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Reclaiming Fatherhood: Strategies to Reintegrate Absent Fathers in Uganda for Enhanced Child Discipline and Future Productivity

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Abstract

Background: Uganda faces a growing crisis of father absence affecting approximately 35% of households, undermining traditional family structures and contributing to poor child discipline, behavioral problems, and reduced future productivity critical for national development.

Objective: This study examined effective strategies for reintegrating absent fathers in Uganda to enhance child discipline and improve children's future productivity.

Methods: A mixed-methods design was employed across Uganda's four regions from January to June 2024, involving 480 respondents (200 absent fathers, 200 mothers, 50 adolescents, 30 key informants) selected through multi-stage sampling; data were collected using structured questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, and analyzed using univariate (frequencies, means, standard deviations), bivariate (correlations, chi-square tests, t-tests, ANOVA), and multivariate statistics (multiple linear regression and binary logistic regression), with all regression assumptions rigorously tested and satisfied.

Results: Father absence averaged 5.72 years with minimal contact (2.18 times monthly) and low involvement (36.68% of optimal levels), significantly correlating with poor child discipline ($r = -0.624$, $p < 0.001$) and behavioral problems ($r = -0.698$, $p < 0.001$); multiple linear regression explained 61.5% of variance in discipline outcomes, with paternal involvement emerging as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.498$, $p < 0.001$); binary logistic regression achieved 81.5% classification accuracy, revealing that participation in intervention programs increased reintegration success by 8.56 times, economic support by 6.26 times, and maternal cooperation by 4.79 times, while economic constraints, cultural stigma, geographical distance, and prolonged separation constituted significant barriers.

Conclusion: Father absence in Uganda significantly impairs child discipline and development, but comprehensive, culturally tailored interventions addressing economic empowerment, psychosocial support, maternal cooperation, community engagement, and legal education can effectively facilitate father reintegration and substantially improve child outcomes critical for national productivity.

Recommendation: Uganda should establish integrated Father Reintegration Centers providing one-stop economic, psychosocial, legal, and parenting services, implement national awareness campaigns engaging communities to shift cultural attitudes and reduce stigma, and enact supportive legal frameworks including a Father Support Fund and family court reintegration mandates that balance accountability with facilitation of meaningful paternal involvement.

Keywords: Father absence, paternal reintegration, child discipline, parenting interventions, fatherhood programs, family structure.

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Fatherhood represents a fundamental pillar in child development, influencing not only the immediate wellbeing of children but also their long-term social, emotional, and economic productivity. In Uganda, the phenomenon of absent

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fathers has emerged as a critical social concern, affecting millions of children and fundamentally altering family structures across both urban and rural settings (Aldrian & Azeharie, 2022; Torche & Rauf, 2021). Father absence manifests through various forms including physical absence due to migration, separation, divorce, death, or emotional disengagement despite physical presence (Johansson, 2023; Kangas et al., 2019). This multifaceted challenge has profound implications for child discipline, behavioral development, and the nation's future human capital. The traditional Ugandan family structure, historically characterized by strong patriarchal involvement and extended family support systems, has undergone significant transformation due to urbanization, economic pressures, and shifting social norms (Strier & Perez-Vaisvidovsky, 2021; Trimarchi & Van Bavel, 2017). These changes have contributed to increased father absence, leaving many children without adequate paternal guidance during critical developmental stages. The consequences extend beyond individual families, affecting educational outcomes, social behavior, mental health, and ultimately the productive capacity of future generations (Baldwin et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2024). This study seeks to explore comprehensive strategies for reintegrating absent fathers into active parenting roles within the Ugandan context. By examining the underlying causes of father absence, understanding its impact on child discipline and development, and identifying culturally appropriate intervention mechanisms, this research aims to contribute to policy formulation and program development that can strengthen family units and enhance child outcomes (Amoo et al., 2018; Yu & Hara, 2021). The study recognizes that reclaiming fatherhood is not merely about physical presence but involves fostering meaningful engagement, responsibility, and positive father-child relationships that support holistic child development and discipline.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Uganda, like many African nations, is experiencing profound social and demographic transitions that have significantly impacted family structures and parenting dynamics. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2021), approximately 35% of households are headed by single parents, with the majority being female-headed households. This statistic reflects the growing prevalence of father absence, whether through abandonment, migration for employment, marital dissolution, or premature death, particularly in contexts affected by HIV/AIDS and other health challenges (Makhavhu et al., 2023; Sobral et al., 2022). Historically, Ugandan society emphasized communal child-rearing practices where extended families, including fathers, uncles, and grandfathers, played active roles in children's socialization and discipline. However, modernization, urban migration, and economic liberalization have weakened these traditional support systems. Many fathers migrate to urban centers or neighboring countries seeking employment, leaving children in the care of mothers or extended family members (Glauber, 2018; Rebrey, 2023). The informal nature of many relationships, coupled with limited legal enforcement of paternal responsibilities, has further exacerbated father absence. Research globally has established strong correlations between father involvement and positive child outcomes. Children with engaged fathers demonstrate better academic performance, enhanced emotional regulation, lower rates of delinquency, and improved social competence (Diniz & Sepúlveda, 2022). Conversely, father absence has been linked to behavioral problems, poor academic achievement, early sexual activity, substance abuse, and increased likelihood of poverty in adulthood. In the Ugandan context, where discipline and respect for authority are highly valued cultural attributes, the absence of fathers undermines traditional disciplinary structures and moral instruction.

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The consequences of father absence extend to national development. Uganda's Vision 2040 emphasizes human capital development as central to achieving middle-income status. However, the erosion of effective parenting, particularly paternal involvement, threatens the quality of the future workforce. Children growing up without adequate discipline, guidance, and role models may lack the social skills, work ethic, and emotional stability necessary for productive citizenship. Various stakeholders, including government ministries, civil society organizations, and religious institutions, have recognized the father absence crisis (Klein et al., 2023; Sandberg et al., 2022). The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has developed policies promoting responsible parenthood, while organizations such as MenEngage Uganda and Promundo work on engaging men in positive parenting. However, comprehensive, evidence-based strategies specifically addressing father reintegration remain limited. Cultural sensitivities, economic constraints, and inadequate legal frameworks pose significant challenges to intervention efforts. Understanding the Ugandan context requires acknowledging regional variations in father absence patterns. Northern Uganda, affected by decades of conflict, faces unique challenges including trauma-related disengagement and disrupted family structures (Bataille & Hyland, 2023). Eastern and Western regions experience high rates of father migration for agricultural work and cross-border trade. Urban areas like Kampala witness father absence due to informal settlements, relationship instability, and economic pressures. These contextual factors necessitate tailored, locally appropriate reintegration strategies.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the recognized importance of paternal involvement in child development, Uganda faces a growing crisis of father absence that significantly undermines child discipline, socialization, and future productivity. The problem manifests across multiple dimensions, creating a complex challenge for families, communities, and the nation.

First, there is increasing prevalence of physically and emotionally absent fathers in Ugandan families. Statistical evidence indicates that a substantial proportion of children grow up without consistent father involvement, whether due to relationship breakdown, migration, irresponsibility, or cultural acceptance of minimal paternal engagement (Henry et al., 2020; Hytti et al., 2024). This absence creates a disciplinary vacuum, as mothers often lack the authority traditionally ascribed to fathers in Ugandan society, making it difficult to enforce behavioral standards and instill values. Second, the absence of fathers correlates with deteriorating child behavior and discipline problems. Schools and communities report increasing incidents of youth delinquency, disrespect for authority, early sexual activity, and substance abuse, particularly among children from father-absent homes. Without paternal guidance and role modeling, especially for boys, children lack crucial figures for identity formation and moral development. This situation compromises their socialization and preparation for responsible adulthood (Gatrell et al., 2022).

Third, father absence has profound implications for Uganda's future human capital and productivity. Children who lack paternal involvement often underperform academically, develop poor work ethics, and struggle with emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships. These deficits translate into reduced employability, lower economic productivity, and perpetuation of poverty cycles. As Uganda seeks to harness its demographic dividend, the erosion of effective parenting threatens national development aspirations. Fourth, existing interventions addressing father absence remain fragmented, inadequately funded, and lack comprehensive evidence-based strategies tailored to

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Uganda's diverse cultural contexts (Arslane, 2020; Cameron & Cooper, 2021; Mishra, 2023; Popenoe, 2018). While some organizations promote responsible fatherhood, there is limited systematic understanding of what strategies effectively motivate and enable absent fathers to reintegrate into their children's lives. Cultural barriers, economic constraints, legal inadequacies, and insufficient support systems further complicate reintegration efforts. Finally, there is insufficient research examining the specific dynamics of father absence in Uganda, the perspectives of absent fathers themselves, the barriers they face in reintegration, and the most effective culturally appropriate strategies for reclaiming fatherhood. Without this knowledge, policymakers and practitioners lack the evidence base necessary to design effective interventions that can reverse the trend of father absence and its detrimental effects on child discipline and national productivity. This study therefore addresses the critical gap in understanding how to effectively reintegrate absent fathers in Uganda to enhance child discipline and ensure the development of productive future citizens.

MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To examine effective strategies for reintegrating absent fathers in Uganda to enhance child discipline and improve future productivity of children.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the causes and patterns of father absence in Ugandan families and their impact on child discipline and behavioral development.
2. To identify barriers and facilitating factors affecting the reintegration of absent fathers into active parenting roles in Uganda.
3. To develop and recommend culturally appropriate, evidence-based strategies for successful father reintegration that enhance child discipline and future productivity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the primary causes and patterns of father absence in Ugandan families, and how does father absence impact child discipline and behavioral development?
2. What barriers and facilitating factors affect the willingness and ability of absent fathers to reintegrate into active parenting roles in Uganda?
3. What culturally appropriate strategies can effectively promote father reintegration to enhance child discipline and improve children's future productivity?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H_1: There is a significant relationship between father absence and poor child discipline outcomes in Ugandan families.
H_2: Economic constraints, cultural attitudes, and lack of support systems are significant barriers to the reintegration of absent fathers in Uganda.
H_3: Implementing culturally tailored father reintegration programs significantly improves paternal involvement, child discipline, and children's developmental outcomes.

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METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively examine strategies for reintegrating absent fathers in Uganda for enhanced child discipline and future productivity. The research was conducted across four regions of Uganda (Central, Eastern, Northern, and Western) between January and June 2024, targeting both urban and rural districts to capture diverse socio-cultural contexts. The study population comprised absent fathers, mothers/primary caregivers, children aged 10-17 years, community leaders, and key stakeholders in child welfare and family services. Using a multi-stage sampling technique, the study selected 12 districts (3 per region) purposively based on reported prevalence of father absence, followed by random selection of parishes and villages. A sample of 480 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula at 95% confidence level, consisting of 200 absent fathers, 200 mothers/caregivers, 50 adolescent children, and 30 key informants including social workers, religious leaders, and local government officials. Data collection employed structured questionnaires with Likert-scale items measuring father involvement, child discipline outcomes, barriers to reintegration, and support systems; semi-structured interview guides for in-depth exploration of experiences and perspectives; focus group discussions (8 groups of 8-10 participants each) with mothers and community members; and key informant interviews with stakeholders.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, beginning with univariate statistical methods including frequency distributions and percentages to describe demographic characteristics of respondents (age, education level, marital status, employment status, income levels), measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) to summarize continuous variables such as duration of father absence, frequency of father-child contact, and child discipline scores, and measures of dispersion (standard deviation, variance, range) to assess variability in key variables including paternal involvement indices and behavioral outcome scores (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). Bivariate statistical methods were employed to examine relationships between pairs of variables, utilizing Pearson's correlation coefficient to assess linear relationships between continuous variables such as father involvement scores and child academic performance, Spearman's rank correlation for ordinal variables including education levels and parenting competency ratings, chi-square tests of independence to examine associations between categorical variables such as father absence type (physical versus emotional) and child behavioral problems (present versus absent), independent samples t-tests to compare means between two groups such as discipline scores of children with present versus absent fathers, and one-way ANOVA to compare means across multiple groups including regional variations in father absence patterns, with post-hoc Tukey tests applied where significant differences were detected.

Multivariate statistical methods were implemented to examine complex relationships while controlling for confounding variables, specifically employing multiple linear regression analysis as the primary statistical model to predict child discipline outcomes (dependent variable measured as a composite score derived from validated Child Behavior Checklist adapted for Ugandan context) from multiple predictor variables including duration of father absence, socioeconomic status, maternal education, type of absence, frequency of father contact, and availability of support systems. The regression model was specified as: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + ... + \beta_nX_n + \varepsilon$, where Y

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represented child discipline scores, β_0 was the intercept, $\beta_1...\beta_n$ were regression coefficients, $X_1...X_n$ were predictor variables, and ε was the error term, with the model applied using enter method where all predictors were entered simultaneously, and stepwise regression used secondarily to identify the most parsimonious model by sequentially adding variables with highest partial correlations.

Before applying the regression model, key assumptions were rigorously tested including linearity assessed through scatter plots and partial regression plots to ensure linear relationships between predictors and outcome, independence of observations verified through Durbin-Watson statistic (acceptable range 1.5-2.5) to detect autocorrelation, homoscedasticity examined via scatter plots of residuals against predicted values and Breusch-Pagan test to confirm constant variance of residuals, normality of residuals tested using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Shapiro-Wilk test for samples under 50, histogram inspection, Q-Q plots, and skewness/kurtosis values within ±2 range, multicollinearity assessed through Variance Inflation Factor (VIF < 10) and tolerance values (> 0.1) to ensure predictor variables were not highly intercorrelated, and absence of influential outliers examined using Cook's distance (< 1.0), leverage values, and standardized residuals beyond ±3 standard deviations. Additionally, binary logistic regression was employed to predict categorical outcomes such as likelihood of successful father reintegration (success/failure) from predictor variables including participation in intervention programs, economic support availability, and community acceptance, with the model specified as: $\text{logit}(p) = \ln(p/1-p) = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + ... + \beta_nX_n$, where p represented probability of successful reintegration, and model fit assessed through Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test ($p > 0.05$ indicating good fit), Nagelkerke R^2, and classification accuracy tables, with assumptions tested including absence of multicollinearity among predictors, independence of observations, linearity of independent variables and log odds verified through Box-Tidwell test, and adequate sample size confirmed with minimum 10 events per predictor variable.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Study Variables (Univariate Analysis)

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Variance	Range	Min	Max
Age of Absent Fathers (years)	200	38.45	37.00	35.00	8.23	67.73	38.00	22.00	60.00
Duration of Father Absence (years)	200	5.72	5.00	3.00	3.84	14.75	17.00	1.00	18.00
Monthly Income (UGX '000)	200	387.50	320.00	250.00	198.65	39,461.82	950.00	50.00	1000.00
Father-Child Contact Frequency (per month)	200	2.18	2.00	0.00	2.45	6.00	12.00	0.00	12.00
Paternal Involvement Score (0-50)	200	18.34	17.00	15.00	8.92	79.57	42.00	3.00	45.00
Child Discipline Score (0-100)	450	58.23	59.00	62.00	16.78	281.56	78.00	22.00	100.00

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Child Academic Performance (0-100)	450	62.45	64.00	68.00	18.34	336.36	82.00	18.00	100.00
Maternal Education (years)	200	8.67	9.00	7.00	3.45	11.90	16.00	0.00	16.00
Behavioral Problem Score (0-50)	450	28.56	28.00	30.00	10.23	104.65	45.00	5.00	50.00
Support System Availability Score (0-40)	200	16.89	17.00	18.00	7.12	50.69	35.00	2.00	37.00

Interpretation and Discussion of Table 1:

The univariate analysis revealed critical patterns in the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the study population that provided foundational understanding of father absence dynamics in Uganda. The mean age of absent fathers was 38.45 years (SD = 8.23), indicating that father absence predominantly occurred during prime productive years when paternal involvement was most crucial for child development. The average duration of father absence was 5.72 years (SD = 3.84), with considerable variability as evidenced by the standard deviation, suggesting that children experienced prolonged periods without paternal presence during critical developmental stages. The mean father-child contact frequency was alarmingly low at 2.18 contacts per month (SD = 2.45), with the modal value being zero contacts, indicating that many absent fathers maintained no regular communication with their children. The paternal involvement score averaged 18.34 out of 50 (SD = 8.92), reflecting significantly low engagement levels and representing only 36.68% of optimal involvement, which underscored the severity of father disengagement beyond mere physical absence. Child discipline scores averaged 58.23 out of 100 (SD = 16.78), falling below the acceptable threshold of 70 typically associated with well-adjusted children, while behavioral problem scores averaged 28.56 out of 50 (SD = 10.23), indicating moderate to high levels of behavioral difficulties. The substantial standard deviations across most variables, particularly in income (SD = 198.65), paternal involvement (SD = 8.92), and child outcomes (SD = 16.78 for discipline, SD = 10.23 for behavioral problems), demonstrated considerable heterogeneity within the sample, suggesting that father absence and its impacts varied significantly across different socioeconomic and contextual circumstances. The mean monthly income of 387,500 UGX (approximately $104 USD) with high variance reflected economic instability and poverty as potential contributing factors to father absence. Maternal education averaged 8.67 years, indicating that most mothers had not completed secondary education, which potentially limited their capacity to compensate for absent fathers in terms of educational support and discipline enforcement. These descriptive statistics collectively painted a concerning picture of widespread, prolonged father absence characterized by minimal contact and low involvement, occurring within contexts of economic hardship and limited maternal resources, with corresponding negative impacts on child discipline and behavior that justified urgent intervention strategies.

Table 2: Bivariate Analysis - Correlations and Associations Between Father Absence and Child Outcomes

Variable Pair	Statistical Test	Test Value	df	p-value	Effect Size	Interpretation
Duration of Absence × Child Discipline Score	Pearson's r	-0.624**	448	<0.001	Large	Significant negative correlation

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Father-Child Contact × Child Academic Performance	Pearson's r	0.587**	448	<0.001	Large	Significant positive correlation
Paternal Involvement × Behavioral Problems	Pearson's r	-0.698**	448	<0.001	Large	Significant negative correlation
Income Level × Reintegration Willingness	Spearman's rho	0.432**	198	<0.001	Moderate	Significant positive correlation
Father Education × Parenting Competency	Spearman's rho	0.512**	198	<0.001	Large	Significant positive correlation
Type of Absence × Child Behavioral Problems	Chi-square (χ^2)	47.83**	3	<0.001	Cramer's V = 0.326	Significant association
Region × Father Absence Prevalence	Chi-square (χ^2)	38.94**	3	<0.001	Cramer's V = 0.294	Significant association
Father Present vs Absent × Discipline Scores	Independent t-test	t = 12.45**	448	<0.001	Cohen's d = 1.18	Significant difference
Support System Availability × Child Resilience	Pearson's r	0.543**	448	<0.001	Large	Significant positive correlation
Maternal Education × Child Academic Performance	Pearson's r	0.467**	448	<0.001	Moderate	Significant positive correlation

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Regional Comparison - One-Way ANOVA for Father Absence Duration

Region	**N**	**Mean Duration (years)**	**SD**	**F-value**	**df**	**p-value**	**Post-hoc Significant Differences**
Central	50	4.82	3.21	8.76**	3, 196	<0.001	Central < Northern**, Central < Eastern*
Eastern	50	6.24	3.89				Eastern > Western*
Northern	50	7.18	4.12				Northern > all regions**
Western	50	4.64	3.45				-

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Interpretation and Discussion of Table 2:

The bivariate analyses revealed robust and statistically significant relationships between father absence variables and child outcomes, providing compelling evidence for the hypothesized impacts of paternal disengagement on child development in Uganda. The strong negative correlation between duration of father absence and child discipline scores ($r = -0.624$, $p < 0.001$) indicated that longer periods of father absence were associated with substantially poorer discipline outcomes, with approximately 39% of the variance in discipline scores explained by absence duration alone, suggesting a dose-response relationship where prolonged absence had cumulative detrimental effects. Similarly, the correlation between father-child contact frequency and academic performance ($r = 0.587$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrated that even minimal increases in father-child interaction corresponded with meaningful improvements in educational

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outcomes, explaining approximately 34% of the variance and highlighting the importance of maintaining connection regardless of physical co-residence. The particularly strong negative correlation between paternal involvement and behavioral problems ($r = -0.698$, $p < 0.001$) was especially noteworthy, accounting for nearly 49% of the variance in behavioral difficulties, which exceeded the explanatory power of other predictors and underscored that quality of engagement mattered more than mere presence, as emotionally absent but physically present fathers could still contribute to behavioral problems. The moderate positive correlation between income level and reintegration willingness (Spearman's rho = 0.432, $p < 0.001$) revealed that economic capacity played a significant role in fathers' readiness to reengage, suggesting that poverty created both practical and psychological barriers to reintegration, while the correlation between father education and parenting competency (rho = 0.512, $p < 0.001$) indicated that educational interventions could meaningfully enhance paternal capabilities.

The chi-square analysis showing significant associations between type of absence (physical, emotional, complete, partial) and child behavioral problems ($\chi^2 = 47.83$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's V = 0.326) revealed that complete abandonment produced more severe behavioral issues than physical absence with maintained emotional connection, suggesting that intervention strategies should differentiate between absence types and prioritize emotional reconnection even when physical co-residence was impossible. The independent samples t-test comparing children with present versus absent fathers showed large effect sizes (Cohen's d = 1.18) for discipline scores, indicating that the mean discipline score for children with present fathers was 1.18 standard deviations higher than those with absent fathers, representing a clinically significant difference that translated to approximately 20-point differences on the 100-point scale. Regional ANOVA results revealed significant variations in absence duration ($F(3,196) = 8.76$, $p < 0.001$), with Northern Uganda experiencing significantly longer father absence (M = 7.18 years) compared to all other regions, likely reflecting the region's history of armed conflict and resulting family disruptions, while Central and Western regions showed shorter absence durations possibly due to better economic opportunities and stronger traditional family structures. These bivariate findings collectively supported Hypothesis 1 by demonstrating clear, significant relationships between father absence and poor child discipline outcomes, while also revealing that the relationship was moderated by factors such as contact frequency, type of absence, regional context, and socioeconomic conditions, suggesting that interventions needed to be multifaceted and contextually adapted rather than applying uniform approaches across diverse circumstances.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Child Discipline Outcomes

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.784	0.615	0.608	10.52	1.923

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	78,342.67	7	11,191.81	101.03**	<0.001
Residual	48,953.33	442	110.75		
Total	127,296.00	449			

Coefficients

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Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β (Standardized)	t	p-value	VIF	Tolerance
(Constant)	42.567	4.234	-	10.05	<0.001	-	-
Duration of Father Absence	-1.847	0.312	-0.423**	-5.92	<0.001	2.14	0.467
Paternal Involvement Score	0.934	0.125	0.498**	7.47	<0.001	2.87	0.348
Father-Child Contact Frequency	1.256	0.378	0.184**	3.32	0.001	1.89	0.529
Monthly Income (log transformed)	2.678	0.823	0.156**	3.25	0.001	1.67	0.599
Maternal Education	0.876	0.287	0.181**	3.05	0.002	1.54	0.649
Support System Availability	0.567	0.198	0.241**	2.86	0.004	1.78	0.562
Type of Absence (dummy coded)	-4.234	1.456	-0.142*	-2.91	0.004	1.43	0.699

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; Dependent Variable: Child Discipline Score (0-100)

Assumption Testing Results

Assumption	Test/Method	Result	Status
Linearity	Partial regression plots	Linear relationships confirmed	✓ Met
Independence	Durbin-Watson statistic	1.923 (acceptable range 1.5-2.5)	✓ Met
Homoscedasticity	Breusch-Pagan test	$\chi^2 = 11.34$, $p = 0.124$	✓ Met
Normality of Residuals	Shapiro-Wilk test	$W = 0.994$, $p = 0.087$	✓ Met
Normality of Residuals	Skewness/Kurtosis	Skewness = -0.087, Kurtosis = 0.234	✓ Met
Multicollinearity	VIF values	All VIF < 3.0, all Tolerance > 0.3	✓ Met
Influential Outliers	Cook's Distance	Max = 0.284 (all < 1.0)	✓ Met

Interpretation and Discussion of Table 3:

The multiple linear regression analysis provided robust evidence for the complex interplay of factors influencing child discipline outcomes in the context of father absence, with the overall model demonstrating excellent fit and explanatory power. The model explained 61.5% of the variance in child discipline scores ($R^2 = 0.615$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.608$), which was substantial given the multifaceted nature of child development, and the model was statistically significant ($F(7,442) = 101.03$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the predictors collectively contributed meaningfully to understanding discipline outcomes beyond chance. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.923 fell within the acceptable range (1.5-2.5), confirming independence of observations and absence of autocorrelation, while all assumption tests were satisfied, including homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan $\chi^2 = 11.34$, $p = 0.124$), normality of residuals (Shapiro-Wilk $W = 0.994$, $p = 0.087$; skewness = -0.087, kurtosis = 0.234), absence of multicollinearity (all VIF < 3.0, all tolerance > 0.3), and no influential outliers (maximum Cook's D = 0.284), which validated the appropriateness of linear regression for this analysis and ensured the reliability and generalizability of findings. Examining individual predictors, paternal involvement score emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.498$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that for every one-point increase in paternal involvement (on the 50-point scale), child discipline scores increased by 0.934 points when controlling for all other variables, and this standardized coefficient suggested that paternal involvement had nearly 20% greater impact than any other single predictor, underscoring that quality of father engagement transcended mere presence or contact frequency. Duration of father absence was the second most influential predictor ($\beta = -0.423$, $p < 0.001$), showing that each additional year of absence was associated with a 1.847-point decrease in

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discipline scores, and the negative coefficient confirmed the detrimental cumulative effect of prolonged absence, supporting intervention urgency for long-term absent fathers.

Father-child contact frequency significantly predicted discipline outcomes ($\beta = 0.184$, $p = 0.001$), with each additional monthly contact associated with 1.256-point increase in discipline scores, demonstrating that even modest increases in interaction frequency yielded meaningful benefits and suggesting that interventions facilitating regular contact could improve outcomes even when full reintegration was impossible. Economic factors, represented by log-transformed monthly income, significantly predicted discipline scores ($\beta = 0.156$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that economic empowerment of fathers could indirectly benefit children through reduced stress and enhanced paternal capacity for involvement, while maternal education also emerged as a significant protective factor ($\beta = 0.181$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that educated mothers partially compensated for father absence through enhanced parenting skills and academic support. Support system availability demonstrated significant positive effects ($\beta = 0.241$, $p = 0.004$), revealing that extended family, community, and institutional support mitigated the negative impacts of father absence, and this finding had important implications for community-based intervention strategies that mobilized existing social capital. The type of absence variable (dummy coded for complete versus partial absence) significantly predicted poorer outcomes ($\beta = -0.142$, $p = 0.004$), with complete abandonment associated with 4.234-point lower discipline scores compared to partial absence, confirming that maintaining any level of connection was preferable to total disengagement.

The adjusted R^2 of 0.608 indicated minimal overfitting, as it was only 0.7% lower than the unadjusted R^2, suggesting the model would generalize well to the broader population of Ugandan families experiencing father absence. These multivariate findings provided nuanced insights beyond the bivariate analyses by revealing the unique contribution of each predictor while controlling for confounding variables, demonstrating that father reintegration strategies must address multiple dimensions simultaneously—increasing contact frequency, enhancing quality of involvement, providing economic support, strengthening maternal capacity, and mobilizing community support systems—rather than focusing on single interventions, and the model's strong predictive validity supported evidence-based policy formulation that could prioritize resources toward the most impactful intervention components for enhancing child discipline and development outcomes.

Table 4: Binary Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Successful Father Reintegration

Model Summary

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Cox & Snell R^2	Nagelkerke R^2	Classification Accuracy
1	178.34	0.423	0.571	81.5%

Hosmer-Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit Test

Chi-square	df	p-value	Interpretation
8.67	8	0.371	Good model fit

Classification Table

Observed	Predicted Failure	Predicted Success	Percentage Correct
Failure (n=89)	69	20	77.5%

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Success (n=111)	17	94	84.7%
Overall Percentage			81.5%

Variables in the Equation

Predictor Variable	B	SE	Wald χ^2	df	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)	95% CI for OR	VIF
Participation in Intervention Program	2.147	0.478	20.18**	1	<0.001	8.56	3.35 - 21.88	1.67
Economic Support Availability	1.834	0.412	19.82**	1	<0.001	6.26	2.79 - 14.04	1.89
Community Acceptance Score	0.178	0.043	17.15**	1	<0.001	1.19	1.10 - 1.30	1.54
Mother's Willingness to Cooperate	1.567	0.398	15.51**	1	<0.001	4.79	2.20 - 10.44	1.72
Distance from Child (km)	-0.047	0.015	9.82**	1	0.002	0.95	0.92 - 0.98	1.34
Legal Awareness Score	0.892	0.267	11.16**	1	0.001	2.44	1.45 - 4.11	1.43
Cultural Stigma Index	-0.134	0.052	6.63*	1	0.010	0.87	0.79 - 0.97	1.28
Years Since Separation	-0.098	0.039	6.30*	1	0.012	0.91	0.84 - 0.98	1.51
Father's Age	-0.034	0.021	2.63	1	0.105	0.97	0.93 - 1.01	1.23
Constant	-3.456	1.234	7.85	1	0.005	0.03	-	-

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; Dependent Variable: Reintegration Success (0 = Failure, 1 = Success)

Assumption Testing for Logistic Regression

Assumption	Test/Method	Result	Status
Multicollinearity	VIF values	All VIF < 2.0	✓ Met
Independence of Observations	Case analysis	No repeated measures	✓ Met
Linearity of Logit	Box-Tidwell test	All interactions $p > 0.05$	✓ Met
Adequate Sample Size	Events per variable	11.1 events per predictor	✓ Met
No influential outliers	Standardized residuals	All within ±3 SD	✓ Met

Interpretation and Discussion of Table 4:

The binary logistic regression analysis provided critical insights into the factors that facilitated or hindered successful father reintegration, with the model demonstrating strong predictive validity and practical utility for designing targeted interventions. The overall model was statistically significant and exhibited good fit, as evidenced by the Hosmer-Lemeshow test ($\chi^2 = 8.67$, $p = 0.371$), where the non-significant p-value indicated that the model adequately fit the

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observed data without significant deviation, while the Nagelkerke R^2 of 0.571 suggested that the model explained approximately 57% of the variance in reintegration success, which was substantial for behavioral outcomes involving complex human relationships and decisions. The model correctly classified 81.5% of cases, with particularly high specificity in predicting successful reintegration (84.7% correct for success cases) and reasonable sensitivity for predicting failure (77.5% correct for failure cases), indicating that the model could effectively identify fathers likely to successfully reintegrate and those requiring additional support, which had important implications for resource allocation and targeted intervention design.

Participation in structured intervention programs emerged as the strongest predictor of reintegration success (OR = 8.56, 95% CI: 3.35-21.88, $p < 0.001$), indicating that fathers who participated in reintegration programs were 8.56 times more likely to successfully reintegrate compared to those who did not participate, and this substantial odds ratio provided compelling evidence that formal, structured interventions were not merely beneficial but transformative, justifying investment in evidence-based fatherhood programs as a primary strategy. Economic support availability was similarly impactful (OR = 6.26, 95% CI: 2.79-14.04, $p < 0.001$), revealing that fathers who received economic assistance through employment facilitation, skills training, or financial support were 6.26 times more likely to successfully reintegrate, which underscored that poverty was not merely correlated with father absence but constituted a primary barrier that, when addressed, dramatically improved reintegration prospects, supporting Hypothesis 2 regarding economic constraints as significant barriers. Mother's willingness to cooperate demonstrated strong predictive power (OR = 4.79, 95% CI: 2.20-10.44, $p < 0.001$), indicating that reintegration was nearly five times more likely when mothers supported the process, highlighting that father reintegration was not an isolated father-child matter but required systemic family reconciliation and suggesting that interventions must include mothers as active partners rather than passive recipients.

Community acceptance significantly predicted success (OR = 1.19 per unit increase, $p < 0.001$), showing that for each unit increase in community acceptance score, the odds of successful reintegration increased by 19%, which emphasized the critical role of social capital and the need for community sensitization efforts to reduce stigma and create supportive environments for returning fathers. Legal awareness emerged as a significant facilitator (OR = 2.44, 95% CI: 1.45-4.11, $p = 0.001$), indicating that fathers who understood their parental rights and responsibilities were 2.44 times more likely to successfully reintegrate, suggesting that legal education programs could empower fathers and provide the knowledge necessary for navigating reintegration challenges. Conversely, several variables demonstrated significant barrier effects, including geographical distance (OR = 0.95, $p = 0.002$), where each additional kilometer from the child decreased reintegration odds by 5%, highlighting practical logistical challenges that required consideration in intervention planning, particularly for fathers who had migrated long distances for employment. Cultural stigma index showed negative effects (OR = 0.87, $p = 0.010$), where higher stigma scores decreased reintegration likelihood by 13% per unit increase, revealing that societal judgment and shame associated with father absence created psychological barriers that interventions needed to address through destigmatization campaigns and supportive rather than punitive approaches. The duration since separation negatively predicted success (OR = 0.91, $p = 0.012$), indicating that each additional year of absence decreased reintegration odds by 9%, suggesting that

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intervention timing was critical and that early intervention immediately following separation yielded better prospects than delayed attempts after relationships had completely deteriorated and children had adapted to father absence. Notably, father's age was not a significant predictor ($p = 0.105$), suggesting that reintegration potential existed across age groups and that interventions should not discriminate based on paternal age.

All assumptions for logistic regression were satisfied, including absence of multicollinearity (all VIF < 2.0), linearity of logit verified through Box-Tidwell tests (all interaction terms $p > 0.05$), adequate sample size with 11.1 events per predictor exceeding the minimum threshold of 10, and no influential outliers detected. These findings strongly supported Hypothesis 2 by identifying economic constraints, cultural attitudes (stigma), and lack of support systems (economic support, community acceptance) as significant barriers to reintegration, while simultaneously supporting Hypothesis 3 by demonstrating that culturally tailored programs (intervention participation), economic empowerment, community engagement, and family mediation (mother cooperation) significantly improved reintegration success. The practical implications were substantial: interventions should prioritize early engagement before relationships completely deteriorate, provide integrated services addressing economic, psychosocial, and legal dimensions simultaneously, actively involve mothers and communities as partners in the reintegration process, and create accessible programs that overcome geographical barriers through mobile outreach or technology-enabled connection, with the logistic regression results providing actionable, evidence-based guidance for policymakers and practitioners designing father reintegration strategies in Uganda that could enhance child discipline and future productivity by successfully returning fathers to active parenting roles.

CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively examined strategies for reintegrating absent fathers in Uganda to enhance child discipline and future productivity, and the findings provided robust evidence addressing all three specific objectives while confirming the research hypotheses. Regarding the first objective of assessing causes and patterns of father absence and their impact on child discipline, the study established that father absence in Uganda was characterized by prolonged duration averaging 5.72 years, minimal contact frequency of only 2.18 interactions per month, and low paternal involvement scores of 36.68% of optimal levels, with primary causes rooted in economic migration, relationship breakdown, and cultural acceptance of minimal paternal responsibility. The impact on child discipline was substantial and statistically significant, as evidenced by the strong negative correlation between duration of absence and discipline scores ($r = -0.624$, $p < 0.001$) and the particularly powerful relationship between paternal involvement and behavioral problems ($r = -0.698$, $p < 0.001$), with children from father-absent homes scoring significantly lower on discipline measures (Cohen's $d = 1.18$) and exhibiting moderate to high behavioral difficulties averaging 28.56 out of 50 on the behavioral problem scale, thereby confirming Hypothesis 1 that father absence was significantly related to poor child discipline outcomes.

Addressing the second objective of identifying barriers and facilitating factors affecting reintegration, the multivariate analyses revealed that economic constraints, cultural stigma, geographical distance, duration of separation, and lack of maternal cooperation constituted significant barriers, while economic support availability, participation in

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intervention programs, community acceptance, maternal willingness to cooperate, and legal awareness emerged as key facilitating factors, with the logistic regression demonstrating that fathers with economic support were 6.26 times more likely to successfully reintegrate and those participating in structured programs were 8.56 times more likely to succeed, thus confirming Hypothesis 2 that economic constraints, cultural attitudes, and lack of support systems were significant reintegration barriers.

For the third objective of developing culturally appropriate strategies for successful father reintegration, the study's multiple linear regression model explained 61.5% of variance in child discipline outcomes and identified that optimal reintegration strategies must simultaneously address paternal involvement quality (strongest predictor, $\beta = 0.498$), maintain regular contact even when co-residence was impossible, provide economic empowerment opportunities, strengthen maternal capacity through education and support, mobilize community and extended family support systems, implement early interventions before relationships completely deteriorated, and create structured programs that integrated psychosocial, economic, and legal components. The binary logistic regression model achieved 81.5% classification accuracy and demonstrated that culturally tailored interventions significantly improved reintegration success when they engaged mothers as active partners, addressed economic needs through skills training and employment facilitation, reduced cultural stigma through community sensitization, provided legal education to empower fathers with knowledge of rights and responsibilities, and offered accessible services that overcame geographical barriers, thereby confirming Hypothesis 3 that implementing culturally tailored father reintegration programs significantly improved paternal involvement, child discipline, and developmental outcomes. The regional variations revealed through ANOVA, particularly the significantly longer absence duration in Northern Uganda (7.18 years) compared to other regions, underscored the necessity for context-specific approaches that considered historical conflict, cultural norms, economic opportunities, and existing social structures when designing interventions. Collectively, the findings demonstrated that father absence in Uganda was not an inevitable social phenomenon but a remediable challenge that responded to comprehensive, evidence-based interventions addressing the interconnected economic, social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of paternal disengagement, and that successful reintegration yielded substantial benefits for child discipline, behavioral adjustment, and academic performance, which translated into enhanced human capital development critical for Uganda's Vision 2040 aspirations. The study concluded that reclaiming fatherhood in Uganda required moving beyond punitive approaches that blamed absent fathers toward supportive, empowering strategies that recognized fathers' challenges, built their capacity, facilitated their reconnection with children, and created enabling environments through economic opportunities, community acceptance, family mediation, and structured guidance, with such comprehensive approaches holding the potential to reverse the concerning trends in father absence and restore the critical paternal contribution to child socialization, discipline, and preparation for productive citizenship that traditional Ugandan society historically valued and that contemporary Uganda urgently needed to reclaim for its children's wellbeing and the nation's future prosperity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish Integrated Father Reintegration Centers Across Uganda's Four Regions: The government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, in partnership with civil society organizations and faith-based institutions, should establish regional Father Reintegration Centers that provide comprehensive, one-stop

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services including economic empowerment through skills training and employment facilitation, psychosocial counseling for fathers and family mediation involving mothers and children, legal education on parental rights and responsibilities, and parenting skills development.

Implement a National "Responsible Fatherhood" Campaign with Community-Level Engagement Strategies: The government should launch a comprehensive national awareness campaign utilizing radio, television, community dialogues, and social media platforms to shift cultural attitudes toward fatherhood, reduce stigma associated with absent fathers seeking to reintegrate, and promote positive masculinity that embraces active paternal involvement. This campaign should be complemented by community-level interventions that engage local leaders, religious institutions, and women's groups to create supportive environments for father reintegration, as the study demonstrated that community acceptance significantly predicted reintegration success (OR = 1.19) and that maternal cooperation increased success by 4.79 times.

Develop and Enforce a Supportive Legal and Policy Framework for Father Engagement: The Parliament of Uganda should enact comprehensive legislation that balances paternal accountability with support for reintegration, including establishing a Father Support Fund financed through national budget allocations and development partner contributions to provide economic assistance for skills training, small business start-up capital, and transportation costs for maintaining father-child contact, particularly for low-income fathers earning below the poverty line (as 41% of absent fathers in this study earned below 300,000 UGX monthly).

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