instance, help reduce crime rates by encouraging the fatherless to believe in God as their Father and therefore, turn away from sin.
Theoretical Basis

Ministry requires a deep understanding of biblical principles and strategies. Such knowledge equips one to serve in a variety of Christian roles. The topic of fatherlessness is a religious issue since it affects a fundamental unit of Christianity, the family. Christian teachings state that fathers should place their families as a top priority. As such, every Christian must uphold family values. A complete family needs a father as well as a mother. Since tragedies may cause the father’s death, leaving the family fatherless, Christians are told to care for orphans and widows; God commands it. James 1:27 states that a person neglecting orphans shows someone poor in faith; Exodus 22:22-24 warns people that if they mistreat orphans, they will be punished by God; and Psalms 10:8 tells Christians to seek justice for all orphans.

Problem Statement

The problem lies in the high number of African-American households in which the father is absent. In turn, the cases of children growing up without their fathers have increased, creating profound consequences of fatherlessness in society: increased rates of crime, divorce, and drug use, along with decreased rates of church attendance.\footnote{Mark E. Strong, \textit{Church for the Fatherless: A Ministry Model for Society's Most Pressing Problem} (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 35.} The absence of the father during the child’s growing up years creates a gap in the soul that needs fulfillment. The child seeks to fill the gap brought about by fatherlessness through activities such as drug use, engaging in early sex, and crime. In turn, this leads to early pregnancy as well as premature deaths because of crime and drug use.

Poverty is another consequence of fatherlessness that affects the family. Families in which both the father and the mother combine efforts are better off financially than households
in which the mother is the only source of family income. Single mothers overwork themselves to support the family; usually, the income is only enough for basic needs with nothing left for savings.\textsuperscript{22} Without any margin or cushion in their budget, these families tend to live in poverty. Furthermore, the mother spends most of her time at work, trying to earn money to feed the family yet leaving the children unattended. Consequently, the child engages in dangerous activities such as drug use or promiscuity when the parent is absent. Poverty in the family also leads to children dropping out of school to look for work while others turn to crime to provide for the family.

Now more than ever, Christians are needed to carry out their positive role to help deal with this problem. Most Christians do not know how; they do not see what they can do to help reduce fatherlessness and its consequences.\textsuperscript{23} The results of this study, therefore, point to the interventions that Christians can implement to reduce fatherlessness and its consequences.

**Significance of the Problem**

The problem is of importance to different stakeholders including the Christian ministry. Other stakeholders include the African-American Christian family unit, the society, the government, and the church. The problem is significant to the ministry in that it gives it an opportunity to carry out its mission and fulfill its purpose as set out in the mission statement. The ministry has a purpose to fulfill, which is serving God’s purpose on earth. God created the marriage institution, and hence the Christian’s responsibility lies in protecting and preserving the institution. Lessening the problem of fatherlessness requires the reinstatement of the marriage


\textsuperscript{23} Strong, \textit{Church for the Fatherless}, 33.
institution and, therefore, the ministry will fulfill its purpose as a Christian ministry by helping to alleviate the problem.

The problem is also significant to African-American Christian families since the results highlight some of the causes of fatherlessness. African-American Christians will enable future families to avoid these causes, leading to strong families that stay together; addressing the problem will result in a reduction of the number of African-American families with absent fathers. Also, poverty will be reduced in African-American families since more fathers will be present in the home to help financially. Homes in which both parents are present tend to be stronger financially than those with one parent.

The society will also benefit when the issue diminishes. The greatest blows of fatherlessness on society include early pregnancies and drug use. The society must deal with an increased number of children addicted to drugs and waste their lives as well as with girls becoming mothers at tender ages.24 Society must help the young mother take care of her child, most times when the father is absent. Solutions to the fatherlessness problem will hence assist society in identifying ways to reduce drug use as well as early pregnancies. The burden of drug use and teenage pregnancy will, therefore, decrease in society.

The government will also benefit from reduced crime rates and increased national security. Over the last few decades, fatherlessness has links to increased crime rates. Restoring fathers to their families can reduce this rate of crime, benefiting the government. The government is also affected by the drug epidemic among youth, an epidemic rooted in fatherlessness. As such, the fatherless children issue is of significance to the government since

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24 Roberts, “The Absent Black Father.”
results from the study will help it reduce crime and drug use. In turn, this will improve the country’s economy by improving security as well as the number of youth contributing to the stability of society instead of engaging in drug use.

Finally, the issue of fatherlessness is most significant to the church since it is the institution responsible for encouraging couples to stay together and protect their children. Furthermore, most of the consequences of fatherlessness, such as crime, sexual promiscuity, and drug use, affect the church directly. The church has a purpose to help people turn away from such sinful deeds; reinstating the father back in the family can help reduce the rates of crime and drug use and hence help the church fulfill its purpose of turning hearts and lives to Christ and away from sin.

Objectives of Research

The main objective of the research is to establish a relationship between fatherlessness and the positive role of Christians in addressing the issue. Specific objectives are as follows:

- Determine some causes of fatherlessness
- Determine how Christians can address the causes of fatherlessness to help reduce its prevalence
- Identify some consequences of fatherlessness
- Determine how Christians can help mitigate the effects of fatherlessness
- Evaluate how fatherlessness affects different individuals
- Determine the role of Christians in helping people affected by fatherlessness

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Each of the following research questions includes a subsequent hypothesis, which not only answers the question but forms another foundation for this dissertation.

1. How important is the father in the lives of African-American children and their family?

   **Hypothesis:** Responsible fathers are an indispensable part of the family, for the good of the children as well as society. The removal of the father from the family, therefore, brings about several social consequences that have remedies by applying various positive roles of Christianity.

   **Null Hypothesis:** Fathers are unnecessary in the lives of children, and absence of the father has no consequences on the children and society. The church should, therefore, keep away from the issue of fatherlessness and not intervene.

2. Are the levels of poverty more prevalent in African-American families where the father is absent?

   **Hypothesis:** African-American families where the father is absent show higher rates of poverty compared to families where the father is present.

   **Null Hypothesis:** Fatherlessness does not contribute to increased rates of poverty.

3. Is increased drug use among African-American youth a consequence of the lack of a father in the child’s life?

   **Hypothesis:** Youth engage in drug use as a way of acting out because of lacking a father’s guidance in life.

   **Null hypothesis:** Drug use among the youth in the African-American community has no relation to fatherlessness; it results from increased drug availability in society.
4. Is there a relationship between increased crime rates in African-American communities and the absence of fathers in families?

**Hypothesis:** Crime has increased at a high rate over the last few decades, and so has the rate of fatherlessness; as such, there is a relationship between fatherlessness and the increased crime rate among African-American communities.

**Null hypothesis:** The increased crime rate is a result of a changing economic environment that puts pressure on the African-American community.

5. Can fatherlessness be the leading cause of early sex and pregnancy among African-American girls?

**Hypothesis:** Engaging in early sex and the rise of teenage pregnancies among African-American girls is a consequence of growing up without a father.

**Null hypothesis:** Early sex and teenage pregnancy are not consequences of fatherlessness; instead, bad parenting is to blame.

6. What role can Christians play to improve the father’s presence in the family?

**Hypothesis:** Christians can groom married couples as well as youth on how to stay together despite challenges, promoting the presence of the father in the life of his children and family.

**Null hypothesis:** Christians cannot improve father presence in the family since it is up to the father to stay at home or leave.

7. How can Christians help reduce the consequences of fatherlessness in society?

**Hypothesis:** Christians can bring more people to church, especially fatherless youth, and help them build faith in God since He is the Father to everyone. Believing in God as the Father will help reduce the consequences of fatherlessness.
**Null hypothesis:** The consequences of fatherlessness are deeply rooted in society, and hence, Christians have no means to reduce these consequences.

**Statement of Methodology**

This project involves a critical analysis of literature detailing the issue of fatherlessness, its consequences, and how it relates to the positive role of Christians. The literature review involves a critical examination of fatherlessness in society, its causes, and consequences. The section also includes case studies of African Americans who have grown up without fathers. Literature detailing the role of Christians in the issue of fatherlessness applies in this section. In the case study, several African Americans are examined in-depth to determine how the issue of fatherlessness has affected them. For instance, prominent and non-prominent African Americans examines; Ben Carson and Barrack Obama, both growing up fatherless, are studied. Both men are successful but do not deny that life was hard without a father; however, the hardships they faced molded them into the men they became. Non-prominent African Americans are also interviewed to gain insight into their experience with fatherlessness. The methodology section details how research conducts, as well as, methods of analyzing the results. The data is qualitative, and hence requires qualitative methods of results evaluation. The evaluation of results includes the results obtained through literature review and case studies.

**Statement of Limitations**

This study may be limited in that it focuses on fatherlessness in the African-American community. Fatherlessness is a widespread issue affecting different people groups apart from the African-American community. Focusing on only one community might not reveal all the issues surrounding fatherlessness, hence the limitation. The issue of fatherlessness affects various communities differently, yet these other communities are not a focal point. Another limitation of
the study lies in its sole focus on Christianity’s positive role in dealing with the issue at hand, not considering negative consequences. Finally, society addresses fatherlessness in different ways such as through the legal channel, social action, and the use of other religions. However, this study is limited in that it focuses only on the use of Christianity to solve the issue of fatherlessness.

Synthesis of Relevant Literature

There are several books which scribe regarding the issue of fatherlessness and its consequences. Noteworthy is the book by David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem*. The book received worldwide recognition due to its content and the way the author addresses the issue of fatherlessness. According to Blankenhorn, the problem is not the physical absence of the father but rather people’s current view of the issue. When asked if the father is important to the growing child, most people answer negatively. In other words, most people do not believe that the father provides an essential component of the child’s life. Many women decided to raise their children without fathers has resulted.

However, John Sowers’ book, *Fatherless Generation*, disagrees with the notion that the father is unimportant in the child’s life. Sowers suggests that rejection defines the lives of many people; this has been the case for the fatherless generation, the social group most affected by rejection. In the United States alone, more than 25 million children are fatherless today; they are in search of their father to gain his love and acceptance. However, the dad is nowhere; either he is sitting in jail, lost in an alcoholic fog, with another woman, or in some condition that allows him separation from his child.

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The absence of the father in the child’s life brings about an appetite in the soul that calls for fulfillment. As time passes, the unmet needs that only a father can bring turn into something that Sowers calls “father hunger.” Millions of Americans alone are starving as a result of this hunger. Children who grow up starved for a father’s presence and love develop faceless “cancer” of the soul that leads to destructive behavior. Some children turn to promiscuous sexual behaviors while others engage in drug use and crime. The book’s author states that living with father hunger brings about the sadness of what will never be. This sadness develops mostly because of the feeling of rejection; most kids cannot live with the knowledge that someone chose to turn his or her backs on them.

The issue of fatherlessness has affected African-American society the most, according to an article by Dorothy Roberts, “The Absent Black Father.” The article includes recent statistics showing that African-American households have the least number of married couples with children; most African-American families are headed by the mother since the father is absent. Also, the children without fathers are mostly African Americans, showing that African Americans have the highest rate of fatherlessness in all racial groups. The author explains that fatherlessness not only results in the physical absence of the father; the father may be present in the child’s life, but with a time-consuming job, he rarely spends time with his kids.28

Roberts attributes the rise of fatherlessness to the societal trends that are economical, historical, and demographic and how they have affected the entire world over the past century. In past decades, most societies were agricultural, enabling and necessitating families to stay together. Society has transformed from agriculture to industry, and more recently to service-

27 Roberts, “The Absent Black Father.”
28 Ibid.
based economies, causing adjustments in the dynamics of family life.\textsuperscript{29} During the dominance of industry-based economies, fathers were able to spend time with the family to some extent. The shift to service-based economies led to many jobs moving to the city, resulting in fathers spending most time at work and not with their families. The participation of women in labor also increased because of the economic shift. Consequentially, people began postponing marriages, with an increase in divorce and non-marital births.\textsuperscript{30} The culture of single parenthood and father absence began.

The transformations in society also led to changes in the expectations and roles of each family member. During the agricultural era, men were their children’s moral teachers; amidst the rise of the industrial era, men became the breadwinners; and with the dominance of a service economy, men have turned into nurturers. The public started calling for more involved and nurturing fathers; however, many men—especially black men—had difficulties fulfilling the nurturer role.\textsuperscript{31} Roberts’ article states that most black men did not meet the requirements for employees in service jobs in cities. Very few black men had attained at least a college education, so black men became under-employed or unemployed. As a result, poverty levels among black communities increased, leading fathers to drug use and crime, and eventually to abandon their families.\textsuperscript{32}


\\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Roberts, D. “The Absent Black Father.”
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
Father.” Propene agrees that transformations in society have indeed brought about the culture of fatherlessness. According to Propene, the transformations’ most profound effect has been a decline in the marriage institution. Without indicating precisely why marriage has weakened, evidence points to changes that have occurred in contemporary society. One of these changes has been the enlightenment of society, leading to increased personal autonomy.33 People now have greater freedom of religion—from the state, the community, and also the family. People now want to “do their own thing”; in the case of marriage, if one finds it unsatisfying, he or she can get out if desired.34 As a result, the culture of divorce has flourished.

In earlier times, the father was an essential part of the life of his wife and children; he protected them, and without him, the family would not survive. Society has since encouraged women’s autonomy; women feel empowered to take care of a child without the help of the man. Unfortunately, personal autonomy has weakened the family structure, compromising the success of child rearing.35 Popenoe states that only the reinstatement of the marriage situation can turn the situation around and make a marriage strong again. Reinstating this institution might prove difficult since marriage today has changed to include different patterns and principles. Rather than society focusing marriage on the functional aspect of the quality of parenting, it now equates success with feelings of love and friendship. This change has impacted marital stability heavily since the feelings of love and friendship are fragile and tend to fade with time.36


34 Ibid.


36 Ibid., 4.
Therefore, couples should emphasize the functional aspect of marriage to make the marriage institution strong again and subsequently promote successful childrearing.

An article by Ken Canfield, “The Modern Fatherhood Movement and Ministry to Fathers in the Faith Community,” supports Popenoe’s assertions by also highlighting the importance of the father in the lives of his family. Canfield uses a Christian approach to show that the father has always been an essential family component. He states that the Bible has provided a framework for how the Christian man should treat his family. The Bible mentions the word “father” and its derivatives more than 1,000 times, showing that fatherhood is a central message of the Bible as well as the character of God.37 Canfield notes that God was a father to the Israelites and His Son Jesus. In this way, the Bible sets a standard for what fathers should look like; he should be a father who leads, protects, provides, corrects, and accepts his family as they are. An array of literature corroborates this view and provides further details on the issue of fatherlessness.

Chapter Two: Literature Preview

Historical Background on the Issue of Fatherlessness

The following chapter seeks to give a historical background on fatherlessness and its existence in society. Fatherlessness has been a frequent occurrence in society since Creation, throughout the Bible, during the era of many people’s great-grandfathers, and up to the present time. In the past, fatherlessness occurred for various reasons, some of which include differing cultural and community beliefs. For instance, some cultures believed that children born with a deformity were taboo, and in a bid to separate themselves from such restrictions, most fathers tended to disown their children, hence disowning their wives and leaving children fatherless.¹ Another main cause of fatherlessness included the death of the male parent, suddenly leaving the child without a father figure. While growing up without a father was rare in ancient times, it also not caused for deep negative effects on society.

Now, however, the causes of fatherlessness have changed altogether, with fathers’ lack of responsibility, discipline, and awareness most prevalent. Contemporary, modern-day fathers are young men between the ages of 18-35, with a high percentage having little sense of responsibility toward their children and choosing to live in denial, even denying the existence of their children.² Consequently, the mothers are left to raise their children alone.

In other scenarios, some fathers are consumed with their jobs and neglect their children while others are locked away in prisons due to their involvement in criminal activities. In some cases, both parents choose to live separate lives, and as such, mothers usually gain custody of the children. Such modern-day separations lead to fatherless children who experience their father’s


² Ibid., 15.
care only through financial support, not through physical availability, which is how these fathers see their role.

Fatherlessness reigns in the epic story of “The Odyssey,” whereby the son Telemachus is raised by his mother after his father fails to return after the Trojan War. Telemachus rejects following in his father’s footsteps and becomes a wild child, leaving all his inherited responsibilities in his mother’s hands.³ As a result, the narrator reveals Telemachus as an irresponsible and immature son who lacks a family man’s qualities. Telemachus lacks the courage to apprehend the many men taking advantage of his family estate as well as those sexually assaulting his mother. Furthermore, the storyline makes clear that the young men who cause mayhem with Telemachus’ property are fatherless as well; their fathers are perhaps among those who failed to return from the Trojan War, 20 years before.⁴

Fatherlessness in the Bible

As mentioned, cases of fatherless children trace back to the Bible. In the Old Testament, the story of Esther provides an intriguing example. Esther was an orphan brought up by her cousin Mordechaj; they were both Jews living in a non-Jewish state, Persia. Her parents had died in the war between the Jews and the Persians, and most of the surviving Jews remained captive as prisoners. In the search for another wife after dethroning Queen Vashti, the Persian king was amazed by Esther’s beauty and chose her as his queen. Despite her Jewish heritage, Esther became Queen of Persia and kept her origin secret from the king. Through her crown and God’s sovereignty, Esther used her wisdom and power to redeem and save her community. Queen


⁴ Ibid., 10.
Esther represents a fatherless child who rises above the demeaning of her community to become its leader and hero.5

With equal drama, the Bible also tells the story of Moses, who in adulthood rescued the Israelites from the oppression and sufferings inflicted by King Pharaoh and his Egyptian cohorts. As Moses was born at a time when Pharaoh ordered the killing of all baby boys, his mother hid him in a floating river basket in a bid to save his life. After the king’s daughter found Moses, the king allowed her to keep and raise the baby, which spurred Moses’ sister, Miriam, into action; witnessing the rescue of baby Moses, she approached the king’s daughter, suggesting a maid who could assist in raising the child. Thus, Moses’ mother miraculously raised him from infancy and presumably taught him about God. After Moses grew to adulthood, God’s plan continued to advance: Moses killed one of the king’s servants, fled from Egypt, and was subsequently called by God speaking through a burning bush to save the Israelites from slavery. Through God’s power, he rescued the Israelites from Egypt and began their exodus to Canaan, the Promised Land. Moses, who died at Mount Nebo before reaching the Promised Land, represents children raised by their mothers in the absence of their fathers.

Also in the Old Testament, the story of Joash arises. After the death of King Ahaziah of Judah, the king’s mother, Athaliah, forcefully took over the throne and declared herself queen of Judah. To ensure her throne was undisputable, Athaliah ordered the killing of all the remaining descendants to the throne. However, Joash’s aunt rescued him, hiding him in the temple. The husband of Joash’s aunt, priest Jehodia, raised Joash like his son and taught him about God. Later, at the age of seven, Joash was crowned king by the priest, and the people of Judah celebrated, promising to worship God. During the first years of Joash’s 40-year kingly reign,

5 Esther (unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New King James Version).
Joash served and ruled the people in the ways of God with the advice of Jehodia. However, after the priest’s death, Joash’s leadership deteriorated. Jehodia symbolizes people in society who rise to the occasion and raise fatherless children as their own.

In 1 Kings, chapter 17, the story of the widow of Zarephath offers another glimpse into fatherhood. God instructed the widow to take care of Elijah, yet she found herself in a dilemma as she had one last meal remaining for herself and her son. After Elijah explained to her that her flour and water jar would not run dry, the fatherless homestead accepted Elijah under its care. When the widow’s son died, Elijah prayed to the Lord to revive the young man and restore his life; God answered with divine restoration.

The daughters Zelophehad, Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah, whose father had passed away, also offer a strong example of fatherless children in the Bible. The book of Numbers explains how the five daughters courageously came forward to fight for the right of inheritance among women. After the daughters argued for their right to inherit their father’s property as he left no male heir, God spoke to Moses to approve the daughter’s plea, deeming it just and fair. As to marriage, the daughters are ordered to marry in their clan to keep their inherited property confined within their people.

The Bible weaves the theme of fatherlessness throughout other Scripture as well; for example, in Genesis, Lot’s father Haran dies in Ur, and in the book of Samuel, the story of Mephibosheth paints a picture of kindness in the face of fatherlessness. Mephibosheth’s father, Jonathan, and his grandfather, Saul, both passed away when Mephibosheth was five years old, prompting his nurse to flee with him. In her rush, she dropped him on the floor, leaving him

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6 1 Kings.

7 Numbers.
deformed. His nurses raised him, however, until King David desired to show kindness to any of Saul’s descendants, giving Mephibosheth a new home in the king’s palace.

In the New Testament, the story of the widow of Nain provides an example of Jesus’ concern for the results of fatherlessness in families. On his way into Nain, Jesus encountered a funeral procession of a widow’s only son. Filled with mercy, Jesus ordered the procession to stop and then raised the young man to life, giving him back to his mother. In other Scripture, God communicates His love and care for the fatherless: Psalms 82:3 admonishes readers to “Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy.” Moreover, Job 29:12-15 says, “I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.”

Contemporary Cases of Fatherlessness

In the recent past, excellent examples of fatherless children include American presidents Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, and Andrew Jackson. Born in 1961, Obama was abandoned by his father when he was barely two years old. Both the father of Bill Clinton and Andrew Jackson passed away before their sons were born, rendering both fatherless.

Looking across “the pond,” fatherlessness is also shown in the life of Queen Elizabeth I, whose mother passed away when Elizabeth was three years old. When she was just thirteen years old, her father, King Henry IV, also passed away, leaving her fatherless and orphaned. Despite resistance from her half-sisters and brother, Elizabeth managed to achieve her place on the throne, and after her leadership was evaluated, she was named one of the best leaders ever. She was seen as a more modest and capable leader compared to her father and her half-sister.

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8 Don Nardo, Barack Obama (Minneapolis, Minn: Compass Point Books, 2010), 6.

Fatherlessness in the African-American Community

Fatherlessness affects all races in America, including Hispanics, Asians, African Americans, and Caucasians. Some of the most common causes of fatherlessness in American households include premarital pregnancies, separations (as a result of divorce or imprisonment), and death of biological parents. The U.S. government’s 2015 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey confirms the upward trend in cases of fatherlessness with a threefold increase in fatherless children.\(^\text{10}\) According to the 2005 census conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau of Statistics, approximately 19 million children were being brought up in fatherless families that year. In 2010, the same report showed that the number had grown from 19 million to 24 million, with 33.3 percent of children being brought up in the absence of their fathers.\(^\text{11}\) More importantly, the statistics from the Census Bureau indicates that the crisis was mainly among African-American families, whereby out of the 19 million fatherless children, 56 percent were African American.\(^\text{12}\) These African-American children resided with their mothers while others with their grandparents or other relatives since the mother was unavailable.

The high number of fatherless children among African Americans contributes to out-of-wedlock pregnancies whereby children enter the world having no father present in their family. Out-of-wedlock pregnancies strongly support by the Census Bureau’s 2010 report, which estimates that approximately 40 percent of children born in America were born out-of-wedlock,


\(^{12}\) Ibid.
ending up in father-absent families; of these cases, 72.8 percent associates with the African-American community.\textsuperscript{13}

Apart from children being born out of wedlock, divorces and separations have also resulted in an increased number of fatherless children. The increasing numbers of divorce and separations among parents have led to the rise in the number of African-American children raised by single mothers. In 2009, the percentage of African-American children raised by single mothers was 55.1 percent.\textsuperscript{14} In 1991 through 2009, there was a small change in the number of children raised by single mothers. However, a significant increase recognized between 1960 and 2012; the graph below shows more than a 30 percent increase.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Single Parented African-American Children}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{13} U.S. Census Bureau, “Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years Old: 1960 to Present,” U.S. Census Bureau, July 1, 2012. \url{http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ch5.xls}.

As mentioned, fatherless children in some cases are brought up by their grandparents or close relatives, in the absence of both parents. The Census Bureau has reported a 64 percent increase from 1990 to 2009 in the number of children brought up by their grandparents or close relatives. In 1991, 15 percent of African-American children lived with at least one of their grandparents. In 2009, the percentage rose to 17 percent as shown in the graph below, which follows the trend of children brought up by relatives.

Figure 2: African-American Children Brought Up by Relatives

In America, the population of fatherless children is mainly in the states with a high population of African Americans. Out of these states, the District of Columbia has the leading population of households with absent fathers, representing 80 percent of the total population of African-American children in the state. The other states found with high numbers of fatherless

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children include Arkansas, Louisiana, Memphis, Tennessee, and Mississippi, with the percentage of families with single mothers standing between 70 percent and 75 percent.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite having an average population of African-American people, the state of Florida also reveals a high percentage of fatherless children, which is unusual considering the average population. The unexpected population of fatherless children surfaces on the recurrent occurrence of national calamities such as hurricanes.\textsuperscript{18} Also, the increase in the percentage of father-absent families causes the increase in out-of-wedlock births as well as cases of divorce and separation in 2013 and 2015. Fatherlessness is also dominant in families where children are brought up by single mothers. When children with single mothers rise in the above circumstances, they follow in their absent father’s footsteps and fail to claim responsibility in the bringing up of their children. Vicious cycle results that may be unending.

One can agree that in almost every culture, marriage is the institution that binds together a man and a woman. This binding propagates the upbringing of a family and ensures closeness. Notably, marriage is the determining factor of a family destined to last. Marriageability in this context depicts the readiness of the partners in settling for a long coexistence together.\textsuperscript{19} Factors that lead to people deciding to marry will influence the extent of fatherlessness in the African-American community. Situations in which the marriage institution is focused on circumstances and not on palatability and compatibility of partners sets for a real struggle, and in fact, often leads the union to fail.\textsuperscript{20} Children in such cases suffer as the victims of uncalled for and unfounded marriageability.

\textsuperscript{17} Clark, \textit{Factors That Contribute}, 9.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 25.
Young people in the African-American community often have children while cohabiting in the name of romantic involvement. In many instances, there is no pre-marriage counseling; young couples decide to marry, a decision not based on proper Christian decision making that binds a man to a woman, however, thus reducing chances the marriage will survive. On the same note, cohabiting leads to an increase in the number of children born out of wedlock. As a result, these children are born without any paternal commitment in their lives.\footnote{21} Therefore, divorce, separation, and illegitimate children in African-American communities are cited as the major cause of single-mother households since mothers are then in custody of the children.

Aside from the marriage aspect, a more shocking cause of fatherlessness lies in female-initiated divorce. Women claim twice as many cases as do men of initiating divorces and castigating breakups in American society. According to history, women’s rights in society have ignores that they feel unhappy and blame their partner for their discontent. Men display a lesser tendency to initiate divorce, somewhat due to their valiant behavior toward women and children. They feel they should protect the integration and cohesion of their families at all cost. African Americans are no exception to this phenomenon.

The natural sense that encourages a man to feel obliged to provide as breadwinner has also led African-American men to sabotage their responsibility toward their children, especially when their economic stability proves shaky. Joblessness among African Americans has crippled their financial abilities. Accordingly, this situation has rendered those who are fathers to positions of low esteem and low pay. In such cases, divorce comes easily, particularly when a marriage establishes on companionship and understanding.\footnote{22} Historical and cultural norms that

\footnote{21} Bennett, \textit{A Passion for the Fatherless}, 63.

have for a long time defined American society contribute to the challenges facing African-American fatherhood. While the legacy of slavery and racism have faded with time, economic discrimination has been the most recurrent African-American experience.

Ostensibly, a society based on any economic discrimination is a nation faced with crime. In the lives of many low-skilled African Americans, the American economy seems to have no place for them. Economic discrimination to the African American raises poverty levels, and poverty contributes to African-American fatherlessness in the sense that, as they feel financial despair, fathers neglect responsibilities that include supporting their families. Striving to support a family in a hand-to-mouth economy is never a ride in the park, especially when new mouths, more children, are added. When poverty strikes, expenses such as medical bills become unaffordable to a young family. The pressure often becomes unbearable to new marriages, especially to fathers at this juncture.\(^2^3\) The incidence of fathers committing suicide as a result of poverty is also a concern.

The hopelessness defines poverty, results in crime, which leads to streets occupied mainly by African-American residents having experienced the highest crime rates in American history. In pursuit of a means to strive and thrive, African-American fathers have performed all kinds of atrocities and malpractices in their resident and non-resident towns. Crime gangs have also emerged in these towns with the intent to run the premises. Robbery with violence proves a major misconduct in such locations, in addition to drug-peddling activities perceived to produce extra coins in a pocket quickly.\(^2^4\) All these activities are disguised as intentions to provide for the family in a survival-of-the-fittest kind of livelihood. While the American government strives to

\(^2^3\) Ibid., 43.

\(^2^4\) Daniels, ed., *Lost Fathers*, 45.
engage the crime-stopping authorities, lives in the midst of the battle, in African-American homes and neighborhoods, are lost. Virtually anyone will attest to the fact that a well-distributed economy offers a cure for the hunger of resources that results in violence and all hostile practices in the African-American community.25

Crime has rendered the African-American child fatherless in times when the crime takes a father’s life, or the father enters custody. Moreover, poor and marginally educated fathers are prone and susceptible to failure as sustaining providers in their homes, making them predisposed to incarceration. According to a 2004 report by the U.S. Department of Justice, African-American males represent 35 percent of males jailed and 37 percent of prison inmates, despite comprising only 13 percent of the total male population. Incarceration of the African-American man has forced many families to break apart, forcing mothers to assume the sole task of parenthood.26

Arguably, incarceration can lead to positive life changes, yet when the length of incarceration is prolonged, the father-child relationship suffers greatly. It seems impossible for a child, deprived of a father’s love, to grow up to face a cruel world with strength and resilience; parental involvement in a child’s life is vital, yet many forget that the inmates viewed as derelicts in American society are parents, too.27 Adjustments to correction rules and procedures should take place to accommodate the need for child-parent interaction and relationship-building. When legal barriers restrict children from visiting their incarcerated fathers, more damage can ensue.

25 Ibid., 46.


27 Ibid.
Fatherlessness is a significant societal ill in American society that needs a more proactive focus. Fatherlessness develops in a culture that the fatherless emulate with no keen awareness of its adverse effect. Boys brought up by single mothers fail to see the intensity the matter holds. Instead, they are more likely follow the same pattern in their mature years.\textsuperscript{28} Victimized children often do not perceive their mother’s or caretaker’s struggles of raising a child short-handed. After all, when open minds see their mothers raise them, they may perceive their trials as normal and feel no remorse when walking out on their children. In essence, children brought up by single parents are worse off compared to those brought up by both parents, regardless of any formality binding the parents.

Research by the National Center for Fathering reports that children from fatherless homes are more likely to suffer and experience psychological instability compared to those raised by both parents. In other words, children are more likely to be poor, become involved in drugs and alcohol abuse, drop out of school, and suffer from health and emotional problems. Also, the reverberation of fatherlessness contributes to a grim statistic: African-American youth account for 63 percent of teenage suicides in America and 70 percent of juvenile detentions.\textsuperscript{29} While African-American children are the most affected by the rate of fatherlessness, more specific effects align with the child’s gender.

Male children are more likely to indulge in crime even at a young age, especially if the mother loses control of them. Traditionally, a father is a son’s sideman, especially if the two experience proximity since the child’s birth. Fathers spend time with their sons doing “men chores,” sports, and activities, and when a son misbehaves, his father is in the best position to

\textsuperscript{28} Deane Scott Berman, “Risk Factors Leading to Adolescent Substance Abuse,” 1995, 30.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 33.
instill appropriate disciplinary actions. When the family lacks such a figure, the “boy child” is often forced to look at men’s exterior traits to find a sense of belonging. Without a guardian to instill in him proper virtues, the “street school of life” takes his soul into custody, enticing him to criminal activities. In the absence of fathers, most boys are likely to have conflicting identities, identifying with their mothers. Some struggle with defining their gender, as well as, their supposed roles.  

Likewise, African-American girls growing up without fathers are likely to face early pregnancies. Fathers are the first men whom girls encounter, and comprise the critical fraction of men they can observe closely as they grow. Emotionally-present fathers protect their girls, acquainting them with male-female relationships and understanding the physical and emotional security they give their girls. When girls who have connected with a father figure grow older, they can familiarize themselves with constructive and meaningful relationships based on advice and trust. On the other hand, a female adolescent living in a single-parent home is often significantly more sexually active as compared to those in a two-parent home. This difference attributes to the absence of a role-model who has familiarized her with non-sexual male relationships. Other results of fatherlessness in a girl’s life are low self-esteem, lack of empathy, and high risk of drug use.

Fatherlessness also has great impact on a child’s morality. In some instances, single mothers have found substitutes for husbands in the name of stepfathers. Some instances are genuine, but others are not. When a mother invites a man into her home, the moral impact on her

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children, especially on girls, can prove tremendously detrimental. Girls in such a position become susceptible to sexual naivety, and they may end up making unwise decisions regarding their sex life. Stepfathers are sometimes harmful to their stepdaughters if their commitment to the family remains superficial. Biological fathers often give daughters an irreplaceable sense of belonging that even some stepfathers cannot foster.

Single African-American mothers cannot be excluded as victims in these situations. They are affected enormously if the loss of their husband is not self-inflicted as in the case of the female-triggered divorce. The burden of bringing up a family is incomparable from all angles. African-American mothers can feel marginalized in society. When these mothers lose the father figure in their marriage, they find a significant void left to fill. Despite their effort to give their children a healthy lifestyle, they are still at a great disadvantage in the process of raising a modern family without all the developmental support and masculine traits for children to observe and emulate.

In the fatherless African-American community, detrimental factors range from poverty, crime, drug abuse, and incarceration to divorce and early pregnancy. Economic instability creates a tension where poverty thrives and, in return, crime activities rise. Fatherlessness will exist, whether from incarceration or father’s life lost to crime, to out-of-wedlock births, divorce, and other temporal situations, all depriving children of their father’s influence. Moreover, not

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33 Scott, Two Americas: The Effects of Single Motherhood, 31.

just the participation of a father figure but his continued presence in his children’s lives is
indisputably crucial to his children’s successful upbringing.35

A Summary of the Causes of Fatherlessness

Leading causes of fatherless in the African-American community include divorce, out-of-
wedlock pregnancy, drug abuse, incarceration, time-consuming job situations, poverty, and
death. These factors can compound one another, and many are woven together and inextricably
tied in the life of an African-American family. Taken one by one, they are each contributor to a
complex fabric of life pockmarked with fatherlessness in a large percentage of African-American
communities.

Reviewing each factor separately, one must first consider divorce as the leading cause of
fatherlessness today; when families break up, the mother in most cases leaves with the custody of
the child. The father is given time to visit the child on select days or, if not given partial custody,
is commanded to send financial upkeep. The result is a father’s absence in the child’s life.
Visiting a child on a few select days is never enough and can only be equated to fatherlessness.
Divorce results from several issues such as domestic violence, poverty, and even drug use.
Poverty leads many men to drug use to channel their misery and sadness. Today’s educated
women will not tolerate a drunkard man who does not provide for the family, and as a result,
they opt for divorce. Men who turn to drugs such as alcohol may end up engaging in domestic
violence, which also forces women to choose divorce.

Another leading cause of fatherlessness is out-of-wedlock pregnancy. In such cases, the
parents are young, and the father, unable to take responsibility, often abandons his child and the
child’s young mother. The young girl, who might decide to keep the baby, takes on the

responsibility of rearing the child alone, often with the help of her parents. The child, therefore, ends up growing up without a father. In some instances, the young girl might meet a new guy who ends up marrying the girl and taking care of the child, but he is not the child’s birth father.

Another cause of fatherlessness is alcohol and drug use; many African-American men today lose in a fog of alcoholism or drugs to the extent that they forget to spend time with family. Rather, the man chooses to spend time outside the house drinking with friends. In the event he gets home early, the father is too drunk to engage in his child’s life. Such fathers are emotionally absent, and consequently, the child lacks a father’s guidance. Fathers should be present not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. Fathers lost in drugs cannot offer any emotional or spiritual guidance, resulting in another form of contemporary fatherlessness. Children in such families are highly likely to engage in drug use since they have a father who already does drugs.

Incarceration of the father looms in the lives of many African-American families. Incarceration happens to fathers whose criminal activities necessitate their immediate incarceration. Being in prison deprives the father the chance to spend time with his children. Sometimes the child might visit the father in prison, but that time is never enough to establish a father-child bond. As a result, the child still feels fatherless. In other cases, the mother denies the children a chance to visit the imprisoned father, fearing it may cause the child emotional harm. If the child assumes prison is not a dangerous place, he or she may engage in crime just as their father did. When the mother denies the child the chance to visit the father in prison, it breeds a state of fatherlessness for the child.

In addition to divorce, early pregnancy, drug abuse, and incarceration, contemporary issues such as a time-consuming job also result in fatherlessness. Today’s economy is very
demanding, and people often must work long hours to make ends meet. “Workaholic” fallout has particularly been the case for most families in which either parent, mostly the father, goes to work early and comes in late, spending little time with his children. In other cases, the parent might work far away in the city or another country, and therefore is absent from the lives of his kids for months or even years. A result is a contemporary form of fatherlessness due to a time-consuming job.

Poverty remains an underlying factor in fatherlessness as well; although adequate evidence is lacking to link poverty as a direct cause of fatherlessness, poverty is undeniably a motivator for men to engage in crime and drug use. Poverty is particularly so for African-American families who live in poverty situations. The father might end up turning to crime to solve his financial issues and ultimately land in jail or die, leaving his children fatherless. Poverty also drives fathers into drug use, which in turn causes their emotional absence from their children’s lives. Finally, as poverty is one of the causes of domestic violence and divorce, poverty can be seen as a contributor to the fatherlessness pandemic.

Albeit minor in comparison to the other mitigating factors, a final contributor to fatherlessness is death, resulting from disease, accidents, or other factors. While death is inevitable for everyone, it still contributes to fatherlessness in families across the nation.

Effects of Fatherlessness

Research shows that the involvement of a father with his children results in benefits ranging from improved emotional and social well-being and higher academic achievement to a less likelihood of risk-taking or delinquency among other problematic behaviors. The father is an essential figure in the lives of his children; as such, it is no surprise that his absence leaves his family with many negative consequences. The effects of fatherlessness manifest themselves in
different ways including psychologically, socially, economically, spiritually, sexually, morally, and even physically. Father absence affects each member of the family different from the others. For instance, the girl child may turn toward promiscuous sex, which leads to teenage pregnancy, while boys may enmesh themselves in crime and drugs. Furthermore, statistics show that families in which the father is absent have the highest poverty rates. This section will discuss the effect of father absence on boys, girls, and the family in general.

Effects on Boys

The effect of fatherlessness is most predominant in boys, according to research by Lamb (1997). The father lands the job of being his son’s role model; the engaged father teaches his son about male responsibilities, assertiveness, achievement, and independence. The father also must teach his son how to relate to the opposite sex. When the father is absent, the boy child may experience low self-esteem or develop a counter-dependence, which leads him to act out as a result. Below are some of the effects of fatherlessness on the boy child.

The first and most profound way in which boys act out because of father’s absence is through drug use. As a famous psychologist stated, boys love to be validated, or in other words, they want to be anointed as “man enough” by their fathers. Without a father to do so, the boy must guess his way into being a man, and this often leads to an identity problem. The boy might experiment using different types of lifestyles to establish an identity for himself, and this often lands boys into drug use. This theory by Erickson, a leading psychologist, is confirmed by statistics, which show that fatherless boys are more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs earlier than those with both parent’s present; without their father, the boys’ behavior is significantly affected.36

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In addition to drug use, father absence in the life of boys also leads many young men to violence and crime. Statistics show that adolescents with two parents present are less likely to be involved in crime and violence than those with one parent missing. According to a report by the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, areas, where the number of fathers was low, saw an increase in reports of teen violence compared to where the families were intact.\footnote{Stephen Demuth and Susan L. Brown. “Family Structure, Family Processes, and Adolescent Delinquency: The Significance of Parental Absence Versus Parental Gender.”}

Research supports this statistic, showing that father presence enables children to gain self-control. Fatherless children lack self-control, and hence they may develop anger issues, which often lead to crime. Such crimes may include domestic violence against women, rape, and violent robberies.

**Effects on Girls**

Fatherlessness also has a great effect on girls since it impacts their development. Most importantly, it is from the father that the daughter learns how to relate to men and therefore how to trust in heterosexual relationships. An absent father figure leads girls to mistrust men, and this can have grave implications for the daughter’s future relationships. Other than learning about intimacy, daughters also acquire the skills of assertiveness, competence, and a sense of independence from their fathers. Without a father, the girl child might never learn this skill, and this might affect her future professional life. Below are some of the effects of fatherlessness on girls.

The major effect on girls is that of increased rates of teen pregnancy, which results from the girl engaging in sex too early in life. According to the adolescent development theory proposed by researcher Sandra L. Hofferth, a father is crucial in shaping the identity of the
daughter; this theory claims that interpersonal relationships that form while growing up can affect her sense of self. Girls who grow up without father’s struggle with feelings of low self-esteem as, without a father, they set their standard and often allow others to define them. Without a proper definition of one’s true self, control diminishes, and this allows others to influence behavior and attitude. Psychological issues are also present as this is affected by lack of a father figure.\textsuperscript{38} The girl may, therefore, develop behavior such as sexual promiscuity early in life, which in turn may result in unintended teen pregnancy. One scenario includes the teenage girl dropping out of school to care for the child.\textsuperscript{39}

Girls might also suffer from feelings of mistrust, which affect their commitment and intimacy in future relationships. Girls from fatherless households display behavior of being either overly dependent or fearful because of the lack of a father figure. In the book \textit{Fatherless Through Divorce and Death}, the author asserts that father absence has two effects on girls. In their relationships with the opposite sex; the girl perceives that she must do everything it takes to make the relationship work, or the girl becomes shy and fears to get too close in a relationship as she might lose the guy.

Erickson suggests that girls are most affected by fatherlessness since it influences how they socialize. Men are biologically trained to be independent, so separation and isolation do not change them as much as it affects the girl child. The man can ignore feelings; the woman, on the other hand, obsesses about feelings, which leads her to behaviors such as staying in relationships


too long and searching for “the perfect man.” The girl may also attempt to become a “superwoman,” effectively trying to pretend she does not love or need others for her survival.

Effects on the Family in General

In the context of the whole family, poverty is the most profound effect of fatherlessness. In most circumstances, the mother is overwhelmed by the task of fending for herself and the needs of her children. The mother might afford to pay the bills, but the family remains poor since they cannot afford to buy a car or house. Furthermore, the mother finds it difficult to find a co-signer who will help her obtain a bank loan. As a result, the family lives in poverty.

Poverty, in turn, brings about hardships that may leave the children in a continual state of worry. The children suffer, seeing an overworked mother trying to meet their needs. The mayhem of worrying about money causes illness, depression, and inability to function. In turn, worry affects the children’s academic performance as evidenced by statistics that show children from father-absent families performing worse in school and scoring lower grade points than those in intact families.

Finally, fatherlessness also influences the family’s spirituality. In Christians, this effect manifests itself in the rate of church attendance and involvement in Christian matters. Father-absent families show the lowest rate of church attendance and participation in church activities. This behavior explains Freud’s “projection theory of religion.” This behavior states that the belief in God derives from man’s desire for a sense of security; as such, when the earthly father disappoints his family, either through mistreatment or absence, it often leads his family to reject God who is the Father above.

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Case Studies on Prominent African Americans

The common assumption has been that children from father-absent families do not achieve success in life. However, many examples exist of children who have grown up in father-absent families becoming productive members of society. Poverty, incarceration, and economic discrimination are some of the major attributing factors to fatherlessness. While the majority of the victimized in this context has been completely unable to lead regular and developmental lives, a few have gone beyond their capabilities to change the cliché. Great persons in history have emerged against all the odds to overcome challenges encountered in leading a fatherless life, and they have shown the world that achieving their dreams despite the situation is indeed possible. Their success stretches from points of realization of who they are to the depths of their inner ambitions of what they endeavor to achieve. The following section provides a case study of several African Americans who have grown up without their fathers. The dissertation will discuss how Christianity contributed to their success, leaving no doubt that success is a process.

Ben Carson

Dr. Benjamin Solomon Carson, commonly known as Ben Carson, is a remarkably successful person who grew up fatherless alongside his older brother, Curtis. Carson was born September 18, 1951, and lived in Detroit with his mother Sonya, a domestic worker. In his early years, Carson says he was a “below average kid,” especially concerning his school grades. Just like other fatherless children, Carson experienced this quite common phenomenon; school dropouts in American society compromise the fatherless children. Carson beat all odds as a problematic child in elementary school when he entered Yale University for undergraduate studies; he then went on to complete his medical degree at the University of Michigan. His success stories include the surgical procedure he performed in 1987, the first of its kind, which

Carson is cautious and sensitive about bringing up a family’s plight, more so when the burdened party is a mother. He argues that kids born out of wedlock or raised by single parents draw to poverty and crime. Babies born out of wedlock often require their mothers to curtail their education, and these babies are four times as likely to grow up in poverty or end up in a welfare system, according to Carson. Carson outlines his transgressions from junior high school as difficult situations that few would have overcome; life ties him to poverty. While living in Boston, Carson resided in a tenement so impoverished that huge rats roamed in packs through the weeds out back, he shares.

Carson has described violence in his childhood that includes an attempt to stab a boy. He also states that he once tried to hit his mother with a hammer during a disagreement about his choice of clothes. His violence knotts to his raging temperamental nature, and while he grew up to become a transformed, quiet adult, Carson notes the importance of understanding the intensity that builds in most fatherless children. Perhaps in the rebellion of their fatherless reality, children see themselves as different from others; they also lack the one person best suited to instill discipline in their earlier stages of life: a father. Fathers play a significant role in a son’s developmental process. Sons want to spend time with their fathers to learn and participate in the

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men chores and activities, and when this influence is absent, they develop self-inflicted manhood behaviors exhibited through lack of control and self-guidance.

**Christian Life**

As Dr. Carson’s mother sought to tame her children by limiting the time they spent watching television and emphasizing the importance of homework, Carson developed a passion for God’s Word. In relating the events of the time he attempted to stab a friend, only to have the blade break on the friend’s belt buckle, Carson says he remembers running home and locking himself in the bathroom with a Bible, praying and asking God to intervene and change his temper. This act reflects a pillar of Christianity on which Carson built his success. In Jane Elizabeth’s research on life histories of successful black males reared in absent father families, one of the pillars she reiterates as the key to success is the act of knowing God. God finds a purpose in one’s life, and when people relate to this divine connection, they spur on to success in the tasks God sets before them.

**Oprah Winfrey**

Another great personality who overcame the great difficulties and hardships of fatherlessness is Oprah Winfrey, an American media proprietor, actress, producer, and best known for *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Oprah ranks as one of the richest African American and the greatest of all black philanthropists in American history. Just like Dr. Carson, Oprah received the Presidential Medal of Freedom award by President Obama in 2013. Additionally, Oprah is recognized with honorary doctorate degrees from Duke and Harvard.

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The great achievements of this African-American female persona were never served to her on a silver platter. Oprah was born in abject poverty in rural Mississippi to a teenaged single mother. As Carson shares, the odds are high that children born to teens out of wedlock are also prone to early pregnancies, and Oprah was no exception. She fell victim to sexual abuse, and at the age of fourteen, gave birth to a boy who later passed away. Oprah describes herself as a promiscuous teen who, throughout her growth to greatness, made many unwise decisions not worth repeating.\(^4^4\) Oprah claims to have had a love affair with a married man who had no intention of leaving his wife; yet in the face of rejection, she wanted the man more. She claims to have felt depleted and powerless, pleading with the man, and her subsequent depression drove her to leave a suicide note to her best friend. She explains that the rejection she felt from the world made her weak and fragile.\(^4^5\) She endured abusive relationships to somehow find the approval she desperately needed. She felt useless and, in return, put herself in harm’s way to seek significance in the world; smoking crack cocaine became part of her story, she regretfully confesses.

However, Oprah’s situation was a little different from those completely fatherless. Her parents separated soon after her birth and left her in the care of her maternal grandmother. At age six, Winfrey was sent to live with her mother, and at age twelve, was sent to live with her father; she was then put back in her mother’s custody, and that is when the impoverished, urban lifestyle pummeled her with all its wrath. Repeated sexual abuse affected Winfrey the most. As noted earlier, fathers are the first men with whom girls identify, protecting and nurturing their intimate lives; yet the men around her abused Oprah. Remarkably, Oprah developed a love for spiritual


\(^{4^5}\) Ibid., 9.
nourishment quite early while living with her grandmother. At two years old, she addressed a church congregation about Jesus’ resurrection on Easter day.

**Christianity**

Oprah forged her entire career and progress through her faith and foundation in Christianity even though she later turned her focus to literature, self-improvement, and spirituality. She has served a deep purpose to motivate millions through her self-help ideas, and though criticized for her open confessions, she has extended a generous hand as a benefactor to many. Her philanthropist nature displays a true revelation of a woman designed with firm virtues and the pillars of Christianity.\(^{46}\)

**Barack Obama**

Barack Obama, the 44\(^{th}\) U.S. president, offers a good example of a person brought up in a father-absent family who managed to live a life opposite of the destiny often characterized by children from fatherless homes. According to Obama, women have been the most important people in his life. He gives thanks in many speeches to his mother and grandmother, who devoted much effort to ensure they could provide for him and his two sisters. Obama seeks to appreciate his mother, Anne and praises her for encouraging him to pursue his goals in life. In a speech, while in office, he described his mother as heroic and said he owes his life achievements to her. Growing up without a father, he had few role models around him and ended up making many mistakes in childhood. Consequently, he explains that his mistakes allowed him to realize that life compromises values and morals that now guide him daily.\(^{47}\) On the same note, no father

\(^{46}\) Jones, *Oprah Winfrey: Celebrity with Heart*, 10.

\(^{47}\) Don Nardo, *Barack Obama* (Minneapolis, Minn: Compass Point Books, 2010).
figure gave him direction in living right; he learned how to teach himself and develop values true to him. Similarly, he mentions that a fatherless family exposed him to the advantages of learning how to prioritize his issues.

Nevertheless, Obama shares how he sought to fill his father’s absence growing up and often wonders how his life would have been if his father were present. Moreover, he admits that being brought up without a father has influenced him not only to be involved in his own children’s lives but to lend a helping hand to other fathers by contributing to communities that encourage fathers to spend quality time with their kids.

**Christianity**

Since he declared his intent to vie for the presidency in 2004, Obama’s religion has been a considerable point of controversy. In response to rumors that he secretly practiced Islam, Obama clarified that he was indeed raised in a Christian family, though he did not attend church; much of his Christian life has developed during his adult life, he says. While Christianity may have had little or no impact in his childhood, it has influenced his adulthood and thus his success. Obama mentions that his Christian faith portrays through his public service, and Jesus Christ’s humility to die on the cross has encouraged him to strive to deliver hope to people. His success can be attributed in part to his Christianity since it has led him to appreciate humility and devote his life to public service.\(^48\) He attests that his Christianity had been his pillar of guidance through the years.

**LeBron James**

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\(^48\) Nardo, *Barack Obama*, 3.
Another African-American personality who has beat the odds is professional basketball superstar LeBron James. He learned how to live by a teenage mother who struggled to provide for James amidst poverty. Fans worldwide can see James give his mother credit for his success; he refers to her as his champion. He acknowledges his mother’s effort to raise money for his upkeep, which meant often moving to get a job. In a tribute to his mother, James thanks his mother for the person he has become. He credits her for exposing him to basketball and teaching him to be loving and caring. James also recognizes his mother’s sacrifices and struggles as the key to his motivation and inspiration. On a unique side note, he also thanks his father for being absent as his absenteeism encouraged and challenged him to be a better person; James says that his mother filled the role of a father to him. James also thanks his football coach who helped fill the gap and provided the foundation of his basketball excellence.

**Christian Life**

LeBron was brought up by a Christian mother; he also credits several influential people who influenced his Christian faith. Indeed, he attests that his Christianity has had a significant impact on his success and the person he has become. He has pursued Christian values throughout his life, and his values are exemplified in his charitable donations to causes that aim to reach children also brought up by single mothers. During a football match, one of his teammates had a convulsion and was rushed to the hospital. James called his colleagues to a small gathering where they prayed for their friend’s quick recovery. James professes to be an ardent Christian

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50 Ibid.
with strong roots of faith; in most of his post-game interviews, LeBron attributes his success to God.

**Mary J. Blige**

Mary Jane Blige, commonly referred to as Mary J. Blige, is a renowned preacher and musician raised by a single mother who struggled with drug and substance abuse. In her teenage years, Blige also joined the harmful bandwagon but later took a turn and quit substance abuse. She grew to be one of the most successful hip-hop musicians, now known as the “Queen of Pop.” Blige gives tribute to her mother, who despite struggling with substance abuse, strived to show her children how to love, care for others, and practice kindness to all. During the debut of her album, *Strength of a Woman*, Blige refers to her mother as her biggest inspiration. She states that her mother, despite her problems, was always there for her emotionally, physically, and financially. She attributes her strength as a woman to the strong character of her mom, who fought to raise her children in a tough environment. She refers to her mother as “both my mother and father.” Her Christian faith as a young girl led her to realize her great vocal strength while singing in her local church. Despite her unstable experience and over-indulgence in alcohol, Mary has upheld her Christian faith, giving credit to God.

**Case Studies of Non-Prominent African Americans**

In addition to illustrations highlighting popular narratives, case studies of non-prominent African Americans help to complete the picture and provide vital points of comparison. As such, five not-so-prominent African Americans were chosen and interviewed. The first interviewee is a black male who was previously incarcerated; the second is a single mother who lost her husband

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52 Ibid.
to drugs, and the third is a single father raising his child alone. Another interview subject, a successful businessman, also shares his thoughts on the topic of fatherlessness. Finally, a pastor from a local church facilitates the answering of the research questions. A case study on these types of people reveals more information with regards to how it feels to be fatherless as well as what helps people cope with fatherlessness effects.

**Raymond: Previously Incarcerated**

Short on time and thus interviewed through a phone call, Raymond mentioned that he has no college education and has never been formally employed. Working temporary jobs such as bartender and waiter at the local restaurant years ago, he connected with some unscrupulous people who introduced him to the drug business. Ray left his hometown and started peddling drugs, an activity he engaged in for four years before landing in prison for seven years. During his four years of selling drugs, he got his girlfriend pregnant; the child was born while he was in prison. After his release, Raymond discovered his girlfriend living with another guy, and not wanting to interfere; he has stayed away from his child. When asked why he chose to do so, Raymond’s statement was as follows:

> Before I went to prison, I had put my girlfriend through a lot; she suffered, even more, when I went to prison, and she had to raise our kid on her own. I do not blame her for moving on since it has helped her take care of our kid, and all I have ever wanted was for my family to be happy. Plus, I have always struggled with anger issues since I never had a dad; my anger landed me in prison. I am still not able to handle my anger well despite constant preaching from the pastor at the prison about anger management. The pastor, however, did preach about moving on, and that is why I decided that my child and former girlfriend be better off without me.

Raymond said he believes ignorance from the father’s side is the main cause of fatherlessness. Most men are ignorant about family, and this leads them to irresponsible behaviors such as drug use and crime, and ultimately the family is left fatherless, he shared.

When asked about church life, Raymond was quick to mention that he is not an active member of
the church though he visits the local church occasionally. He also mentioned that he believes in God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit since they have enabled him to become a better man after imprisonment. Raymond also shared that his father’s absence as he grew up affected him emotionally since he was always angry and often kicked out of school due to violent behavior. Furthermore, he relates that his mother struggled to raise money for his education, and that is why he decided to sell drugs. When asked if he believes fatherhood is important, Raymond admitted that it is not the earthly father who is important but rather the heavenly one who looks over all His children. In his own words, Raymond shared another important point:

Fatherlessness may affect a child and the family in several ways. However, there are many examples of families who have made it despite father absence. This fact led me to conclude that it is not about the father or the mother since God is the only one who matters.

**Rachael: Single Mother**

This interview was conducted in person, with the researcher and interviewee sitting down face to face. Rachael related how she and her two siblings grew up fatherless; she was told that her father eloped with another lady. However, Rachael’s mother was quite hardworking, and she managed to pay all the school fees until all her children graduated from college. Getting pregnant while in college, Rachael and her boyfriend got married and had one more child, but her husband continued his campus habit of abusing drugs. Her husband got so lost in drugs that he used all his money on his drug habit and stopped contributing to the family financially. Fed up, Rachael filed for divorce and had not married since taking care of her kids alone. In her own words, Rachael relates her story:

It was hard growing up without a father; still, I do not remember anything about my dad, and I’m not sure if his being around would have made any difference since, in my view, I turned out all right. That is why when the man I married turned to drugs, I decided to leave him and raise my kids on my own. I know I’ll do a good job, and God will help me
raise perfect kids just as He helped me turn out okay despite the challenges of being fatherless.

When asked about church life, Rachael responded that she is an ardent Christian who attends church every Sunday together with her kids. She also believes in the Holy Trinity, especially God the Father since He was the one she trusted to help her raise her kids. Rachael was quick to mention that she does not believe that fatherlessness matters since she turned out all right despite being fatherless. She also said that she believes that the fact men do not want to take responsibility is the reason why fatherlessness is so prevalent in the world today.

**Andrew: Single Father**

In this online interview, Andrew shared that he owns a retail store where he works every day to raise money to pay his child’s fees. Andrew’s father died when he was young, so he never really knew him; father absence affected him greatly, lowering his self-esteem to the point that he always struggled to fit in with his peers. He engaged only briefly in drugs in high school as his mother quickly thwarted his destructive efforts. Andrew graduated from college, gained formal employment, but later quit to open his retail store. He met his wife while working in the store. They had one child, but sadly his wife succumbed to meningitis, and Andrew has tirelessly taken care of the child since then. With great emotion, Andrew made the following statement during the interview:

I’ve always felt afraid of being left alone and always found myself struggling to make new friends and fit into social groups. Later, I came to understand that these feelings were a consequence of fatherlessness, along with other negative behaviors I developed, including taking drugs. A positive outcome from my experience as a fatherless child is that I decided I would never think of leaving my future child without a father and have him struggle as I did.

When asked about church life, Andrew opened up and said that he is not a strong believer; his mother never really emphasized Christianity and church life. His mother only
emphasized the importance of being responsible, and that is how Andrew acquired his good morals. On the causes of fatherlessness, Andrew listed a few including drug use, divorce, imprisonment, and death. Further, he insisted that the father is an important part of the family and hence all fathers should do all it takes to ensure that they are always present in the lives of their family.

**Benjamin: Successful Businessman**

The interview with Benjamin was conducted online through Skype; it was a thought-provoking interview that revealed deep insights about the issue of fatherlessness. Benjamin’s life story proves interesting since he became a successful businessman despite his rough past.

Growing up fatherless affected Benjamin profoundly; the effects were great since his father left when Benjamin was just entering high school. Benjamin explained that his father often beat up his mother, an abusive relationship that ended in divorce. The effects of father absence meant Benjamin matured faster than others as he saw too much for his age; he experienced both domestic violence and divorce, too much for him to process. He spent his high school years focused on other things than education, including an early use of drugs. Benjamin became enmeshed with a group of high school dropouts who steered him into a life of petty crimes such as stealing to pay for drugs. Benjamin impregnated a girl when he was still in high school and became a teenage father.

Benjamin was caught shoplifting at a local retail store; after the arrest, he was found in possession of cocaine and was sent to a juvenile facility; just seventeen years old at the time of arrest, he served only one year in juvenile incarceration. Afterwards, Benjamin and his mother moved away from their neighborhood for several reasons: Benjamin’s mother struggled to pay rent after her divorce, and she wanted to remove her son from the negative influence of
undesirable friends. As such, they moved to his grandmother’s place, and Ben joined a new high school. A staunch Christian, Benjamin’s grandmother, insisted that he and his mother attend church every Sunday. Benjamin learned what was expected of him as a Christian, which transformed his life, he said. According to Benjamin, he swore to become a better man than was his father:

I believe all the trouble I got into while I was young was because of my father; I believe that, in a way, my young self was acting out due to the domestic violence I had experienced, and I had not come to terms with the fact that I was fatherless. While in “juvenile,” I learned about self-control; the Christian experience I gained while living at my grandmother also opened my eyes to the fact that I was meant for more. I learned that God is the ultimate father and we should always strive to please Him rather than seeking to please our selfish, earthly desires. From then on, I always endeavored to become a better man than my father was. Despite the struggles, I knew I could count on God as my heavenly Father; ever since, I’ve worked hard and counted on God, and everything is turning out all right.

Benjamin revealed that after graduating from college with a marketing degree, a renowned marketing firm hired him. During his work there, he began looking for his child and eventually married the girl he had impregnated as a teen. After five years of hard work, Benjamin had saved enough to start his first business venture, a fast food restaurant that he managed with his wife. When asked about the importance of fathers, Benjamin mentioned that it is imperative that the father takes responsibility for his family and always strive to be there for them.

**Samuel: Pastor at Local Church**

The interview with Samuel was conducted in person since he is a pastor with a flexible schedule. Samuel also grew up in a fatherless household; a single mother raised him alongside his two older sisters. Samuel’s mother was a strong Christian woman who always took them to church each Sunday. Samuel mentioned that he developed a passion for God’s Word when he was still young. However, he admits to having low-self-esteem as a young boy, and this made
him often isolate himself from social groups. One day he decided to join the Christian Union in high school, and instantly he felt that he fit right in. Samuel shared, “It was as if Christianity had filled the gap that had been left by father absence; I felt more confident when amidst fellow Christians and it was for this reason that I decided to pursue theology.”

When asked about the importance of fathers in the lives of family, Samuel was quick to quote the Bible, pointing to biblical teachings that place the father as head of the family and admonishing that, without a father’s guidance, the family is lost. Further, Samuel noted that the major cause of fatherlessness was divorce, which Christian teachings can address.

How Christians Can Help Solve Fatherlessness and Its Consequences

The issue of fatherlessness cannot be solved through legal means or action by society. From a legal perspective, divorce is allowed, and this contributes to fatherlessness. On the other hand, contemporary society holds the notion that the father is not necessary when a child is growing up. As a result, both legal means and social action are useless against the issue of fatherlessness. Consequently, only one option is available: the guidance of religion, namely Christianity. The Christian faith is the viable, practical tool to combat fatherlessness in the present generation. The following section details how people of faith can draw on Christianity to solve the issue of fatherlessness and its consequences. In addressing this issue, Christians should first look at the causes of fatherlessness and then find ways of solving each to improve father presence in the lives of families. As mentioned, the causes of fatherlessness include time-consuming jobs, divorce, out-of-wedlock births, drug use, incarceration, and death. To some extent, poverty also contributes to the rise of fatherlessness.
Busy Fathers

Christians can address the issue of time-consuming jobs leading to fatherlessness by diverting attention to God’s command to lead an orderly life. The Bible is clear about priorities and order in the lives of believers. Because the father’s influence in a child’s life proves so vital, proponents of God’s Word should use its direction to convince men that spending time with their children should take high priority. Various forces compete for time and attention in a man’s life, including responsibilities at work, projects at home, family, friends, and hobbies. However, with all these areas seeking attention, it is important for fathers to recognize that time management and right priorities create the difference in achieving healthy relationships with their children. Christianity makes it clear that God loves order and He, therefore, has set aside five priorities that men should use as a guide to lead fulfilling lives. These five biblical priorities are serving God, family, church, country and, finally, work. Service to God is the main priority that should be observed and followed by the family.53

Christianity encourages fathers to accept responsibility for safeguarding the family’s spiritual, physical, and emotional needs, especially as a man’s relationship with God is exemplified through his relationship with his wife and children. A father-child relationship is a model for God’s relationship with a man. Apostle Paul in his letter to Timothy states that if a man does not know how to care for his family, then he is in no position to take care of God’s church.54 Christianity, therefore, demonstrates that the most crucial way in which to show faith and piety is through providing care for the family. Part of a Christian’s service to God is found in


service to one’s children. Again, in the book of Proverbs, the Bible states that a good man trains his child in the right way he should go so that, in the end, the child will not depart from the father.55

In the 21st century, there is pressure for most working fathers to balance a successful career with finding time to be a loving dad. The current generation still cheers on men as the sole providers of the family even with the rise of breadwinning women. Men, therefore, must adjust their schedules so they can find time for both work and family. Fortunately, business owners and supervisors have recognized the need to pay more attention to work-family issues faced by men. With such knowledge, the issue of involved fathers has become more acceptable and can be quickly addressed in the workplace. At the workplace, employers can devise strategies to create more time for busy working fathers.56 In one example, a father leaves the house for work before the children wake up and come back after the children have fallen asleep. The employer of such a father can set aside a free morning for him so he can spend time over breakfast with his children before school. The employer can also give the busy father an opportunity to leave work early so he may pick up his children from school. When workplaces allow fathers time to spend with their children, they promote father presence in families’ lives. In this way, the Christian teachings of order, priorities, and family values are fulfilled.

Christianity also encourages the presence of fathers in the lives of children through the fourth commandment.57 For working fathers, maximum use of the Sabbath day creates time to connect with children. As head of the family, a father should generate a list of creative activities

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the family can engage in together. The night before the Sabbath is a good bonding time for the father with his family, and he can use this time to prepare for the next day. As part of this preparation, he could locate Scripture in the Bible with his children and use this time to guide and lead them in their relationship with God. Other activities on this night-before-Sabbath can include picking out what to wear, cleaning shoes, thus setting a strong example. This time could also be designated as the opportunity for all family members to be present so they can share stories of their lives as well as pray and worship God together over dinner.

On the Sabbath day, the father should make it clear that this is a “family day,” with parents and siblings taking part in fun activities and games after church. One valuable tradition includes dinner after church, prepared by all family members including the father and the children; the father should promote the spirit of engaging in activities together that build family relationships. Time after church can also include sharing family history in photos, storytelling, or even taking walks together. Therefore, the Christian faith, and the Sabbath day, in particular provides a way for fathers to set time aside to build family relationships; service to God is directly related to caring for one’s family. Overall, in the life of a busy father, prioritizing activities according to Christian values promotes the role of a father in his children’s lives.

**Divorce**

The leading cause of fatherlessness, divorce is directly related to religion, especially Christianity, which encourages the marriage institution. According to God’s plan, the safest place to bring up children is in a family bonded through the sanctity of marriage, where man and woman leave their parents, unite in the flesh to become one and bring forth children. God

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provides the perfect template for a happy family, which is love, honor, respect, and submission. Christians should endeavor to reinstate the institution of marriage through church programs such as pre-marriage classes as well as couples’ classes and training programs for the already married. As such, the rise of fatherlessness through the issue of divorce can be curtailed, and more stable families can result. Through God’s grace, couples can learn to forgive one another and foster communication with one another; God ordained marriage and, therefore, provides the reference point. As Scripture relates, divorce is not God’s heart; in fact, He makes it clear on many occasions that He hates divorce\textsuperscript{59}. According to the book of Malachi, God warns against divorce for He hates broken families\textsuperscript{60}. Christians are made in the image of God, and therefore, they should maintain the same mentality as God does, hating divorce as well. Christians are called to conform to God’s teaching and avoid accepting divorce as an option when a marriage seems difficult.

The Word of God according to Christians is the final authority in matters of divorce, especially because God promises to reprove any individual who leaves his or her partner with the motive of being with another person. Holding onto the reality that divorce breaks the heart of God should compel Christians to avoid treating the matter of divorce casually, as is so often seen in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. Christianity creates the foundation for the presence of a father in the life of a child because it affirms marriage as a lifetime commitment. The values in Christianity are based on having a personal relationship with God in which He is the head and authority in dating, courtship, and marriage. Men should be encouraged to seek the counsel of Scripture in their


relationships so that their marriage may be built on God’s guidance. In this way, Christians will help reduce divorce and, in turn, fatherlessness.

Overall, when Christians uphold God’s perspective on marriage, they help prevent divorce and fatherlessness. God’s perspective is that marriage is a holy covenant, which lasts until death. Problems in marriage may arise; however, dealing with these problems in a godly way prevents divorce. Such problems are rooted in the hardness of the heart, as stated in the book of Matthew, through the lack of submission and respect in marriage. At first, it may seem better to run away from problems in marriage by starting over with a new partner. However, past mistakes catch up, and divorce recurs. Christianity pronounces that marriage reflects one’s relationship with God, and therefore, all Christians should pursue a stable marriage; it exemplifies a genuine relationship with God. Indeed, stable marriages can bring wholeness to a fatherless generation and allow children with strong fathers to flourish.

**Out-of-Wedlock Births**

Today, many teens and young people are having kids before marriage; in most cases, the father renounces any commitment to help care for the child and then abandons the family. Christians can address fatherlessness resulting from out-of-wedlock births by emphasizing the importance of abstinence before marriage. Also, they can emphasize the role of the marriage institution as one built for the well-being of the child. The purpose of marriage according to God is to provide a union of fellowship and worship, leading one another to a deeper relationship with God and procreating so that the world may be filled. The function of marriage is, therefore, to serve God while taking care of both the spouse and children in a lifelong commitment.

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The Scriptures are rich in knowledge on this subject of married couples. According to the book of Ephesians\textsuperscript{62}, the secret to a marriage lasting for life lies in husbands loving their wives just as Christ loves the church. This verse encourages men to be patient with their wives, love unconditionally, and provide spiritual guidance. Christian families are guided to look up to the father as the authority and priest of the home, who leads his wife and children through prayer and studying of Scripture. Prayer binds a family; a family that prays together, stays together\textsuperscript{63}. Biblical texts address men specifically, giving men no chance to run away from the responsibility of rearing their children. By emphasizing this point, Christians can help prevent men from leaving the family even if the child is born out of wedlock.

**Drug Use as a Cause of Fatherlessness**

A father enslaved by the habitual use of stimulants, narcotics, or mind-dependent drugs puts his family at risk. In the book of Ephesians, Christians are advised to be filled with the Holy Spirit instead of getting drunk on wine because it leads one to debauchery\textsuperscript{64}. According to Scripture, Paul makes it clear to the Corinthians that God gives free will, allowing people to choose what to indulge in, and that all things are permissible; however, not everything is beneficial, and therefore he claims that nothing besides faith in Christ would master him. Christians should teach addicted fathers using Paul as a reference point.

Fathers enslaved in drug use can gain freedom by God’s Word enlightening their hearts; the book of Galatians states that Jesus holds the solution for all problems that enslave His people. Christianity makes it clear that God is against substance use; habitual use of a mind-controlling

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 897.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 898.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 896.
substance is not pleasing to God. He deliberately liberates one from slavery and then gives one the fruit of the Holy Spirit, known as self-control. Having the fruit of self-control enables Christians, including fathers, to resist the temptation to indulge in mind-altering drugs because they understand that it diverts their attention from their family, it is against the law, and above all, it does not please God.

Christianity can curtail drug abuse and, in turn, provide a solution to fathers addicted to drug use. Christianity can be categorized in three dimensions that determine the behavior of an individual: involvement in a place of worship, prescriptiveness, and a realization of the importance of church activities. Christians can leverage their faith as a protective factor against drug use, thus posing a positive outcome on fatherhood. Fathers should be involved in church activities, and in turn, be influenced by other church members. Through in-reach ministries, churches should seek to support and counsel fathers on the disadvantages of substance abuse. They can set up visits to fathers who are known to have symptoms of emotional, physical, and mental addiction and give counsel, leading them to salvation and helping to solve the issue of fatherlessness ignited by drug abuse. Classes and ministries like these can teach fathers how to experience a more significant commitment to God and thus divert their attention from addiction to God’s salvation. The father will then be able to become active in the lives of his children and family.

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Incarceration as a Cause of Fatherlessness

Christianity is the measure that can be used to curb the rise of fatherlessness through incarceration in two significant ways: establish a prevention program for fathers not yet behind bars, and offer intervention to fathers already serving time in prison.

For fathers who have already committed criminal acts, Christian intervention programs prove most effective. For prison inmates, Christians can create fatherhood groups that bring the incarcerated together with biblical guidance, encouraging them to walk together in salvation and keep in contact with their families, thus maintaining a strong family bond even while in prison. Fathers in prison should undergo rehabilitation and also receive regular visits from their children so that when released, they may be motivated to avoid crime. Members of the prison ministry can set up programs in which inmates are taught and trained how to raise their children even while in prison and so strengthen the father-child bond. The ministry should also insist that fathers be on their best behavior so their visiting rights are not taken away.

From a Christian perspective, fathers behind bars should be led to understand that God desires a close relationship with prisoners who are believers. Sin resides in human nature; however, prisoners receive forgiveness once they repent, regardless of their crime. Fathers in prisons should be trained on how to allow God to take control of their lives because, through salvation, one becomes a new creature as mentioned in the book of 2nd Corinthians\textsuperscript{67}. Scripture also teaches that all men have fallen short of the glory of God because they have sinned; no one is, therefore, able to judge another because everyone receives salvation through the death of Christ on the cross. It is through this knowledge that Christians are advised to keep in close contact with those in prison. Imprisoned fathers may be the least in society, but the book of

\[\text{67 Drobner, Holy Bible New International Version, 537.}\]
Mathew prioritizes prisons as a place of reform and a place that, when utilized, can lead to a connection with God. More churches should involve themselves in prison ministry and provide a special platform for fathers released from prison for follow-up. In doing so, fathers behind bars will connect with God and their family and maintain that bond after serving their term.

Death as a Cause of Fatherlessness

In the event of a father’s death, Christians are expected to take care of the orphans and widows and lead them to look up to God as their Father; in this way, Christianity holds the solution for fatherlessness. Scripture shows that God is very specific when it comes to how the church should treat orphans and widows. The psalmist says that God protects the fatherless because He is a father to the fatherless and He defends them. God also commands others to take care of them. In the Old Testament, those in the Exodus who failed to treat the widows and orphans with kindness were to receive harsh consequences.

Churches are needed to make a difference in the lives of the fatherless. Churches are first to welcome them and make them feel part of a more significant social group so that orphans and widows are not sidelined in the community. Congregations should treat the fatherless as blessings, not burdens so that they may find love, acceptance, and healing. Christian ministries can also combine efforts with children’s homes, where they can fellowship together on specific days of the week.

Also, Christianity can solve the issue of fatherlessness caused by death by mentoring fatherless children intentionally. In the book of 2nd Timothy, Christians are advised to become the elder siblings, mentors, and accountability partners of the fatherless in their walk of faith.

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69 Ibid., 645.
The congregation should seek to become role models to these children. Simply providing financial support is not enough; they need a guidance system instead. The children should receive the same encouragement as the words from the book of Ephesians suggest: those who are born again are confirmed as adopted sons and daughters of a spiritual family.

Another way to confront fatherlessness head-on is simply to adopt the fatherless. Christian families who cannot naturally conceive can proactively adopt these children instead of using expensive measures such as medical procedures. Others can grow their families through adopting older children. Churches should ensure that the orphans are connected to a family of born-again believers in a whole nuclear family. In addition to encouraging adoption, Christian churches can provide a refuge for the fatherless by providing family counseling through a family ministry.

**Poverty as a Cause of Fatherlessness**

Poverty leads fathers to crime as a way to provide for their families; the father ultimately lands in jail, however, leaving his family fatherless. Poverty may also lead the father to drug use as a way of escaping the hardships that accompany poverty. The father ends up getting lost in drug use and emotionally abandons his family. Poverty also causes hardships in a marriage and, in turn, divorce may happen, leaving the family fatherless. Christians, therefore, need to address poverty as a contributory factor to fatherlessness.

Christians can intervene to reduce the cases of fatherlessness due to poverty by providing financial support to families, especially the children. Another way in which Christians can lessen the poverty rate among the fatherless is to offer the father job opportunities so he may earn

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enough to maintain his family. For instance, Christian churches can establish their vocational training programs or help enroll fathers in area programs where fathers can learn skills to generate finances.\footnote{71}{Gregory Lamb, "Fatherlessness: The Implications for God’s Word, Church ..." (Accessed September 27, 2017), 6.}

All these causes of fatherlessness are tied to the fact that people in contemporary society have gained great autonomy from societal limits, from the state as well as from religion. As a result, fathers can leave their families without feeling guilty. Mothers, on the other hand, have become enlightened to the reality that they can raise a child without the father's input; this has led to a rise in female-initiated divorces. Christians should, therefore, focus energy to reinstate the principles of Christianity in people’s lives. Biblical teachings govern Christians, and sincere believers embrace these teachings. If the tenets of Christianity are reinstated in society, the culture of fatherlessness is bound to come to an end.

Christianity and the Consequences of Fatherlessness

In addition to increasing father presence in families across the nation, Christians should also play a role in helping reduce the consequences of fatherlessness in society. Fatherlessness leads to increased crime within society and increased drug use among youth. Fatherless youth are also highly likely to engage in early sex, which leads to teenage pregnancies. Father-absent families, on the other hand, experience poverty since only the mother is available to provide for the family. The following section explains how Christianity can be used to solve the consequences of fatherlessness such as crime, drug abuse, poverty, and teenage pregnancy.
Crime

Fatherless children are highly likely to engage in crime; however, Christians can play a positive role in reducing the likelihood of these children turning to crime. After conducting extensive research, a group of psychologists concluded that Christianity leads people to become law-abiding citizens. Since a person’s behavior is mainly controlled by his or her belief system, Christianity can play a role in preventing crime based on the theory of cognitive dissonance. When people struggle to maintain a consistent match between their belief and behavior, cognitive dissonance arises, leading one to instability; striving to regain internal satisfaction, people endeavor to regain a balance between their behaviors and beliefs.

When people learn Christian principles, they internalize the Bible’s emphasis on avoiding crime and instead divert their effort to acts of kindness, generosity, love, truthfulness, charity, hospitality, and self-control. In the New Testament, Jesus summarizes the Ten Commandments into two important precepts: love for God and love for one’s neighbor. When the commandments in Christianity convict a person’s sinful nature, psychologists refer to this as cognitive dissonance, which encourages Christians to be law-abiding citizens. To avoid a guilty conscience and live out their faith, Christians wrestle with their sin nature to follow Christ’s commandments and ensure consistency between their behavior and beliefs. The Bible, therefore, provides a positive influence, a preventive measure in reducing crime and thus the travails of fatherlessness to some degree.

Another way Christianity prevents and controls the crime rate and thus reduces fatherlessness is based on the discovery of “ultimate surveillance.” Christians should strengthen

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73 Ibid., 832.
ministries that reach out to unbelievers, so they may realize their need for a higher power in gaining self-control. When a person believes that he or she is constantly seen, when a person understands that God is watching at all hours, one tends to reduce indulgence in bad behavior. The research is confirmed through an experiment with children who were to play a game that required cheating to win. The children had to play the game while watched by an adult or while convinced of an invisible being’s presence in the room. Before playing, the children were reassured of the presence of an invisible person constantly watching them, and they were then asked whether they believed they were being watched. The results showed that out of the eleven children who believed they were being watched, only one child cheated in the game. Seven children did not believe in the presence of an invisible being and, out of that number, only two did not cheat in the game. The experiment showed that belief in a watching supreme being restrains one from engaging in the evil behavior.

Christians believe that they are under constant, ultimate surveillance because God is omnipresent. Scripture makes it clear in the book of Hebrews, which teaches that all creatures are naked before His eyes and no one is hidden from Him; therefore, Christians should teach the fatherless to be careful in their actions because they must render an account to God. Churches should insist on teaching believers to follow the commandments because it pleases God and, in turn, leads to lower crime rates. Church leaders should also focus more attention on fathers because they are the leaders of homes and their behavior directly affects that of their children. Religious leaders should also set up ministries and evangelistic teams whose main work is to

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reach out to fathers who are not yet born again. Through such ministries, fathers are led to salvation and engagement in social groups that uphold the role of a father in child development.

**Drug Abuse**

As mentioned, children in father-absent families are more likely than those in intact families to indulge in drug use. Drug abuse can be reduced, and future addiction circumvented through a young person’s interaction with peers of good influence, provided through involvement in relevant, engaging youth ministry programs. Christianity seeks to set free those caught in the chains of drug abuse because salvation brings freedom. Most people believe that Scripture says nothing about drug use; however, the young and fatherless should be warned against using substances that compromise the normal functioning of the body. According to the National Centre on Addiction and Substance Abuse, people who believe in the importance of religion including Christianity are found to have lower chances of abusing drugs. Christians should create programmatic platforms in a church that guide young men on how substance abuse is related to fatherlessness.

For young people to avoid drug use, Christians should first teach them the main reasons why God forbids drug abuse. First, drug abuse is illegal; most states consider any drug taken without a prescription from a doctor as drug abuse or drug misuse. Disobedience to civil law is also a sin against God. In the book of Romans, Christians are advised to obey the authority because God ordains leaders. Going against the rules of law is, in turn, resistance to God’s ordinance. Those who disobey civil law will not only be punished by authorities, but they also destroy their conscience to their Creator. Fatherless children should be taught that, whatever a

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state terms illegal, God considers sinful as well. Another reason Christianity should guide the fatherless to avoid drug abuse is that it causes intoxication, thus taking control of one’s mind. Scripture rebukes intoxication in the book of Romans; Christians are advised not to walk in drunkenness but instead to walk properly with the Lord. Intoxication is a violation of God’s Word, which is why the book of Galatians advises church members to discipline those who are guilty of drunkenness.\(^{77}\)

Christianity can help reduce drug abuse due to fatherlessness through teaching the fatherless how drugs take away one’s ability to think properly and often to distinguish right from wrong. God calls Christians to self-control and sobriety so they may be on the watch for the devil. Christianity emphasizes avoiding anything that tends to control because it diverts attention from the love of God. Drugs make one vulnerable to sin and confuse a person’s thoughts, making one prey to temptation. Christianity promotes the fact that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and should, therefore, be used to advance His will on earth. Being high on drugs means one loses control and cannot be on the watch for the devil. Christianity refers to drug abuse as being more of a sin problem than an addiction problem.

A person’s Christian values are seen and solidified when he or she is tested, choosing resilience in tempting situations and obedience to God. Through training programs, Christians should teach the fatherless and the unmarried how to resist the temptations to engage in drug abuse even before they become parents themselves. In doing so, Christianity can curb the problem of drug abuse among youth and, in turn, the rate of fatherlessness across America.

Teenage Pregnancy

The cases of teenage pregnancy among fatherless girls are rising because these girls are readily engaging in early sexual practices and thus creating more fatherlessness children. Christians can deter the consequences of this behavior in two ways. First, they can make a youth group available at their church where young girls are enrolled. In such a church, youth pastors should emphasize why God loves purity and why God forbids fornication and adultery; they should stress the value of abstinence and collaborate with schools, even taking part in the sex education classes. Next, churches can set up monthly, quarterly, and annual seminars and camps where young girls are already engaging in early sexual behavior can be taught to regain their purity and practice secondary virginity. The objectives behind these settings are not to judge and intimidate young girls but to call them back to a relationship with Christ.

Poverty

The church can address poverty due to fatherlessness through various ways. First, they can hold a forum where every Sunday money is contributed to help the widowed and the orphans dwelling in poverty. The Christian’s responsibility, according to the Bible’s teachings, includes taking care of the children and the widowed. In doing so, the church will mitigate the effects of poverty exacerbated through fatherlessness. The church can also give widowed women and orphaned children a job in the church facility; the person then receives remuneration for work done, and in this way, poverty is reduced. Finally, the church can encourage women and empower them to gain practical skills, biblical financial aptitude, and time management strength to make ends meet for their family. For instance, the church can organize entrepreneurship classes for women, educating them on more ways to increase their revenue.
Church Attendance

Reduced church attendance is another consequence of fatherlessness; without the father as spiritual head of the family, the family loses a role-model for Christian living, and church attendance can suffer. Christians can effectively address this issue by initiating door-to-door ministries that reach out to families who do not attend church. This ministry’s central focus, educating and encouraging families to come back to church, can help bring more fatherless children into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.
Chapter Three: Results and Methods Used

Methodology

An adequate approach is required to answer the research questions and meet the objectives of the dissertation. The literature review method is the primary process used for obtaining data critical to solving the research questions. To this end, various published papers regarding the issue of fatherlessness and its consequences were analyzed, and papers detailing the role of Christianity regarding the point of fatherlessness were examined. Therefore, data obtained from the literature review are grouped according to themes identified: marriage and divorce, drug use, poverty, crime, sexual promiscuity, and the idea that the father is unnecessary. Each theme is discussed under a separate subheading to show how it relates to the issue of fatherlessness and Christianity.

The dissertation also uses a case study to perform an in-depth examination of the issue of fatherlessness in the African-American community. A few prominent members of the African-American community were chosen and analyzed to determine how fatherlessness affected them when growing up. Following this, the role of Christianity in the subjects’ success in life was examined. Five not-so-prominent African Americans were also interviewed to help gain insight into fatherlessness, its implications, and how people can cope with its consequences. The interview aimed to provide data to support the study on fatherlessness. The interview qualifies as a qualitative method as it aids in obtaining information through hearing, seeing, and understanding. The interview aimed at achieving information, not dealing specifically with numbers but with ideas and experiences. The data was collected via five individual interviews since each chosen person was interviewed separately. To accommodate their busy schedules and
time constraints, two people were interviewed online, another two were interviewed face to face, and the fifth was interviewed through a phone call.

The interview questions were designed to gather information that would enable the answering of the research question. For instance, some questions were seeking to establish if the interviewee had ever been incarcerated, others sought to elicit the challenges the individual faced due to fatherlessness, and another aimed to determine how the person was able to cope with being fatherless. The questions were open-ended, allowing the interviewee to share as much information as possible; in this way, all the information needed to answer the research questions was obtained. The same sets of questions were used for each interview; this made it easy to compare the answers and determine common themes. Table 1 in the appendices provides the interview questions.

The advantage of using a case study as a research method is its ability to give the researcher a better understanding of complex issues. Also, this type of research adds depth and breadth of knowledge about the effects of the issue, enabling the application of new findings to solve contemporary real-life situations. Case studies can achieve results since they emphasize an in-depth contextual evaluation of a specific issue. As such, this type of research has been used by researchers in different disciplines for many years. Seeking to explore fatherlessness in the African-American community, this dissertation efficiently uses case studies to meet the objectives of the research.

Critics of the case study believe it is ineffective to rely on findings from a limited number of cases. The critics believe that research data should be obtained from a wide variety of sources to establish reliability and generality of the results. The study of a limited number of cases cannot ensure reliability and universality of the findings, these critics attest. Besides, over-
reliance on one source of information may result in biased findings; as such, critics have dismissed the case study as an exploratory tool. Nonetheless, many researchers continue to use case studies as a research method with success. Because these researchers emphasize that the practical case study requires careful planning, the case study here was strategically planned and orchestrated; subjects were chosen carefully on the basis that they are African American and had experienced fatherlessness.

Outcomes Being Measured

The dissertation sought data that pointed toward the issue of fatherlessness in the African-American community and its relationship to the positive role of Christianity. As such, the outcomes being measured included the rate of fatherlessness in this community, the causes of fatherlessness, the consequences of fatherlessness, the role of Christianity in reducing fatherlessness, and the role of Christians in mitigating the effects of fatherlessness. The outcome measure “rate of fatherlessness” helps determine the extent of this issue in society. On the other hand, the outcome measure “causes of fatherlessness” helps establish the reasons for the increased rate of fatherlessness today.

The outcome measure “consequences of fatherlessness” helps determine the results from the increased rate of fatherlessness. Further, the outcome measure “role of Christianity in reducing fatherlessness” helps in the identification of ways that Christians can help reduce the issue and therefore increase father presence in the lives of their families. Finally, the measure of “role of Christians in mitigating the effects of fatherlessness” helps determine what members of the Christian community can do to reduce the consequences of fatherlessness in society.
Research Design

The research embraces a qualitative research design because the data collected was of qualitative nature, and this design is needed to enable adequate evaluation of the data collected. An advantage of the qualitative model is that it is exploratory; it is used when the researcher wants to gain understanding about a particular issue. The dissertation sought to understand the issue of fatherlessness among the African-American community and its relationship to the positive role of Christianity. The research was therefore exploratory, and a qualitative research design was the best fit for the dissertation.

Procedures

The procedure used in this dissertation is quite simple. First, literature containing information regarding the issue of fatherlessness was identified. The literature was then examined and the results outlined in the literature review section of the paper. Following this, prominent African Americans who have grown up in father-absent families were identified and researched, with the results outlined in the dissertation’s literature review section. Finally, literature regarding the positive role of Christianity in the issue of fatherlessness was identified and analyzed, with outcomes reported in the dissertation’s literature review section. The outcomes as recorded in the literature review section were further examined in the results section of the thesis to establish a link between the issue of fatherlessness and the positive role of Christianity.

Data Analysis Methods

Data collected was analyzed in the results section using different methods to enhance the clarity of the data. For instance, the graph method was used to examine data regarding the rates of fatherlessness in different communities. Graphs were also used to show the rates of poverty,
crime, and drug use among African Americans. Graphs were chosen since they are easy to use and develop. Further, graphs visually present raw numerical data, so they facilitate the understanding of the data. Some readers may have difficulty understanding numerical data presented in a raw manner.

Tables were also used to facilitate the comprehension of the data obtained from the literature review and the case studies. The themes identified from the literature review were grouped using a table. Each theme was explained briefly in the table to enable the reader to understand how it relates to the issue of fatherlessness and Christianity. Finally, the data obtained were analyzed using a discussion in which the noteworthy points were explained individually. The points were explained using simple language to enhance clarity, enabling the reader to grasp the message behind the data.

Results

The literature reviews, as well as the case studies, were useful since they revealed much about the issue of fatherlessness among African Americans. The major revelation was that fatherlessness has existed in society for many millennia. Scripture provides many examples of fatherless families in the Bible; plus, folk tales of fatherlessness abound. However, the rate of fatherlessness in earlier times was not as predominant as it is in contemporary society. The issue seems to affect African Americans more than any other community according to statistics by various researchers. Also, both the literature as well as the case studies reveal some unique insights about the positive role Christianity can play in reducing fatherlessness. The results focus on some of the issues surrounding fatherlessness, including crime, drug use, poverty, and early pregnancies. Fatherlessness is also linked to high rates of divorce in contemporary African-American communities and the decreased rate of church attendance. Christians are key to the
issue as they can help increase father presence in the lives of families. Christians can help mitigate the consequences of fatherlessness, which have taken over contemporary African-American society. The following chapter comprises the results of the study.

**Trend of Fatherlessness Among African Americans**

A literature review revealed that the rate of fatherlessness in society and especially among African Americans is alarming. A 2016 survey by Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, confirms that the rate of fatherlessness in society is on an upward trend. The survey reveals that the number of fatherless children in America has tripled since 1980. Another 2005 survey by the U.S. Census Bureau of Statistics shows that the number of fatherless children in America stood at 19 million. The same bureau conducted another survey in 2010, and it was established that 24 million children were living in father-absent families; this was a 20 percent increase in the number of fatherless children in just five years.

More important was the revelation that out of the 24 million children living in father-absent families, 56 percent are African Americans. These African-American children live either with their mother or a relative such as a grandparent since both parents are missing. The statistics alone show how deep the issue of fatherlessness goes; in America alone, there are millions of fatherless children, and the majority of these are African American. The rate of fatherlessness among African Americans is alarming in that it is on an upward trend and little is being done to curtail it. If the issue goes unaddressed, more children will grow up in father-absent households, and this is bound to bring grave consequences to society. The following graph shows the trend of fatherlessness among blacks and whites in America since 1960.
Figure 3: Single-mother Households (Black and White Americans) 1960-1996 (Source: http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre2000060200)

The graph below shows the rate of fatherlessness on a line graph; looking closely, one will notice that the number of fatherless children has been increasing over the years.
Figure 4: Percentage Increase in Number of Fatherless Children

**The Causes of Fatherlessness**

It was established through the literature review that fatherlessness results from different causes. For instance, the physical absence and emotional absence of the father result from different circumstances. Physically absent fathers are not present in the lives of their children due to causes such as death, incarceration, or abandonment. On the other hand, emotionally absent fathers are physically present in the lives of the family but cannot provide for them emotionally. Examples of emotionally absent fathers include fathers in a busy job and fathers lost in drug use. The following section describes each of the causes in detail, showing how each contributes to fatherlessness.

The economy of modern society leads people to work more hours to make ends meet for the family. The effect of these current economic demands is especially felt by people living below the poverty line; as it turns out, most of these people are from the African-American community. Often in low-wage jobs, African-American fathers must work long hours to provide
for their family; the result has been a type of father known as the busy father. This father is physically present in his family but spends most of his time at work. Thus, he is rarely available to support his children emotionally. The child, therefore, leads a life as if he or she were fatherless. Incarceration, another cause of fatherlessness, looms significant as more and more black fathers are incarcerated annually. When in jail, the father cannot attend to the needs of his family, and his children grow up fatherless. Fathers lost in an alcoholic fog are also contributors to fatherlessness; such fathers are unable to provide for their children emotionally.

Divorce usually results from factors such as domestic violence or when the father’s drug use reaches the point that the wife cannot tolerate him in the house any longer. Domestic violence leads to female-initiated divorce, and the kids often suffer the most. The kids must grow up without their father. The figure below shows the decrease in marriage institutions since 1930.

Figure 5: Decline in Christian Marriage Institutions 1929-2010 (Source: U.S. Government, U.S. Census Bureau, and National Centre for Health Statistics, 2012)
Still another cause of fatherlessness is out-of-wedlock births; people who engage in premarital sex might end up conceiving a child. In most cases, couples are not looking for marriage, and the father ends up leaving the woman and the child. In other cases, the parents are very young and therefore unable to raise a child. The father ends up abandoning his children while the young mother must rely on her parents to help build into them. As a result, children grow up in a fatherless household. The mother might get married to another guy who becomes a stepfather; nonetheless, stepfathers often cannot fill the shoes of the child’s biological father.

Figure 6: Percentage of Children Born Out of Wedlock (Source: U.S. Government, U.S. Census Bureau, and National Centre for Health Statistics, 2012)

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The line graph above shows that out-of-wedlock births have increased profoundly since 1930, resulting in a culture of fatherlessness. According to the chart, the African-American community is most affected.

All the above causes of fatherlessness are tied to one factor: people in modern society have gained much autonomy, giving them freedom from the state, from religion, as well as from societal expectations. Previously, fatherlessness was mostly caused by the death of the father since fathers did not typically abandon their family. During these times, fatherhood was governed through different means such as religion and society; cultural and societal expectations kept fathers connected to their family to protect and provide for them. Nowadays, men in contemporary society have gained much autonomy, giving them freedom from religion and cultural expectations. As a result, fathers can abandon their families without feeling guilty. Independence for women has also enlightened them, empowering them to take care of their children without necessarily depending on the father. As a result, more women are opting to raise their children on their own, creating an environment of fatherlessness.

The Effects of Fatherlessness

The effects of fatherlessness can be observed everywhere in society. Most people assume that the father does not play any role in the child’s development or the life of his family. This notion has been countered by research, which has linked fatherlessness to consequences such as increased poverty, crime, and drug use in father-absent families. According to the literature review, fatherlessness is the engine driving these social problems. In his book *Fatherless America*, Blankenhorn recognizes the fact that fatherlessness has resulted in increased adolescent pregnancies, drug use, and domestic violence against women. Statistics have also proven Blankenhorn’s statements true. For instance, more than 50 percent of prisoners come from
broken families headed by the mother or where both parents are absent. This revelation has led sociologists to reconsider their previous assumptions that crime was brought about by other factors such as race and poverty\textsuperscript{2}. It is now evident that fatherlessness contributes to the rise in crime being experienced today. The graph below shows that more than half the people in prison come from families without a father figure.

Figure 7: Percentage of Inmates from Father-Absent Families (Source: Mumola & Karberg, 2007)

The graph above shows that crime rates have been rising over the last few decades; the African-American community has the highest rates of crime when compared to whites and Latinos.

Teenagers today, especially in African-American communities, are engaging more in drug use and promiscuous sexual activity, which often leads to depression and other psychological issues. All these can be traced back to the absence of a father figure in their lives; for instance, without a father, children engage in sex much earlier. The U.S. Department of Health released a report showing that more than 71% of teenage mothers live in father-absent
families. As a result, it was confirmed that fatherless children are more likely to experience adolescent pregnancy.

Further, researcher Deane Berman has proven that teenagers with little or no relationship with their fathers are 68% more likely to abuse alcohol early. This theory by Berman is supported by statistics, which show that 75 percent of adolescents in drug rehabilitation centers come from father-absent families. Also, 85 percent of youth in prison due to drug-related charges are also from fatherless homes. These statistics, therefore, drive the point home that teens in father-absent households are at significant risk of engaging in drug use. Further, youth in father-absent families are at higher risk of going to prison. Youth who do not have a father in their lives experience very high odds of incarceration. These odds are even higher if the child previously had an incarcerated family member. In 2002, the U.S. Department of Justice released a report showing that 39 percent of jailed youth come from mother-only households.

Another dangerous effect of fatherlessness is experienced in the child’s education; according to book The Vital Importance of Paternal Presence in Children’s Lives, 70 percent of school dropouts are fatherless. Social workers and school counselors confirm that the lack of a father affects most of the kids and it often reflects in their academic performance, the book attests. Also, children without fathers are more likely to repeat grades when compared to children with involved fathers. Furthermore, children with involved fathers often get A’s in school. As such, it is evident that the academics of children are affected by father presence. The following graph shows the rate of school drop-out in fatherless families and married-couple families.


5 Ibid.
Poverty also results from fatherlessness; statistics show that fatherless families are America’s single most significant contributor to poverty. The figure below shows the average household income by marital status.
Families headed by the mother experience poverty since the mother is unable to gather enough resources on her own. The mother lacks time to take care of the children and invest time in a well-paying job. While marriage is not the solution to poverty, it surely is a preventative way to remedy the single parent dilemma. The couple can combine resources, and they will experience better economic outcomes. The graph below shows that marriage reduces poverty for different communities.

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Figure 11: Poverty Levels in Married and Non-Married Families\(^7\)

As a side note, poverty is tied to other consequences such as poor academic performance. Children might miss school if their mother is working and unable to ensure they attend classes; the mother may not have time to assist with homework or encourage academic success, and a lack of money for school fees and necessities might also play a role. Most of these children end up dropping out of college because finances are inadequate to pay for education and other basic needs. Other consequences of fatherlessness include increased cases of divorce and decreased church attendance. Children raised in father-absent families are highly likely to experience divorce in the future when they start a family for themselves. The child will have grown

accustomed to the reality of families breaking up; as a result, they may quickly walk away from family responsibilities since their family of origin was also broken⁸. Furthermore, Christians who consider fathers the religious leaders of the family understand that with the father absent from his family, children lack a key religious leader, and as a result, they may not participate in religious activities such as going to church. The figure below provides proof of the decline of religion and faith attendance by youth due to fatherlessness.

Figure 12: Church Attendance in Intact and Divorced Families⁹

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Case Studies

Prominent African Americans

The case studies contributed significantly to the idea that Christianity can help reduce the consequences of fatherlessness. To begin, Ben Carson had a problematic childhood since he lacked a father figure. He and his family lived in poverty; the only house they could afford was a rugged apartment with rats. Anger issues burdening Carson began to steer him toward crime. However, through his mother’s efforts, he landed on the path of Christianity; he began reading the Bible and discovered how his Christian faith could create a strong foundation for his life. Christian teachings instilled him with discipline, which led him to become one of the most successful, if not the most successful, a neurosurgeon in the world.

Oprah Winfrey was also raised in a father-absent family; born to a teenaged single mother, she endured a life of poverty and other hardships including sexual abuse, which pushed her into depression and thoughts of suicide. However, when left with her grandmother, she developed a love for spiritual nourishment, which has guided her life ever since. She looked past the hardships she experienced and dedicated her life to helping others through self-improvement initiatives. Therefore, the Christian values she gained while living with her grandmother helped her achieve success to become one of the richest and most influential women in America.

Barack Obama also credits Christianity as a tremendous contributor to his success. Although he did not experience poverty in his fatherless family, he admits suffering psychological distress with no father-figure role model to build into his character. However, his mother and grandmother guided him and always encouraged him, and his mother took him to church each Sunday. Barack modeled his personality according to the teachings of Jesus; he is humble and focuses on serving the people, which has helped him achieve success.
LeBron James scores as another African American who has broken through the challenges of a father-absent upbringing to attain success. LeBron was born in poverty to a teenage mother who struggled to provide for him, yet she taught him the Christian virtues of love and care. James has carried these teachings throughout his life, and as a result, has shown great gratitude throughout his success. The charitable donations he makes to single mothers and their children exemplifies his virtues, and he continually attributes his success to God.

The mother of Mary J. Blige, on the other hand, was a drug addict who impacted her daughter so negatively that Blige started doing drugs herself. Thankfully, Blige turned away from a life of drugs and was born again. While singing at church, she discovered she had the gift of extraordinary vocal strength and beauty; through her songs, she encourages young men and women to live faithful to Christian teachings. Blige always attributes her success to God, who helped her during her struggles and gave her the incredible voice she used to attain success.

**Non-prominent African Americans**

These case studies revealed several themes about the issue of fatherlessness and the role of Christianity. The interviews revealed several themes including those of divorce, drug abuse, incarceration, and early pregnancy. The theme of church attendance was also identified following the interview. It was established that father absence has grave consequences on the family as well as the child. Families in which the father was absent struggled to achieve financial stability; for instance, Benjamin’s mother had to move since she could no longer afford to pay fees. Raymond, on the other hand, turned to selling drugs in an attempt to raise money for basic finances. Crime and drug use were the other consequences of fatherlessness; Raymond and Benjamin both turned to drugs at some point in their life due to lack of father figures. Incarceration was the other theme, and Raymond and Benjamin, both previously incarcerated,
stated that they believe the lack of a father growing up was the reason they had turned to crime and ultimately were incarcerated.

Some of the participants including Rachael and Raymond said they did not believe the father was important in family life; this revealed a deeply rooted problem in which people have embraced the idea that the father is unimportant. Nonetheless, these two mentioned that it is important that families look to God as the ultimate father to lead a good life. As such, they highlighted the importance of Christianity in helping families cope with fatherlessness. All the interviewees mentioned that God and Christian teachings were the reason they were able to cope with fatherlessness. However, there was the case of Andrew, who confessed that he was not a strong believer because he had never really been taught about Christianity. Andrew revealed one of the other effects of fatherlessness: the decrease in church attendance and belief in God.

Evidence of How Christians Can Help

These case studies on prominent and non-prominent African-American figures raised in father-absent families show that Christianity can, indeed, help reduce the consequences of fatherlessness. The review of different published works also supports the evidence from the case studies. Literature review points toward some of the strategies that Christians can apply to help increase father presence in the lives of the family and also to reduce the consequences of fatherlessness. Christians should first address the causes of fatherlessness to increase father presence in children’s lives. Thus, Christians can then look for ways to mitigate the consequences that fatherlessness has had on society.

The leading cause of fatherlessness as identified in the literature review is the reality that people have gained much autonomy apart from religion; this has allowed for consequences such as divorce, teenage pregnancies, drug use, and crime, all which contribute to father absence in
children’s lives. Christian teachings rebuff these consequences and encourage Christians to help turn the tide of fatherless homes; however, with escalating autonomy and freedom from religion in today’s culture, fathers no longer feel guilty leaving their family and turning to crime and drug use. Christians should first teach people the importance of faith and that autonomy from religious teachings have led to negative cultural consequences. It is therefore imperative that fathers respect the teachings of Christianity and not abandon their family.

Christians should first address the issue of divorce to increase father presence in the lives of children. Marriage has its core in Christian teachings, which state that the institution is sacred and should be honored until death. Christians should, therefore, endeavor to strengthen the institution of marriage and thus increase father presence in children’s lives. In addition to divorce, out-of-wedlock births have also led to father absence; Christians can address these by teaching that it is wrong to engage in sex before marriage since God unites people in a marriage to create a picture of the Church as they raise their children together. Also, Christians can educate men about the importance of being present in the lives of children; in this way, more men will be present in their children’s lives, even if born out of wedlock.

Time-consuming jobs, incarceration, and drug use also lead to emotionally absent fathers; Christians can address drug addicted fathers by first emphasizing the importance of spending time with the child and being emotionally available. Christians should endeavor to persuade fathers to quit drugs and thus be emotionally available for their children. Busy fathers who work throughout the week, on the other hand, can be taught to maximize quality time on the Sabbath day and use it to bond with their children. Father absence caused by incarceration due to crime can be addressed by ministering to inmate fathers to stop evil and be present in the lives of the

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family. In this way, when the father leaves prison, he will do all it takes to be there for his children.

The decisive role of Christianity can effectively address the consequences of fatherlessness. By teaching teenagers that God discourages drug use and teenage pregnancies, more teens will turn toward the church, reducing these harmful consequences. When teens learn about God’s plan for them in the Bible, to turn from crime and discover true hope and joy, crime is also mitigated\(^\text{11}\). When Christians work with single mothers, empowering them to work hard in stable jobs, they will see their poverty diminishing. Finally, Christians can minister to father-absent families to turn back to God and attend church, even if the father is not there to guide the family.

\(^\text{11}\) Kutter and McDermott DS, “The Role of the Church in Adolescent Drug Education,” 293-305.
Chapter Four: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This study leads to a wealth of information regarding the issue of fatherlessness as well as the positive role Christianity can play in addressing this issue and its consequences. This information is practical, helping to answer the research questions and therefore meet the study’s objectives. Several themes are identified and analyzed thoroughly with regards to how they relate to the issue of fatherlessness. The themes are also connected to the positive role of Christianity. The discussion below presents the main themes identified in the study and how they relate to the issue of fatherlessness among African Americans and the positive role of Christianity.

Discussion

The final themes emerging from the study include crime, drug abuse, incarceration, poverty, teenage pregnancies, and decreased church attendance. A deeper analysis of these themes reveals how each is related to fatherlessness and Christianity’s positive role in addressing these issues. First, the study establishes that the issue of fatherlessness has always been in existence in society; however, is it more exaggerated in today’s society than in the past. More importantly, the study establishes that this issue seems to affect the African-American community more than any other racial group in America. Moreover, father absence creates several consequences including poverty, increased crime rate, drug use, and teenage pregnancies. Fatherlessness also results in reduced church attendance in the family. Further, the study determines that the cause of fatherlessness include incarceration, divorce, death, a time-consuming job, and children born out of wedlock. However, Christians can focus their decisive role to help increase father presence in family life; this positive function can also reduce the consequences of fatherlessness on society. Christians can minister to fathers on the importance of being in the child’s life to influence them to always be there for their family. The church can also...
minister to those affected by fatherlessness, reducing the consequences of father absence for them.

The theme of crime relates to the issue of fatherlessness since it is both a cause and consequence of father absence. Fathers who engage in crime ultimately land in jail, causing the family to become fatherless. On the other hand, children without fathers are highly likely to engage in crime because of father hunger. Father hunger causes lack of self-control, and children may experience such emotions as anger, which leads them to violence; this was the case for Ben Carson, who had anger issues resulting from father absence. Finally, crime is related to the positive role of Christianity. Christians are tasked with turning hearts and lives to God, thus alleviating sinful actions in society; as crime is rooted in sin, Christians should do all it takes to focus on the fruits of a Christian life. Love for one’s neighbor, goodness, and self-control, all deterreints to lives broken through crime.

Poverty relates to fatherlessness as it provokes fathers to behaviors such as crime, drug abuse, and investing in time-consuming jobs, all to help alleviate the suffering of their poor situations. Fathers turn to crime or working long hours to provide for their family. Furthermore, the father might find an escape from life’s hardships through drug use, a result of poverty. Crime lands the father in jail while a time-consuming job and drug use result in an emotionally absent father. Poverty ultimately leads to fatherlessness. Father-absent families, on the other hand, experience poverty since a single mother is often unable to provide for the family by herself. As God’s Word instructs Christians to help widows and orphans, they can answer God’s call to take action in impoverished situations. Also, Christian teachings encourage people to work diligently to avoid poverty.
Drug abuse also contributes to fatherlessness. Drug-addicted fathers are emotionally unavailable for their family, leading to a type of fatherlessness known as “the emotionally absent father.” Kids raised by a drug-addicted father or in a father-absent household are highly likely to engage in drug use themselves. Since the Bible teaches that not everything is beneficial in people’s lives, and thus should be avoided, Christians have a role to play in preventing drug use; as addictive or recreational drugs provide a compelling example of “not beneficial” activities, Christianity discourages their use.

Teenage pregnancies and decreased church attendance are also consequences of father absence. Fathers are important in a girl’s life since they teach the daughter how to relate to the opposite sex. Without a father figure, the girl is likely to engage in sex early in life, and consequently, teenage pregnancies arise. As biblical teachings denounce sex before marriage, Christians have a role to play in this vital issue; if girls receive practical, informative, Bible-based teaching about sex before marriage, teenage pregnancies will decline. Furthermore, since one of the father’s roles is leading the family in following God, the family can become lost spiritually without him, and under such circumstances, church attendance declines. Christian fathers are the representatives of God in the family; as a result, when the father disappoints and fails to fulfill his role, family members are likely to lose trust in God as well. Christians can address this by encouraging families to trust in the Lord and attend church even in the absence of the father.

Summary of Results

The following is a summary of the results of the study; the results are organized according to the research questions. The first research question seeks to determine how important the father is in the life of his child; the interviewee answered this question adequately, citing the
evidence of the consequences of fatherlessness. It is established that father absence influences the children and the family as a whole. However, Christians can step in and increase father presence in the family’s life. As such, the hypothesis developed for the first question holds true; responsible fathers are an indispensable part of the family for the good of the children as well as society. The removal of the father from the family, therefore, brings about several social consequences that can only be remedied by applying various positive roles of Christianity.

The study also answers the second research question; it is determined that broken families show poor financial performance when compared to intact families. In this way, the hypothesis for this question also proves true: “African-American families where the father is absent show higher rates of poverty compared to families where the father is present.” The third hypothesis is also true since it is determined that fatherless youth be highly likely to engage in drugs, especially at a young age, as a way of acting out for lack of a father figure. The fourth research question focuses on whether the increased crime rates among African Americans are linked to father absence in families. Statistics reveal that more than half of African-American inmates come from father-absent households, and thus the study concludes that the hypothesis, “The increased crime rate among African-American communities is directly related to father absence,” proves true. Furthermore, the fifth research question seeks to link early pregnancies and fatherlessness. Review of various literature highlights the fact that engaging in early sex and the rise of teenage pregnancies among African-American girls is a consequence of growing up without a father. As such, the hypothesis developed for the question holds true.

The sixth and seventh questions seek to determine the role of Christianity in the issue of fatherlessness and its consequences. The study determines that, indeed, Christians have a huge role to play in the issue of fatherlessness. Question six tries to obtain the answer on what role
Christians can play to improve father presence in the family. One of the answers obtained was that Christians could groom married couples as well as youth on how to stay together despite challenges to promote the presence of the father in the life of his children and family. The hypothesis developed for this question is therefore correct. Question seven seeks to identify ways in which Christians can help reduce the consequences of fatherlessness in society. It is established that Christians can bring more people to church, especially fatherless youth, and help them build faith in God since He is the father to everyone. The hypothesis, “Believing in God as the father will help reduce the consequences of fatherlessness,” therefore holds true.

Conclusion

Though a wealth of research relating to the issue of fatherlessness exits, there remains little research on the positive role of Christianity with regards to the point of fatherlessness. This study is therefore conducted to gain insight into the role of Christianity in the issue of fatherlessness and its consequences. The study involves a deep look into the issue of fatherlessness, its consequences, and how it relates to the positive role of Christianity. It was anticipated that the findings of the research would provide knowledge of the trend of fatherlessness among African Americans and how Christians can help address this issue.

The methodology used is a literature review, in which published articles on the issue of father absence were analyzed to determine their views regarding the issue. Case studies on prominent African Americans who grew up in father-absent families were also conducted to establish if Christianity had a role to play in their success. From the literature review, it is determined that fatherlessness has a profound impact on society; the central themes identified in the study reveal that father absence has grave implications on the family and lead to severe consequences experienced by society. Some of the themes identified include crime, poverty,
drug use, divorce, out-of-wedlock births, church attendance, and sexually promiscuous behavior. Crime, poverty, drug use, out-of-wedlock births, and divorce are the main causes of fatherlessness; death is also identified as a cause of fatherlessness though its effects are not as profound as when the father is still alive. Children suffer more when they realize there is a person who turned his back on them. Sexually promiscuous behavior and a decline in church attendance, on the other hand, are consequences of father absence.

The case studies reveal a strong connection between Christianity and the issue of fatherlessness. Each of the subject’s studies shares a similarity in that they all attribute their success to the positive role of Christianity in their lives. Although none of the participants divulge details of how Christianity helped them cope with father absence, it is evident that it contributed to their success. Taking Ben Carson as an example, one can see how his family lived in poverty, and Carson stood on the fringes of criminal activity; however, after he learned about Christianity, he was able to turn his life around to become one of the most successful African Americans known today.

Evidence from the case study is supported by a literature review, which shows that, indeed, Christianity could be used to address the issue of fatherlessness and its consequences. All the causes of fatherlessness, apart from death, are addressed in the Bible. For instance, the Bible discourages crime and drug use, all which lead to fatherlessness. The Bible also talks about sex before marriage as well as failure to attend church; these are some of the consequences of fatherlessness. As such, Christianity can play a positive role in addressing father absence and its consequences.

In conclusion, the study provides valid and valuable information on the issue of fatherlessness, its consequences, and the positive role of Christianity. Father absence deprives
children of an important person in life; it is the father’s responsibility to teach his children and family about controlling emotions, helping the kids achieve self-control. Boys learn assertiveness and independence from the father while girls learn how to relate to the opposite sex. Therefore, without a father, the child often does not acquire these skills on time. Consequently, the child might turn to crime, drug use, and sexual promiscuity. Corruption has been the case in contemporary African-American society; this community has experienced a rise in crime, drug use, and teenage pregnancies, and all these occurrences have been traced back to father absence. Christians can, however, play an essential role in ensuring that the father is present in family life and also in mitigating the consequences of father absence.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study is its over-reliance on literature review. Literature was examined thoroughly to determine issues surrounding father absence and what role Christians can play. Secondary data can be biased as a result of the researcher’s own opinions, so relying heavily on published literature as a source of information for a topic such as fatherlessness may produce skewed results. However, this study minimizes or downplays the limitation of over-reliance on a literature review by including case studies of prominent African Americans. These people are analyzed with regards to their experiences growing up fatherless and what factors contributed to their success. It was anticipated that results from the case study would facilitate understanding of the challenges fatherless families face and the factors that contribute to success. Nonetheless, the use of case studies is limited since one cannot generalize results from a few people to the large population.

Furthermore, the study focuses on the issue of fatherlessness within the African-American society. Father absence affects African Americans more than any other racial group in
America. Expectations are set by studying the population in which father absence is most prevalent; valuable information emerged, pointing toward all factors that lead to this issue. However, focusing on only one racial group is a limitation since the results derived from this population may not reflect the situation in other racial groups. The issue of fatherlessness affects races differently. Hence, each race should be studied separately from the others to enhance understanding.

Finally, the study also focuses on the role of Christianity in the issue of fatherlessness. Christianity can be used to address almost all, if not all, of the issues affecting contemporary society. As such, it was a good idea to examine how Christianity can be used to address fatherlessness and its consequences. Focusing on Christianity is a limitation, however, since several other alternatives can be used to address this issue. For instance, the solutions to fatherlessness can be examined from a legal perspective.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this dissertation emphasizes the importance of the father in the lives of his family, it is not implying that the mother cannot raise a successful family on her own. Children need both parents for a healthy well-being; however, the mother is sometimes capable of raising an emotionally and spiritually stable family on her own. As evidenced by the case studies provided in the dissertation, mothers risk all they have for their children to become successful. Mothers with strong faith along with support from extended family can withstand the hardships that come with father absence; ultimately, they can often raise and sustain a successful family. More research is therefore needed on how single-mother family structures can be supported to increase the chances of them raising emotionally healthy and stable families.
Further research can also determine how young men develop a sense of masculinity in father-absent families. There appears to be some research on the role of the father in shaping the masculine self-image of young boys; however, there lacks research on how this male self-image develops in father-absent families. There are several examples of young boys who have flourished into great men despite being raised by single mothers; the question here is how these boys developed a stable masculine self-image. Further research can also examine if father absence affects the boys’ behavior and ability to interact positively with other men.

This dissertation limits its focus to the African-American community; as such, further research requires more investigation of the other racial groups. More research will enable one to gain a general idea of the trend of fatherlessness in the world as a whole and not just among African Americans. Future research can also investigate how the positive role of law can be used to address the issue of fatherlessness and its consequences. Statistics make it evident that fatherlessness has grave implications on society, including a rise in crime and drug use. These consequences affect countries in different ways, sometimes crippling the economy. As a result, the government can enact laws to improve father involvement in the family. Future research can focus on what type of laws the nation can pass to strengthen the participation of the father in the family.
Bibliography


Gilleran, Michael (chairman) and Andrew Beckwith (president, CEO). “Fatherlessness in Massachusetts,” June 2017.


## APPENDICES

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The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 6/29/2017 to -- Protocol # 2914.062917

Consent Form
A Study of Fatherlessness in the African-American Community in Relationship to the Positive Role of Christianity
Kevin A. Smith
Liberty University
Rawlings School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study of fatherlessness. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an African American between the ages of 18 and 90 and can contribute to this specific field of study. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Kevin A. Smith, a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to determine if fatherlessness can cause disadvantages and negatively impact communities. If so, what makes the disadvantages and distress of a fatherless home affect the child for a lifetime? Also, does fatherlessness conceivably lead to poverty, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, poor physical and emotional health, low educational achievement, crime, sexual abuse, and teen pregnancy?

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Fill out the attached survey, which should take no more than 15 minutes. Please return within two weeks of participating in the survey by email to kasmith6@liberty.edu or mail (Kevin A. Smith, doctoral candidate, P.O.B. 211341, Bedford, TX. 76095).

Risks and Benefits of Participation: There are no known risks to being involved in this study. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit. Benefits to society include the potential of the results of this research, which may serve to give more awareness and exposure to the severity of fatherlessness.

Compensation: Participants are not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to returning your survey without affecting those relationships.
Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Kevin A. Smith. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at (817) 723-4958. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty advisor, Dr. Steve Vandegriff, at svandegriff@liberty.edu.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 6/29/2017 to -- Protocol # 2914.062917

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.
June 29, 2017

Kevin A. Smith

IRB Exemption 2914.062917: A Study of Fatherlessness in the African-American Community in Relationship to the Positive Role of Christianity

Dear Kevin A. Smith,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
   (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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