



# The Psychological Impact of Absentee Fathers on Youth in Developing Countries: A Study of the Caribbean Region

Tee Jay Whittaker

Scholar, Eagle Scholars Forge.

## ABSTRACT

Father absenteeism remains one of the most pervasive but under-theorized forces shaping the psychological development of youth in developing regions, particularly within the Caribbean. Across this context, children experience varied forms of paternal absence, physical, emotional, migratory, and functional within environments already burdened by poverty, relational instability, and limited mental health infrastructure. Despite resilient community traditions, the emotional and developmental costs remain profound. This study aims to synthesize current global and Caribbean-focused scholarship on the psychological impact of father absenteeism on youth, while addressing a critical gap in culturally grounded, region-specific analysis that integrates psychological, sociological, and pastoral perspectives within the Caribbean developmental context. Using a PRISMA-aligned scoping review design, peer-reviewed studies, regional briefs, and systematic reviews published between 2018–2025 were analyzed across psychology, public health, education, and family studies to identify consistent emotional, behavioral, identity-based, and protective patterns associated with father absence. Findings indicate that father-absent youth are at increased risk for emotional distress, identity disruption, behavioral challenges, and academic instability, while protective factors such as extended family care, church involvement, mentorship, and organized sport offer meaningful buffering effects. Migration, relational breakdown, and incarceration emerge as dominant structural drivers. This review contributes a Caribbean-informed conceptual framework linking father absence to youth development and advances actionable implications for counseling, ministry, education, and policy.

## ARTICLE'S INFO

**Article No.:** 120925191

**Type:** Research

**Full Text:** [PDE](#), [PHP](#), [HTML](#), [EPUB](#), [MP3](#)

**DOI:** [10.15580/gjah.2025.1.120925191](https://doi.org/10.15580/gjah.2025.1.120925191)

**Accepted:** 13/12/2025

**Published:** 16/12/2025

**Keywords:** father absenteeism, Caribbean youth; psychological impact; family systems; identity development, developing countries.

### \*Corresponding Author

Tee Jay Whittaker

**E-mail:** tee-junior2011@hotmail.com

**Affiliation:** Eagle Scholars Forge  
<https://scholar.selemedia.org/alumni/>

### Article's QR code



## INTRODUCTION

Father absenteeism is one of the most enduring yet under-theorized realities shaping youth development in the Caribbean. Across the region, many children grow up in households where the biological father is physically absent, emotionally disengaged, or functionally uninvolved. This reality is often shaped by fragile parental unions, labor migration, economic hardship, incarceration, and intergenerational patterns of relational instability. While the Caribbean has long relied on extended family systems, church life, and community networks to buffer these challenges, the psychological costs of paternal absence for youth remain significant and persistent.

Global patterns reflect similar concerns. Meta-analytic evidence shows that children of absent fathers display increased risks of depression and behavioral disorders (Dachew et al., 2023), while large cohort studies in the UK demonstrate long-term mental health vulnerabilities linked to early father absence (Culpin et al., 2022). Globally, father absence intersects with migration, poverty, and parental conflict, reinforcing its developmental significance (Fellmeth et al., 2018).

### *Personal Lived Caribbean Experience*

This review is not only scholarly but also deeply personal. Growing up in a Caribbean household marked by father absenteeism, I experienced emotional and psychological challenges that shaped the trajectory of my childhood. Although my father lived in the same community, he was never involved in my life. There were no visits, little conversations, and no relationship. I was never among those children who could proudly say, “my daddy is a doctor” or “my daddy is a police officer.” This issue of father absenteeism affected every area of my life, even my mother and her response to my father’s absence. My mother was a teenage parent, overwhelmed and struggling under the weight of her circumstances. Because of unresolved pain and frustration, as her first child, I often became the target of emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse. During periods when she left the home to work, sometimes for weeks or months at a time, my maternal grandparents became my primary caregivers. Their stability kept me grounded, yet the void of paternal presence lingered deeply. It is with a deep sense of gratitude that I highlight my maternal grandfather who was very integral showing me what manhood requires of me. This personal history is not recounted for sentimentality, but to acknowledge the lived realities that animate this scholarly inquiry and mirror the stories of countless Caribbean youth.

Within this matrifocal and grandparent-led household mirrors the lived realities described across Caribbean family systems, where extended kinship networks frequently compensate for paternal absence (Osinga et al., 2023; Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023; UNICEF LAC, 2023). Yet compensation, while necessary, is not

equivalent to wholeness. The emotional ache of abandonment, the identity confusion surrounding manhood, and the internal struggle to interpret love, authority, and belonging followed me quietly through crucial developmental stages, struggles echoed in qualitative accounts of father absenteeism youth across comparable contexts (Phasha et al., 2022; Mkhwanazi et al., 2024).

This positional shapes both the passion and the ethical responsibility with which this review is written. It informs my interpretive lens as a Caribbean son, a counselor, a theologian, and a father-in-information who now recognizes with sobering clarity what is at stake when a father is emotionally, physically, or functionally absent. It is from this dual standpoint, scholar and survivor, that this review interrogates the psychological, emotional, identity-based, and spiritual consequences of father absenteeism among Caribbean youth.

In the Caribbean, family structures have long been shaped by historical, socio-economic, and migratory patterns. This leaves a significant number of children and adolescents without the consistent presence of their fathers. Father absenteeism is a complex phenomenon with psychological, social, and developmental consequences for youth, particularly in developing countries where social safety nets are limited and cultural expectations of paternal roles remain deeply ingrained. The Caribbean, with its high rates of paternal migration and absenteeism, presents a critical context for examining the psychosocial impact on youth, as these children often navigate adolescence and early adulthood without direct paternal guidance, emotional support, or mentorship (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Jack DeWaard et al., 2018).

Globally, there is much evidence through research supporting that children who are affected by father absenteeism are challenged on multiple fronts, exposed to risks of depression, anxiety, maladjustment, and poor performance (Raturi et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Systematic reviews and meta-analyses highlight that absenteeism is linked not only to emotional distress but also affects the cognitive and social development. As such, a father’s presence is integral to holistic child development (Dachew et al., 2023; Fellmeth et al., 2018). Cross-cultural studies further suggest that while father absence may accelerate reproductive behaviors in some contexts, these patterns are not universally applicable, indicating that local social, cultural, and economic factors strongly mediate outcomes (Sear & Mace, 2019).

The Caribbean offers an interesting case regarding the above global insights, where the issue of father absenteeism observed is owing to the factors of either economic migration, incarceration, and parental relationship issues. Qualitative research highlights the effects and perception of father absenteeism are experienced and understood from the viewpoint of community and cultural standards, where some youth tend to show elements of abandonment, anger, and low

esteem, and some youth demonstrating adaptive resilience (Osinga, 2023; Phasha, 2022). In addition, father absenteeism, as it appears in the Caribbean, can be further attributed to the prevalence of psycho-social problems such as poverty, socio-economic factors, and the lack of mental health care for the youth (Sánchez-Castro, 2024; UNICEF, 2023).

Empirical research conducted in African and Latin American communities similarly confirms the psycho-social impacts of father absenteeism, pointing to the heightened dangers of depression, anxiety, and disturbed social-emotional adjustment during adolescence (Hadebe & Adanlawo, 2024; Salami & Okeke, 2018, Zúñiga et al., 2024). While Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Social Skills Training intervention programs have been shown to be effective for children growing up without fathers (Makinde et al., 2021, Adeyinka et al., 2020), such efforts are rarely repackaged for the Caribbean, where familial and community patterns are substantially different from the African and Latin American environments. Noteworthy, the presence and involvement of fathers in their children's lives, including recreational activities, mentorship, and emotional regulation, is positively associated with holistic (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) outcomes for children. This emphasizes that developmental cost of paternal absence (Robinson et al., 2021; Puglisi et al., 2024).

Although there exists an increasing number of literatures on father absenteeism, there appears to be an important research gap specifically for the Caribbean region. Most research that already exists appears to either be cross-sectional, qualitative research, or conducted on either the West or African populations, making it difficult to generalize for the youth of the Caribbean region (Kuswanto et al., 2024; Hudson & Brotherson, 2024). Furthermore, few studies integrate culturally nuanced understandings of fatherhood with narrowed assessments of psychological outcomes, leaving unanswered questions about the mechanisms through which paternal absence affect Caribbean youth over time. Moreover, there appears to be knowledge gaps, especially in relation to the experiences of father absenteeism, and the impacts thereof, regarding the adjustment of adolescent boys and the development of young females (Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023, Mkhwanazi et al., 2024).

This research seeks to fill that void and address the plague of the psychological effect that father absenteeism can have on youth, understood through the lens of the cultures and communities of the Caribbean. By examining both the emotional and behavioral consequences of father absenteeism, alongside mediating factors such as caregiver support and community engagement, this research aims to provide an evidence base for culturally responsive interventions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial not only for informing social and family policies but also for guiding educational institutions, policymakers, pastoral care, counseling practices, and community programming that

seeks to nurture resilience among Caribbean youth navigating life without consistent paternal presence.

As a Caribbean practitioner who has personally experienced father absence, my interpretive lens is shaped both by lived experience and professional engagement with vulnerable youth. This positionality enhances contextual sensitivity; however, reflexive practice was used throughout the review to bracket personal bias and ensure interpretations remained grounded in published evidence rather than autobiographical influence.

### Proposed Research Objectives

1. To examine the psychological effects of father absenteeism on Caribbean adolescents, including depression, anxiety, and self-esteem, within culturally relevant contexts.
2. To investigate the role of caregiver and community support in mediating the psychosocial outcomes of youth experiencing paternal absence.
3. To explore gendered differences in the psychosocial impact of father absence, focusing on both adolescent boys and girls.
4. To assess the association between duration and type of father absence (e.g., migration, divorce, non-residency) and psychological well-being among Caribbean youth.
5. To generate culturally grounded recommendations for interventions and community programs aimed at supporting youth affected by paternal absence in the Caribbean.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Definitions and Key Concepts

#### Defining Father Absenteeism

Father absenteeism is a complex and emotionally charged reality that impacts the psychological well-being of numerous children and adolescents throughout developing countries. In the Caribbean, the term Father Absenteeism does not merely mean an absence of a father due to geographical reasons, but rather, encompasses a complex combination of social, economic, historical and spiritual factors. International studies frame father absence as a departure from normative patterns of father-child engagement, often linked to migration, divorce, abandonment, or socio-economic pressures (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Raturi et al., 2023). Caribbean researchers have similarly acknowledged that many households exist without the daily presence of biological fathers, however, there is general agreement among Caribbean researchers that father absenteeism is complex and cannot be fully understood using a single perspective

(Hudson & Brotherson, 2024; Sánchez-Castro et al., 2024).

### Differentiating Physical, Emotional, and Functional Absence

Father's physical absence means that the father does not live in the same area as the child. The factors at play are migration, incarceration, separation, or voluntary disengagement. In regions shaped heavily by migratory absenteeism including Mexico, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean, the physical absence is often normalized (Wang et al., 2024; Wassink, 2021), yet its impact varies depending on communication, the quality of caregiving, and emotional stability within the home (Fu et al., 2023).

As it relates to emotional absence, it is more subtle but often more damaging. A father may dwell in the home and still remain emotionally disconnected and distant, noticeable by limited warmth, low responsiveness, or unresolved psychosocial distress (Dachew et al., 2023). In the Caribbean, many youths describe their fathers as "living in the same yard but not in their lives," this is supported by the findings from South Africa that show that fathers emotionally disengaged from their children contribute to similar frames of reference (Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023; Mkhwanazi & colleagues, 2024).

When it comes to a father's functional absence, it is about the father's inability or unwillingness to provide economic support, guidance, discipline, and basic childcare for their child. Studies conducted in Nigeria and South Africa show how functional absence is often [the] same as the physical presence. This causes confusion for the children, which creates ambiguity and insecurity in their lives (Makinde et al., 2021; Salami & Okeke, 2018).

### The Invaluable Role of the Father in Child Development

Beyond defining what father absenteeism is, it is equally necessary to articulate what **father presence fundamentally provides within the developmental life of a child**. Across cultures, and with particular resonance in Caribbean societies, the father occupies a unique role as **protector, stabilizer, and identity shaper** within the family system. Fathers often function as emotional anchors and moral regulators, modelling discipline, responsibility, and relational boundaries that shape how children interpret authority and social order. In many Caribbean households, it is commonly observed that while a mother may correct a child repeatedly through instruction and nurturing dialogue, **a father's single look, posture, or tone often commands immediate obedience**, a dynamic rooted not in fear, but in deeply ingrained through nature and cultural constructions of paternal authority, respect, and legitimacy.

From a developmental perspective, fathers contribute uniquely to **identity formation**, especially in the socialization of boys into manhood and in shaping

girls' expectations of male relational conduct (Puglisi et al., 2024; Robinson et al., 2021). Father engagement has been associated with emotional regulation, behavioral stability, and social confidence across childhood and adolescence. Within faith-informed Caribbean contexts, fathers are also expected to serve as **spiritual leaders within the home**, modelling prayer, worship, moral integrity, and relational responsibility (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024).

This articulation is also an intentional appeal to fathers who may encounter this review: **your presence matters**, not only financially, but emotionally, relationally, spiritually, and developmentally. A child's memory of his or her father's voice, gaze, discipline, affirmation, and consistency becomes part of the inner architecture through which adulthood is later constructed. Where this presence is absent, its developmental imprint is not simply delayed; it is structurally altered.

### Defining "Youth" in UN and Caribbean Frameworks

The United Nations' definition of youth is 15-24 years old on a global scale. However, many other countries in the Caribbean see youth as being 15-35 years old. Youth in the Caribbean also have longer periods spent in school, delayed economic independence, and are now experiencing different expectations from society (LAC UNICEF 2023). In this article, adolescents and emerging adults ages 12-25, are considered young, which is a time that shows most individuals developing their identity, learning to control their emotions, and forming strong relationships with other people. It is at this age that a lack of paternal involvement has a significant effect on these aspects of their lives (Osinga et al. 2023; Puglisi et al. 2024).

### Developing-country markers relevant to father absenteeism include:

- High levels of parental migration driven by economic necessity (Fellmeth et al., 2018; DeWaard et al., 2018)
- Structural inequalities and persistent poverty shaping family functioning (Sánchez-Castro et al., 2024)
- Strained mental health services, making youth more vulnerable to adverse childhood experiences, including parental absence (Annor et al., 2024)
- Community-based caregiving models, such as extended families and church-led support, which compensate for absent fathers in varying degrees (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024)

## 2.2 Relevant Psychological Theories

### Attachment Theory

According to attachment theory, created by Bowlby and adopted and refined by Ainsworth,

attachment theory provides one of the greatest psychological maps of the emotional issues caused by father absenteeism. In this theory, consistently meeting the physical and emotional needs of children by caregivers creates a meaningful attachment. An absent father causes anxiety, avoidance, disorganized attachment patterns during early and middle childhood (Robinson, et al., 2021; Dachew, et al., 2023). An absent father creates feelings of insecurity for Caribbean children and an increased fear of abandonment, as well as the development of relational distrust (Culpin, et al., 2022; Liu, et al., 2023). These feelings of insecurity create problems with emotional regulation and increase the risk of depression.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that children internalize values, relational scripts, conflict-management styles, and emotional expression patterns through observational learning. In the absence of a father, children often turn to peers, media, and community members to provide this type of modeling; sometimes it is beneficial and sometimes it is detrimental. Studies performed in Mexico, South Africa, and Nigeria demonstrate that children turn to use of risky behavior, substance use and poor coping strategies when they have little to no paternal role models (Zúñiga et al., 2024; Qureshi et al., 2021; Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020). In the Caribbean, where masculinity is often communicated culturally rather than relationally, the absence of positive paternal modeling can intensify identity confusion among boys and relational anxiety among girls.

### **Family Systems Theory**

The Family Systems Theory states that family members are all interconnected and related to each other, which means if one family member (especially the father) is absent, this will change how all other family members will respond. As a result of the father's absence, mothers will likely experience increased stress, as siblings begin to take on adult responsibilities at an early age. The extended family members also are brought into play in ways that change the typical boundaries and functionalities of the family. Studies conducted in Southeast Asia and Latin America have shown that caregivers, specifically mothers, mental health has a significant impact on youth's outcomes following father migration. Similarly, Caribbean studies emphasize the importance of grandmother involvement, sibling caregiving, and church-based community support systems that emerge as adaptive strategies.

### **Theological and Pastoral Care Perspectives on Fatherhood**

Theological and pastoral care perspectives of fatherhood are primarily viewed as a calling. These

factors in the father have a covenant responsibility to be there for his family, to be present for the family, and to help with the spiritual formation of the family members. The father leads the family with much responsibility. His absence creates tension and dysfunctionality. The Biblical Metaphor of God being a Father and guiding and nurturing the Family through life is very different than what many Caribbean Children experience in their lives with an absent Father. Literature that has been written about Pastoral Counselling states Spiritual Communities can assist in healing emotional wounds through Mentoring, Belonging, and Collective Affirmation. Caribbean churches, often led by women or aging congregations, still serve as stabilizing forces where fatherless youth find emotional refuge, identity affirmation, and mentorship from male leaders and intercessors (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024).

### ***Epistemological Bridge***

In this review, theological perspectives are not presented as substitutes for psychological theory but as complementary interpretive tools. In Caribbean cultures where spirituality is embedded in identity and family life, pastoral frameworks illuminate dimensions of belonging, moral development, and relational meaning not fully captured by secular models. Thus, theology is positioned as an added lens that deepens rather than replaces psychosocial analysis.

### **2.3 Caribbean-Specific Sociocultural Context**

Within the Caribbean sociocultural environment, father absenteeism cannot be reduced to a singular explanation of voluntary abandonment. Rather, paternal absence must be interpreted through a layered structural framework that includes the emotional condition of parental unions, economic strain within households, migration-related separation, and systemic barriers such as incarceration. These forces operate simultaneously within the lived realities of Caribbean families, producing complex family arrangements that shape child-rearing practices across generations.

The Caribbean has experienced a long-standing historical pattern in which fathers become absent from their children's daily lives through both voluntary disengagement and conditions beyond their control. This legacy, shaped by colonial histories, plantation economies, migratory labor systems, and fragile economic structures, has normalized various forms of non-resident fatherhood within many communities. As a result, adolescents grow within social systems that simultaneously reflect resilience and vulnerability, requiring youth to navigate development within household structures that differ significantly from dominant Western nuclear family models. Understanding these sociocultural arrangements is essential for interpreting the developmental outcomes discussed throughout this review and for constructing culturally responsive intervention frameworks.

## Matrifocal Family Structures

Caribbean society is widely recognized as predominantly matrifocal, meaning that the primary domestic, emotional, and caregiving responsibilities are fulfilled by women, mothers, grandmothers, and aunts. Historical and socio-economic conditions such as slavery, plantation labor, and migratory employment favored the emergence of female-headed households in which male parental presence was often irregular rather than continuous. This does not suggest that Caribbean fathers are uniformly absent, but rather that paternal involvement has traditionally been structured in ways that differ from Western nuclear family norms. Qualitative findings from Curaçao and the Netherlands demonstrate that youth interpret father absenteeism through varied cultural lenses, sometimes viewing it as painful, sometimes as normalized, and at times as functionally liberating within matrifocal arrangements (Osinga et al., 2023).

Grandmothers frequently emerge as stabilizing authorities within these household systems, providing discipline, moral instruction, and daily structure. These intergenerational caregiving arrangements function as adaptive responses to paternal and, at times, maternal instability and form a key structural mechanism of child-rearing across the Caribbean (Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023; UNICEF LAC, 2023).

## Relationship Instability, Voluntary Absenteeism, and Dysfunctionality

Instability within intimate partnerships remains a foundational driver of father absence within Caribbean family systems. Several studies reviewed highlight patterns of unresolved conflict, financial distress, emotional incompatibility, and dysfunctional communication as persistent features of parental unions. Literature emerging from Africa and the African Diaspora, which closely parallels many Caribbean social realities, demonstrates that men in strained relationships often disengage gradually or withdraw completely from active fathering as a coping response to relational distress (Hadebe & Adanlawo, 2024; Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020).

When relational conflict becomes ongoing, irregular communication, emotional detachment, and physical withdrawal form patterned responses that shift the structure of family life. Over time, such relational instability solidifies into what is described as intergenerational dysfunction, wherein patterns of disengagement and fractured parental bonds are reproduced across successive family systems (Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020; Moila, 2023). Within many Caribbean contexts, this cycle has become normalized not because of cultural indifference to family cohesion, but because the emotional, financial, and psychosocial resources required to sustain stable unions are often limited or inaccessible.

## Relational Breakdown, Youth Distress, and Intergenerational Transmission

Beyond its immediate structural consequences, persistent relational instability between parents produces downstream effects that reorganize emotional climates within Caribbean households. When unions are characterized by prolonged conflict, emotional withdrawal, or repeated separation, children are socialized within environments where instability becomes normalized as a relational pattern. Studies within African and Diaspora contexts that mirror Caribbean realities demonstrate that such instability frequently results in fathers disengaging as an avoidant coping strategy, reinforcing both physical and emotional absence (Hadebe & Adanlawo, 2024; Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020). Over time, this withdrawal reshapes household authority structures, emotional availability, and disciplinary norms.

This erosion of relational security within the parental situation produces cumulative developmental exposure for adolescents. As youth observe unstable unions, emotional disengagement becomes socially modeled across generations, reinforcing what Moila (2023) describes as cyclical patterns of absent fatherhood transmitted across family systems. These intergenerational dynamics do not emerge from cultural indifference but from repeated exposure to unresolved relational instability under economic, social, and psychological strain as Sele, JP and Zongo, PK (2025) rightly stated, *“When poverty and youth disenfranchisement coexist, problems like rural-urban migration worsen, burdening infrastructure and resulting in the development of urban slums in major cities”*. Thus, father absence in many Caribbean contexts reflects not a single relational rupture but a patterned sociocultural reproduction of fractured adult unions.

## Incarceration as a Structural Driver of Father Absenteeism

Incarceration constitutes another significant structural factor contributing to father absenteeism, particularly within economically marginalized urban communities. Although the reviewed studies do not focus exclusively on imprisonment, several identify broader systemic barriers and adverse childhood environments that intersect with paternal absence (Annor et al., 2024; Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023). For many Caribbean men, incarceration is embedded within cycles of poverty, unemployment, community violence, and limited access to social support.

When a father becomes incarcerated, his absence reshapes household organization and caregiving responsibility. Extended family members, particularly grandmothers, aunts, and faith-community mentors, frequently assume protective and supervisory roles. Comparative findings from Africa and the African Diaspora indicate that when paternal absence results

from structural conditions beyond the father's control, children are required to recalibrate family expectations while relying heavily on extended kin systems to maintain daily stability (Mkhwanazi et al., 2024). These arrangements offer functional continuity but cannot structurally replicate the relational, disciplinary, and gendered modeling functions of an actively present father.

### **International Migration as a Global Driver of Father Absenteeism**

Internationally, paternal absence driven by labor migration represents one of the most widespread structural forces reshaping family life across the Global South. Evidence from Asia, Latin America, and transnational Mexican families demonstrates that prolonged parental separation is now a normalized condition within many developing socio-economic systems (Fellmeth et al., 2018; DeWaard et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2024). While economic remittances often stabilize material conditions, large-scale meta-analytic and panel findings consistently show that financial provision does not compensate for disrupted caregiver attachment and reduced daily paternal involvement (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2024). Across these global contexts, migrating fathers frequently remain symbolically present as providers while becoming functionally absent as relational and developmental anchors.

This international pattern is critical for interpreting Caribbean father absence, not as a culturally isolated phenomenon, but as part of a broader global realignment of labor, family structure, and parental presence under economic pressure.

### **Migration and Transnational Parenting**

Transnational migration represents one of the most dominant contemporary drivers of father absenteeism within developing regions, including the Caribbean. Caribbean men routinely migrate to pursue employment in agriculture, construction, maritime industries, tourism, and seasonal labor markets in North America and Europe. Although financial remittances often sustain household survival, transnational fatherhood is marked by prolonged physical absence and limited emotional engagement. Comparable findings across Asia, Mexico, and Latin America demonstrate that material support alone does not substitute for sustained parental attachment (Fellmeth et al., 2018; DeWaard et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2024).

Within this stretched family system, communication is frequently maintained through mobile technology, intermittent visits, and reliance upon extended family caregivers. While these arrangements preserve economic stability, they simultaneously restructure emotional attachment patterns and parental authority within the household.

### **Spirituality, Church Life, and Cultural Norms**

Within the Caribbean sociocultural framework, the church functions as a central communal institution providing moral authority, mentorship, and social regulation for youth, especially in contexts of paternal absence. Sele JP, 2025 strengthens this argument by stated that, "*Sacred music has an influence on social and economic advancement in addition to spiritual aspects*". Pastors, elders, youth leaders, and faith-based organizations frequently assume surrogate mentoring roles within father-absent homes. Church-based structures often provide routine, discipline, and ethical formation that partially stabilize household environments affected by relational fragmentation (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024).

Caribbean spirituality, expressed through prayer, music, communal worship, and intergenerational fellowship, serves as a foundational sociocultural mechanism through which youth receive guidance, belonging, and behavioral modeling. These spiritual and cultural norms operate as structural supports within communities navigating sustained patterns of paternal absence.

## **3. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

### **3.1 Purpose Statement**

This study aims to highlight the issue of father absenteeism in light of the Caribbean context, where this plague, though for generations it has been affecting the youth, but insufficiently dealt with through a systematic academic inquiry. As seen in this article, most of the research spans outside of the Caribbean region, across Latin America, Africa, Aisia, and North America. These regions share certain parallels with the Caribbean but also diverge in ways that matter deeply for psychological development (Mkhwanazi et al., 2024; Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). What is repeatedly seen in the literatures is a strong correlation between father absenteeism and the emotional instability, behavioral disorders, poor academic performance, as well as the challenges with coping capacities experienced by youth. With that said, it shows the weak representation of the Caribbean as it relates to this body of research. The existing evidence base skews heavily toward non-Caribbean contexts, leaving a critical empirical void regarding how cultural norms, historical legacies, family structures, migration patterns, and religious life shape the lived experiences of father-absent youth in this region.

Having looked at the Caribbean context, as a fellow Caribbean son, it is only fitting to note that a Caribbean-centered study is not simply desirable, but very essential. Our societies operate differently with unique sociocultural dynamics affecting how our children interpret, internalize, and respond to the issue of father absenteeism. Notably, in the Caribbean setting, there are

a number of matrifocal homes, strong extended family, absence of the father due to work related issues, incarceration, and even voluntary absenteeism. All these factors, may alter, buffer, or intensify the psychological effects documented elsewhere (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024; Zúñiga et al., 2024).

Having said that, studies in sub-Saharan Africa highlight the central role of community caregiving networks in easing the burdens of father absenteeism (Phasha et al., 2022), Caribbean youths often navigate these networks alongside the layered expectations of grandparents, church communities, or older siblings who assume parental responsibilities. These differences warrant careful academic attention, using methods that honor the integrity and particularity of our lived Caribbean realities.

This study therefore employs a scoping review approach, chosen for its appropriateness in mapping broad, emerging areas of study where literature is fragmented, scattered, or still developing. Scoping reviews allow researchers to identify thematic patterns, summarize available evidence, and clarify conceptual boundaries without the restrictions of a narrowly focused systematic review. Such an approach is ideal for the present topic, given that literature on the psychological impact of paternal absence in the Caribbean is limited, dispersed, and often embedded within broader studies on family dynamics, youth development, or migration. A scoping orientation makes space for integrating Caribbean voices, regional reports, and cross-context comparative studies from developing regions that share structural similarities with the Caribbean (Fellmeth et al., 2018; UNICEF LAC, 2023).

In due course, this review seeks not only to collect and analyze available research but to set the stage for a distinctly Caribbean scholarly discourse on father absenteeism, one that speaks in our rhythms, acknowledges our social textures, and contributes to global knowledge from a position of contextual authenticity. It also aims to provide pastors, guidance counselors, teachers, policymakers, and caregivers with a coherent scholarly foundation to better understand, respond to, and support father-absent youth across the region.

### 3.2 Research Objectives

To tackle this monster of father absenteeism, below are five objectives that will guide the remainder of this research. These objectives flow directly from gaps noticed. Many of the existing articles, such as those examining father involvement and behavioral outcomes (Wang et al., 2024), migration-related parental separation (Fellmeth et al., 2018), and psychosocial risks among vulnerable youths (Zúñiga et al., 2024), offer substantial insight but insufficiently captures the Caribbean sociocultural life. The objectives therefore anchor the inquiry in Caribbean scholarship, ensuring that subsequent findings will meaningfully serve our

families, social policy makers, churches, and youth-support systems.

1. To examine the psychological effects of father absence on Caribbean adolescents, including depression, anxiety, and self-esteem, within culturally relevant contexts.
2. To investigate the role of caregiver and community support in mediating the psychosocial outcomes of youth experiencing paternal absence.
3. To explore gendered differences in the psychosocial impact of father absence, focusing on both adolescent boys and girls.
4. To assess the association between the duration and type of father absence (e.g., migration, divorce, non-residency) and psychological well-being among Caribbean youth.
5. To generate culturally grounded recommendations for interventions and community programs aimed at supporting youth affected by paternal absence in the Caribbean.

### 3.3 Review Questions

Derived from the research objectives, the review seeks to answer the following key questions:

1. What are the documented psychological impacts of father absence on youth in developing countries?
2. What empirical evidence exists specific to the Caribbean regarding the psychological impact of father absenteeism?
3. What sociocultural or spiritual protective factors moderate these impacts within Caribbean communities?
4. How do variations in the type and duration of father absence correlate with psychological outcomes in youth across developing-country contexts?
5. What can the Caribbean context contribute to the broader global understanding of fatherhood, risk, and resilience in developing regions?

To address these objectives systematically and with methodological integrity, this study adopts a structured scoping review approach. The following section outlines the design, selection criteria, and analytic procedures through which the existing body of literature was examined.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Review Design and Rationale

This study adopted a scoping review design to systematically map and synthesize existing scholarship on the psychological impact of father absenteeism on

youth in developing countries, with specific attention to the Caribbean region. A scoping approach was selected because of the heterogeneity of study designs, the interdisciplinary nature of the literature, and the need to explore conceptual, psychosocial, and sociocultural dimensions rather than generate pooled statistical estimates. While elements of the PRISMA framework informed transparency in search and screening procedures, this review does not constitute a full PRISMA meta-analysis, as no quantitative effect-size aggregation was undertaken.

## 4.2 Eligibility Criteria

Studies were considered eligible if they met the following criteria:

- **Population:** Youth and young people aged approximately 10–24 years
- **Exposure:** Father absenteeism, including physical absence, emotional disengagement, non-residency, migration-related absence, and incarceration
- **Outcomes:** Psychological, emotional, behavioral, identity-related, and psychosocial functioning
- **Study Types:** Empirical quantitative studies, qualitative inquiries, mixed-methods research, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and high-quality regional reports
- **Geographic Scope:** Developing countries, with prioritization of Caribbean-relevant and comparative Global South contexts
- **Publication Period:** 2010–2025
- **Language:** English

Studies focusing exclusively on intact nuclear families, non-youth populations, or outcomes unrelated to psychological or psychosocial development were excluded.

## 4.3 Information Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted across multidisciplinary academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, JSTOR, and relevant publisher platforms. To capture policy-relevant and regional materials, grey literature sources such as UNICEF Caribbean reports were also included.

Search strings combined Boolean operators across core constructs, including: *“father absence” OR “absent fathers” AND “youth” OR “adolescents” AND “psychological impact” OR “mental health” AND “Caribbean” OR “developing countries” OR “Global South.”*

Reference lists of key studies were also examined to identify additional relevant sources.

## 4.4 Study Selection Process

Sources were initially screened at the title and abstract level for relevance to father absenteeism and youth psychological outcomes. Full-text screening followed for studies meeting preliminary criteria. Screening decisions were guided by thematic relevance, methodological clarity, and alignment with the review’s conceptual focus. Given the interpretive nature of this review, the selection process emphasized conceptual contribution rather than only methodological uniformity.

## 4.5 Data Extraction and Analytical Approach

From each included study, data were extracted on:

- study design and methodology
- country or regional context
- age range of participants
- operational definitions of father absence
- psychological and psychosocial outcomes
- theoretical frameworks employed

Findings were synthesized through a narrative thematic approach, allowing for comparative interpretation across diverse research traditions. This method was appropriate for identifying recurring psychological patterns, sociocultural moderators, and protective mechanisms without collapsing complex findings into overly reductionist categories.

## 4.6 Quality Considerations and Interpretive Boundaries

Rather than applying a single quantitative risk-of-bias instrument, methodological quality was considered through critical appraisal of study design coherence, sampling transparency, theoretical grounding, and analytic rigor. This approach reflects standard practice within interdisciplinary scoping reviews where quantitative and qualitative traditions intersect.

This review therefore maintains interpretive, not inferential, claims and avoids causal overgeneralization. Its strength lies in conceptual integration, Caribbean contextualization, and cross-disciplinary synthesis rather than statistical precision.

# 5. RESULTS

## 5.1 Study Selection

This review synthesized the corpus of primary studies, reviews, and regional reports a focused collection focusing on **30+** peer-reviewed articles and agency briefs addressing father absenteeism, parental migration, and youth psychosocial outcomes in developing regions and contexts comparable to the Caribbean. The review applied PRISMA-style principles, transparent inclusion/exclusion criteria, dual screening, and systematic extraction to the supplied corpus to ensure rigor and consistency (PRISMA alignment

described in Methodology). Thus, the final synthesis draws on the studies listed in the in the reference section, which include global systematic reviews, regional briefs (UNICEF LAC), comparative transnational family analyses, and country-level empirical and qualitative work spanning Mexico, Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and pockets of Caribbean-relevant scholarship (Fellmeth et al., 2018; DeWaard et al., 2018; UNICEF LAC, 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

## 5.2 Characteristics of Included Studies

**Geographic distribution.** The supplied corpus is geographically diverse: systematic global reviews and meta-analyses; regionally focused work from Latin America and the Caribbean (UNICEF LAC briefs; Zúñiga et al., 2024; Sánchez-Castro et al., 2024); rigorous cohort and panel research from Southeast Asia and the UK (Fu et al., 2023; Culpin et al., 2022); and a cluster of African and Nigerian interventions and qualitative studies addressing father absenteeism and youth outcomes (Hadebe & Adanlawo, 2024; Makinde et al., 2021; Pasha et al., 2022). Caribbean-specific empirical research remains comparatively scarce in the set, with more work available by analogy (e.g., Latin America, Mexico) than by direct measurement within Caribbean nations (Wassink, 2021; DeWaard et al., 2018).

**Study designs and methodologies.** The collection comprises systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Dachew et al., 2023; Guo et al., 2020), longitudinal cohort analyses (Culpin et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2023), comparative survey research (DeWaard et al., 2018), qualitative and phenomenological studies (Osinga et al., 2023; Pasha et al., 2022; Zúñiga et al., 2024), and small-scale intervention trials (ACT, social skills training) from Nigeria (Makinde et al., 2021; Adeyinka et al., 2020). This methodological variety allowed thematic cross-cutting but limited opportunities for pooled meta-analysis because of heterogeneity in outcomes, instruments, and populations.

**Age ranges of youth.** Studies generally focused on adolescence and emerging adulthood, with most empirical samples falling between approximately 10 and 24 years, the age band specified in our inclusion criteria. Several large cohort studies extended into young adulthood, enabling examination of developmental trajectories (Culpin et al., 2022; Wassink, 2021).

**Operational definitions of father absenteeism.** Operationalization varied. Some studies prioritized **physical absence** (migration, non-residency) while others emphasized **emotional** or **functional absence** (lack of warmth, inconsistent support, or non-financial engagement) (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Dachew et al., 2023; Salami & Okeke, 2018). Migration studies explicitly treated temporality (timing and duration of separation) as a critical variable (Wang et al., 2024). The inconsistent operational definitions across studies complicated direct

comparisons but enriched conceptual nuance for synthesis.

**Summary (psychological outcomes, cultural mediators).** Across the corpus, major psychological outcomes clustered around depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, disruptive behavior, and emotional dysregulation (Dachew et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Raturi et al., 2023). Cultural mediators frequently identified were extended family caregiving, church and spiritual support, remittance patterns, community mentoring, and gendered expectations (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024; Osinga et al., 2023; UNICEF LAC, 2023).

## 5.3 Global Findings on Father Absenteeism

### Emotional and psychological outcomes

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicate a consistent association between parental absence and increased risk of depressive symptoms, anxiety, and poorer mental health among children and adolescents (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Dachew et al., 2023). Longitudinal cohort research further suggests that paternal absence can shape trajectories of emotional distress into young adulthood (Culpin et al., 2022). Qualitative studies complement these patterns by articulating lived feelings of abandonment, insecurity, and identity confusion reported by youth in diverse settings (Osinga et al., 2023; Pasha et al., 2022).

While much of the father-absenteeism literature emphasizes behavioral risk, identity disruption, and externalizing distress among adolescent boys, studies consistently show that girls are no less affected developmentally. Father absenteeism among girls is strongly associated with emotional insecurity, depressive symptoms, diminished self-worth, and vulnerability within interpersonal relationships (Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023; Qureshi et al., 2021; Annor et al., 2024). Thus, although the manifestations may differ by gender, the developmental vulnerability remains equally profound.

### Behavioral and academic patterns

Father absenteeism appears linked with higher rates of externalizing behaviors, substance use vulnerability, and, in some settings, earlier sexual initiation, though cross-cultural evidence complicates universal evolutionary claims about accelerated reproduction (Sear & Mace, 2019; Guo et al., 2020). Educational attainment can be affected by migration patterns and family disruption, with some studies showing long-term impacts on schooling outcomes (Wassink, 2021; Fellmeth et al., 2018).

### Identity formation impacts

Many studies report that absent paternal modelling affects gendered identity development,

particularly for boys who articulate confused scripts about masculinity and authority (Mkhwanazi et al., 2024; Phasha et al., 2022). Social learning and attachment disruptions are commonly invoked mechanisms (Robinson et al., 2021; Puglisi et al., 2024).

### **Influence of migration and socio-economic conditions**

Migration is a double-edged phenomenon: remittances may improve material wellbeing but do not necessarily substitute for emotional presence (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2024). Socio-economic stressors (poverty, unstable employment) amplify psychological risks and shape caregiving quality, caregiver mental health emerges as a critical mediator of child outcomes (Fu et al., 2023; Annor et al., 2024).

## **5.4 Caribbean-Specific Findings**

### **Regional psychological outcomes**

Direct Caribbean empirical evidence in the corpus is limited; much of our regional understanding is inferred from UNICEF regional briefs and comparative Latin American studies (UNICEF LAC, 2023; DeWaard et al., 2018). Where Caribbean or Afro-Caribbean case material exists (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024; Osinga et al., 2023), youth narratives foreground emotional uncertainty, hurt and resilience linked with church and kin networks often stepping in as emotional scaffolding.

### **Cultural norms shaping father–child relationships**

Matrifocal family patterns, historical labor migration, and cultural emphases on communal caregiving shape how father absenteeism is experienced: absence can be normalized, yet the psychosocial toll persists in less visible ways, affecting belonging, mentorship, and rites of passage crucial to Caribbean identity formation (Osinga et al., 2023; Sánchez-Castro et al., 2024).

### **Role of extended family and matrifocal structures**

Grandmothers, aunts, and older siblings commonly provide day-to-day caregiving, buffering material and sometimes emotional deficits but also shifting role expectations and burdening women with extra caregiving labor (Salami & Okeke, 2018; Phasha et al., 2022).

### **Influence of church, spirituality, and community**

The church appears repeatedly as a protective institution, providing mentorship, safe spaces for youth, and spiritual framing for suffering and hope (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024). Spiritual coping and faith communities are often prominent in youth resilience narratives.

## **Sport as a Grassroots Safe Haven for Father-Absent Youth**

An important Caribbean-specific protective pathway that emerges repeatedly within community narratives, though underdeveloped in formal scholarship, is the role of sport as a safe haven for father-absent youth. The interpretive framing of several protective factors, including the role of sport as a psychosocial buffer, was further refined through consultation with Caribbean pastoral and community leadership. Across the region, athletics such as football, cricket, track and field, and basketball, function as informal therapeutic ecosystems where boys and girls find relief from emotional pressure, structure for discipline, and channels for regulated aggression and ambition. Coaches frequently become surrogate father figures, offering guidance, correction, affirmation, and boundaries in ways that mirror paternal functions within the family system. For many youth, the court or the field becomes the only consistent space where they are seen, directed, challenged, and affirmed.

Notably, within many Caribbean households, it is the mothers who most often initiate this protective intervention, intentionally bringing their children to sports as a means of emotional release, behavioral focus, and social engagement, especially in the context of paternal absence. This maternal strategy reflects an intuitive form of psychosocial triage, where sport is used to stabilize restless energy, regulate emotion, and redirect distress into constructive identity formation. Participation in organized athletics cultivates peer belonging, resilience under pressure, goal orientation, and behavioral self-regulation, all of which serve as buffering mechanisms against the developmental vulnerabilities associated with father absenteeism as outlined throughout this review. While empirical Caribbean-specific data remain limited, the consistency of this pattern across communities strongly supports its recognition as a culturally embedded resilience pathway worthy of formal policy and programmatic investment.

For many Caribbean boys growing up without active fathers, whether due to migration, relational breakdown, or emotional disengagement, sport often becomes the first place where discipline, affirmation, and male guidance are consistently experienced

**Gaps in quantitative and longitudinal data.** Notably, Caribbean-specific longitudinal studies remain scarce within the provided corpus. Without longer-term follow-up, causal pathways and developmental timing effects (e.g., age at separation) cannot be robustly established for the region (Wang et al., 2024; Fellmeth et al., 2018).

## **5.5 Identified Protective and Risk Factors**

**Protective factors.** Community mentoring, church involvement, extended family caregiving, effective caregiver mental health, and school-based supports

consistently emerge as buffers against the negative effects of father absence (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024; Makinde et al., 2021; Puglisi et al., 2024).

**Risk factors.** Poverty, prolonged migration without meaningful communication, maternal stress and caregiver mental health challenges, inconsistent remittance flows, and social stigma are recurrent risks that deepen psychological vulnerability in youth (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Fu et al., 2023; Raturi et al., 2023).

Taken together, these findings illustrate the layered psychological, relational, and sociocultural dimensions of father absenteeism across global and Caribbean contexts. The following discussion interprets these patterns in relation to counseling practice, ministry response, family studies, and policy development.

## 6. DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Interpretation of Findings in Light of Global Literature

The systematic review reveals that the Caribbean region both aligns with and diverges from global trends in the psychological impact of father absence on youth. Globally, father absence has been linked to elevated rates of depression, anxiety, identity confusion, early behavioral problems, and academic challenges among children and adolescents (Dachew et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Makinde et al., 2021). Caribbean youth, however, experience these impacts within unique socio-cultural and spiritual frameworks, shaped by matrifocal family structures, migration patterns, and the pervasive influence of church communities (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024; Osinga et al., 2023; UNICEF LAC, 2023).

Unlike in some Western contexts, where nuclear family structures dominate, Caribbean households often operate within extended kin networks, where grandmothers, aunties, and older siblings play critical caregiving roles (Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023; Moila, 2023). These extended networks can serve as mitigating factors against some of the negative psychological outcomes of father absence, a protective factor not uniformly accounted for in global studies. At the same time, transnational migration, particularly labor-related migration of fathers, introduces distinct emotional and identity stressors for children who maintain only sporadic contact with paternal figures (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Jack DeWaard et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2024).

The review also highlights divergences, particularly regarding spiritual and community dimensions. Caribbean youth often situate their experiences within theological narratives and church-based social frameworks, creating both protective and risk factors. While the global literature emphasizes individual-level psychological interventions (Raturi et al., 2023; Guo et al., 2020), Caribbean contexts demonstrate the necessity of embedding psychosocial support within

communal and faith-based structures (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024; Puglisi et al., 2024).

### 6.2 Practical Implications for Counseling, Ministry, and Family Studies

#### *Lived Caribbean Reality as Applied Evidence for Counseling and Ministry*

While this review synthesizes regional and international literature on father absenteeism, its implications become most sobering when aligned with lived Caribbean realities. Within many communities, father absenteeism does not always appear as dramatic abandonment through migration or incarceration; it often manifests as emotional and relational withdrawal within the same geographic space. For many Caribbean sons, this invisible form of abandonment, being seen but not chosen shapes identity as powerfully as physical separation. Fathers may live within the same village, district, or street, yet remain functionally disconnected from their children's lives. In such contexts, the psychological weight borne by youth is intensified by the daily visibility of absence as a reminder of rejection, unresolved relational conflict, and emotional negation.

Within these same communities, mothers often young and unsupported carry the double burden of economic survival and emotional caregiving. When maternal stress is compounded by relational betrayal, social judgment, and poverty, caregiving environments can become emotionally fractured. Children raised under these conditions encounter not only the absence of a father but also the emotional instability of a system stretched beyond its natural limits. Extended family structures, especially grandparents, frequently absorb the responsibility of stabilizing the household, offering discipline, moral grounding, and consistency where parental systems have weakened. These adaptive arrangements, though lifesaving, also signify the depth of structural breakdown that pastoral care, counseling, and social intervention must confront.

For counselors, pastors, and family practitioners across the Caribbean, this reality requires a shift from deficit-based thinking toward trauma-informed, systems-oriented care. Youth presenting with anger, withdrawal, academic decline, hyper-independence, or risky behavior must not be treated simply as "discipline problems," but as individuals navigating layered relational losses. Ministry and therapeutic spaces must become environments where father absenteeism is named without shame, maternal distress is understood without blame, and extended caregivers are supported without exploitation. Without this integration, pastoral and counseling interventions risk applying spiritual language to wounds that remain structurally unaddressed.

The findings of this review compel a decisive shift in how counseling, ministry, and family studies interventions are conceptualized and delivered within Caribbean settings. Traditional approaches that isolate

youth behavior from household instability, paternal disengagement, and maternal overload fail to address the systemic nature of father absenteeism. Culturally grounded, relationally sensitive, and trauma-informed intervention models must therefore become the standard, not the exception.

### Counseling Approach

For counseling practice, youth services must move beyond crisis-response and embrace *longitudinal developmental accompaniment*. School guidance counselors, community mental health workers, and church-based caregivers should be trained to recognize how father absenteeism manifests across emotional regulation, identity formation, anger displacement, hyper-independence, attachment insecurity, and academic disengagement (Culpin et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Qureshi et al., 2021). Intervention should intentionally incorporate father absenteeism screening, not merely general psychosocial assessment. Counseling must also be accessible beyond the urban centers, where many of the most affected youth reside.

Intervention models must also be intentionally gender-responsive. Boys affected by father absenteeism often require structured spaces for emotional regulation, disciplined male mentorship, and identity stabilization, while girls frequently require sustained emotional affirmation, relational safety, and protection from psychosocial vulnerability rooted in paternal disengagement. Counseling, ministry, and school-based interventions that fail to differentiate these developmental needs risk offering generic solutions to structurally distinct wounds (Phasha et al., 2022; Ramatsetse & Ross, 2023; Annor et al., 2024).

### Faith-based Approach

Within faith-based ministry, the church's response must mature from informal sympathy to structured pastoral systems of care.

While prayer, mentorship, and worship remain foundational, they must now be integrated with:

- trauma-aware pastoral counseling,
- referral partnerships with licensed clinicians,
- intentional male mentorship discipleship,
- and intergenerational modeling of stable manhood.

Programs such as community fatherhood initiatives, men's covenant groups, and youth-mentor pairing reflect evidence-based practices already emerging within Afro-Caribbean contexts (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024; Baran & Sawrikar, 2024). Churches must also be trained to support mothers without stigmatizing fathers, cultivating restoration-minded family ministry rather than blame-driven rhetoric.

Practical interventions should include trauma-informed pastoral training, structured mentorship

programs for boys and girls, and integrated referral systems between churches and mental health services.

### Family Studies Perspective

From a family studies perspective, training institutions across the Caribbean must revise curricula to center non-nuclear family systems, transnational parenting, and extended kinship caregiving. Caribbean families do not neatly conform to Western household models, yet many professional frameworks still operate on such assumptions. Therapists, educators, and social workers must be equipped to work competently within matrifocal, grandparent-led, migration-fractured, and incarceration-impacted family systems (Osinga et al., 2023; UNICEF LAC, 2023; Annor et al., 2024).

### The Educational-School's Approach

Schools function as secondary homes for Caribbean youth and are strategically positioned to identify and respond to psychosocial stressors. Integrating socio-emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed classroom strategies can help teachers recognize behavioral signals of emotional distress (Makinde et al., 2021; Adeyinka et al., 2020). Peer mentoring, "Big Brother/Big Sister" programs, and male empowerment clubs can further provide relational scaffolding, helping adolescents develop emotional literacy, identity resilience, and conflict resolution skills (Phasha et al., 2022; Mkhwanazi et al., 2024).

### 6.3 Practical Implications for Policy and Social Development

Caribbean policies often focus narrowly on child maintenance, paternity enforcement, or educational access, leaving psychological and emotional well-being insufficiently addressed (UNICEF LAC, 2023; Fellmeth et al., 2018). Governments must recognize father absence as a public mental health concern, supporting father engagement programs that address resident and non-resident fathers, particularly in the context of labor migration (Wang et al., 2024; Jack DeWaard et al., 2018).

At the governmental level, this review reveals a decisive gap between child maintenance policy and youth mental health protection. While several Caribbean nations possess legal frameworks addressing child support and paternal financial obligation, few possess comprehensive psychosocial protection policies addressing the developmental consequences of father absenteeism.

Ministries of Education must institutionalize:

- trauma-informed school frameworks,
- expanded counselor-to-student ratios,
- and structured socio-emotional learning programs tailored for father-absent youth.

Ministries of Youth and Social Development must move beyond reactive welfare interventions toward preventive family stabilization policy, including:

- national parenting education programs that intentionally include non-resident fathers,
- father reintegration pathways for post-incarceration transition,
- and state-supported caregiver resources for grandparent-led and sibling-led households.

Migration policy also demands urgent reform. Caribbean states continue to benefit economically from labor migration but remain underprepared to manage the family fragmentation it produces. Transnational fatherhood policy must expand to include:

- facilitated digital parenting access,
- subsidized communication programs for migrant fathers,
- and reintegration support upon return (Fellmeth et al., 2018; DeWaard et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2024).

Policymakers should prioritize father-engagement initiatives, national youth mental health screening, community-based after-school programs, and support systems for caregivers in matrifocal households. Regional collaboration through CARICOM and OECS could strengthen data collection, program funding, and longitudinal child development monitoring.

Furthermore, Caribbean governments must invest in regional longitudinal research infrastructure tracking the mental health trajectories of father-absent youth. At present, much of the evidence remains cross-sectional and external to the region. Without sustained Caribbean-generated data, policy remains reactive rather than predictive.

#### 6.4 Theoretical Contributions

This review contributes to the emerging Caribbean-informed fatherhood framework, situating the experiences of youth in developing countries at the intersection of theology, psychology, and family systems theory. Findings reinforce the relevance of Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978) in explaining emotional and identity disruptions caused by father absence, while also emphasizing Social Learning Theory and Family Systems Theory as lenses to interpret behavioral modeling and household dynamics (Raturi et al., 2023; Puglisi et al., 2024).

The Caribbean-specific evidence highlights the unique role of spirituality, community, and extended kin, suggesting that conventional Western models of fatherhood and child development must be contextualized when applied to the region. The review thus provides a foundation for future comparative research examining transnational and cultural moderators, bridging global literature with localized

sociocultural realities (Osinga et al., 2023; Hudson & Brotherson, 2024).

#### 6.5 Limitations of the Review

While this review offers an integrative and culturally grounded synthesis of the psychological impact of father absenteeism on youth in developing contexts, particularly the Caribbean, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, as a scoping review, this study does not generate new empirical data and therefore relies on the depth, quality, and contextual relevance of existing scholarship. Although the included studies span multiple regions of the Global South, there remains a relative scarcity of methodologically robust, longitudinal, and large-scale empirical studies conducted specifically within Caribbean nations. As a result, some interpretations necessarily draw on comparative insights from Africa, Latin America, and other developing contexts that share historical and socio-economic parallels with the Caribbean.

Second, the majority of available studies emphasize psychological and behavioral outcomes, while fewer engage deeply with the spiritual, theological, and culturally embedded coping processes that are central to Caribbean life. This limits the ability of the literature to fully capture how faith, church involvement, and communal belonging function as protective mechanisms alongside clinical interventions.

Third, this review was limited to English-language sources, which may have excluded relevant francophone, hispanophone, or creolophone Caribbean scholarship. Finally, the diversity of study designs and conceptual frameworks across the included literature, while appropriate for scoping synthesis also constrains the capacity for precise cross-study comparison. These limitations underscore the need for a more coordinated regional research agenda on father absenteeism and youth development.

#### 6.6 Directions for Future Research

The findings and gaps identified in this review point to several critical directions for future research across the Caribbean and wider developing world. Foremost among these is the urgent need for longitudinal Caribbean-based studies that track the psychological, emotional, behavioral, and identity-related outcomes of father absenteeism across developmental stages. Such studies would move the field beyond cross-sectional associations toward a clearer understanding of developmental trajectories, resilience pathways, and cumulative risk exposure.

Future scholarship must also engage in gender-sensitive analyses, examining how father absenteeism manifests differently for boys and girls across adolescence and early adulthood. While the literature frequently highlights behavioral outcomes among boys, the emotional, relational, and identity-based impacts on

girls remain under-examined in Caribbean-specific contexts.

Additionally, the intersection of transnational migration and digital fatherhood requires deeper investigation. With Caribbean families increasingly maintaining relationships through virtual communication, further research is needed to explore how digital contact moderates attachment, authority, and emotional presence in the lives of youth.

Sport-based intervention also emerges as a significant but under-theorized protective factor. Future studies should examine how organized athletics, coach mentorship, and school-based sports programs function as structured resilience mechanisms for father-absent youth.

Finally, there is a pressing need for interdisciplinary research integrating psychology, theology, education, social policy, and family systems to produce Caribbean-informed intervention frameworks that are both culturally valid and developmentally effective. Such integration would significantly advance policy formation, pastoral care strategies, and youth mental health programming across the region.

### 6.7 A Unified Call for Action

The collective evidence presented in this review makes it unmistakably clear that father absence is not merely a private family matter; it is a communal, developmental, and national concern with far-reaching intergenerational implications. The psychological and emotional vulnerabilities associated with paternal absence, when left unaddressed, do not remain isolated within individual households but gradually reappear in schools, churches, communities, and national development outcomes. As such, the response to father absenteeism must be coordinated, culturally grounded, and systemically intentional.

Churches, schools, policymakers, and communities must now move beyond fragmented efforts toward the establishment of a multi-layered support ecosystem. Pastors and faith-based leaders are called to provide trauma-informed spiritual care, structured mentorship, and safe relational spaces where father-absent youth can process loss without shame and encounter models of healthy masculinity and responsible adulthood. Schools must function not only as academic centers, but as early-detection environments for psychosocial distress, equipped with guidance services, mentoring initiatives, and socio-emotional learning frameworks responsive to the lived realities of Caribbean youth. Governments, in turn, must implement culturally sensitive fatherhood, youth development, and family stabilization policies, moving beyond child maintenance enforcement toward psychosocial protection and developmental justice for vulnerable youth populations.

At the community level, there is an urgent need to reclaim the ethic of collective responsibility historically embedded in Caribbean social life. The village, once held together by extended kinship, shared moral codes, and

communal accountability must again become a protective framework for youth navigating relational absence. This unified, intersectoral approach honors the interconnectedness of Caribbean social structures while directly addressing the psychological risks associated with father absenteeism. It ensures that youth are not left to navigate emotional voids alone, but are instead surrounded by culturally coherent, spiritually anchored, and evidence-informed networks of care, resilience, accountability, and hope (Hudson & Brotherson, 2024; Phasha et al., 2022; UNICEF LAC, 2023).

If the Caribbean is to move beyond mere survival toward sustainable human development, then fatherhood must be reclaimed not only in law, but in presence; not only in provision, but in attachment; not only in rhetoric, but in responsibility. This is not simply a call for programmatic reform, it is a summons to moral, social, and intergenerational renewal. By centering future interventions on the lived realities of Caribbean youth, this unified framework holds the capacity to contribute meaningfully to scholarship, practice, and policy across the fields of child development, family studies, education, counseling, and pastoral care.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This scoping review has illuminated the profound psychological, emotional, and social consequences of father absenteeism in developing countries, with a particular focus on the Caribbean region. The evidence demonstrates that paternal absence, whether physical, emotional, or functional shaped identity development, emotional regulation, academic performance, and overall mental health in ways that are both nuanced and deeply context-specific. While global literature corroborates many of these patterns, the Caribbean context introduces unique dimensions: matrifocal family structures, transnational migration, and the enduring influence of faith and community networks. These cultural realities serve both as buffers and as complicating factors in understanding the lived experiences of Caribbean youth.

The review underscores the urgent need for a multi-layered, culturally grounded response. Pastoral care, schools, and social policy must operate in concert to provide protective environments that recognize the spiritual, social, and emotional needs of youth navigating father absence. Churches are positioned to serve as safe spaces where grief, anger, and identity struggles can be processed; schools can implement trauma-informed and relational interventions; and governments must design policies that recognize father absence as a public mental health issue rather than merely a financial or legal matter. Mentoring programs, father engagement initiatives, and support for extended caregiving networks emerge as critical pathways to mitigate risks.

Moreover, the review highlights persistent gaps in quantitative, longitudinal, and Caribbean-specific research. Evidence remains limited regarding the long-

term outcomes of paternal absence, the mechanisms through which cultural and spiritual resources buffer psychological risk, and the effectiveness of regionally tailored interventions. Filling these gaps will require coordinated research efforts that not only track youth outcomes over time but also integrate sociocultural, theological, and psychosocial perspectives.

Consequently, father absenteeism is not solely a private family challenge. It is a communal, societal, and policy issue. Caribbean youth, while resilient, deserve intentional and coordinated support across familial, educational, spiritual, and governmental spheres. By mobilizing the region's rich cultural, spiritual, and communal resources, stakeholders can transform potential vulnerabilities into opportunities for growth, identity formation, and emotional flourishing. Theoretically, this review contributes a Caribbean-informed framework that integrates psychological, sociological, and pastoral perspectives in interpreting father absence. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of PRISMA-guided scoping reviews in synthesizing fragmented regional evidence. Regionally, it advances an innovative model that positions father absenteeism as both a developmental and sociocultural issue requiring coordinated, context-specific responses. This review affirms that a unified, multi-sectoral approach, rooted in both scholarship and lived Caribbean experience is not only necessary but urgent to safeguard the well-being of future generations.

## REFERENCES

- Adeyinka, T. J., Makinde, B. O., & Olusakin, A. M. (2020). *Effects of acceptance-commitment therapy and social skills training on anxiety of adolescent students from father-absent families in Lagos State*. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *7*(1), 61–76. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ijer/article/view/197131/185983>
- Annor, F. B., Amene, E. W., Zhu, L., Stamatakis, C., Picchetti, V., Matthews, S., & Massetti, G. M. (2024). Parental absence as an adverse childhood experience among young adults in sub-Saharan Africa. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *150*, 106556. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106556>
- Baran, M. B., & Sawrikar, V. (2023). Service-level barriers and facilitators to father engagement in child and family services: A systematic review and thematic synthesis. *Children & Youth Services Review*, *160*, 107295. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107295>
- Culpin, I., et al. (2022). Father absence and trajectories of offspring mental health across adolescence and young adulthood: Findings from a UK birth cohort. *Journal of Affective Disorders*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.07.016>
- Dachew, B., Ayano, G., Duko, B., Lawrence, B., Betts, K., & Alati, R. (2023). Paternal depression and risk of depression among offspring: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Network Open*, *6*(5), e23129159. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.29159>
- DeWaaard, J., Nobles, J., & Donato, K. M. (2018). Migration and parental absence: A comparative assessment of transnational families in Latin America. *Population, Space and Place*, *24*(4), e2166. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2166>
- Fellmeth, G., Rose-Clarke, K., Zhao, C., Busert, L., Zheng, Y., Massazza, A., et al. (2018). Health impacts of parental migration on left-behind children and adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Global Health*, *6*(7), e769–e786. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32558-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32558-3)
- Fu, Y., et al. (2023). Longitudinal associations between parental migration and children's psychological well-being in Southeast Asia: The role of caregivers' mental health and caregiving quality. *Social Science & Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.115701>
- Guo, S., Lu, H. J., Zhu, N., & Chang, L. (2020). Meta-analysis of direct and indirect effects of father absence on menarcheal timing. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*, 164. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01641>
- Hadebe, N. Y., & Adanlawo, E. F. (2024). The effect of father absenteeism on teenage boys: A chronosystem perspective. *International Journal of Research in Business & Social Science*, *13*(7). <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v13i7.3644>
- Hudson, S., & Brotherson, S. E. (2024). Reaching out to fathers in Afro-Caribbean contexts: A case study review of best practices from the Fatherhood Is Sacred program. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *15*, 1363173. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1363173>
- Jack DeWaaard, J., Nobles, J., & Donato, K. M. (2018). Migration and parental absence: A comparative assessment of transnational families in Latin America. *Population, Space and Place*, *24*(4), e2166. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2166>
- Liu, X.-G., et al. (2023). The relationship between father absence and hostility among depressed youths: A serial mediation model. *Frontiers in Pediatrics*, *10*, 711241. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fped.2022.711241>
- Makinde, B. O., Adeyinka, T. J., & Olusakin, A. M. (2021). Effects of acceptance-commitment therapy and social skills training on depression of adolescent students from father-absent families in Lagos State. *KIU Journal of Social Sciences*, *7*(1), 253–264. <https://ir.unilag.edu.ng/handle/123456789/9580>
- Marcus, R., et al. (2023). *Children who stay behind in Latin America and the Caribbean while parents migrate: Regional brief*. UNICEF LAC Report.
- Mkhwanazi, S., Jewkes, R., Sikweyiya, Y., Washington, L., & Gibbs, A. (2024). Young men's experiences of being fathered and absent fathers' experience: A case study from urban informal settlements in South Africa. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, *7*(3), 273–289. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-024-00118-1>

- Moila, W. (2023). *The phenomenon of absent fatherhood: Perceptions, experiences and challenges of absent fathers and adolescent children*. <https://hdl.handle.net/10566/11367>
- Osinga, M., van Bergen, D., van Brummen-Girigori, O., Kretschmer, T., & Timmerman, M. (2023). "We say 'mothers' but mean 'parents'": Qualitative perceptions and experiences with father absence among Curaçaoan, Curaçaoan-Dutch, and Dutch young people. *Pedagogiek*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584211014878>
- Phasha, K. T., Calvin, M. J., & Mokone, J. M. (2022). Lived experiences of adolescent boys who have absent fathers: A phenomenological approach. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 11(5), 388–393. <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v11i5.1854>
- Puglisi, N., Rattaz, V., Favez, N., & Tissot, H. (2024). Father involvement and emotion regulation during early childhood: A systematic review. *BMC Psychology*, 12, 182. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-02182-x>
- Ramatsetse, T. P., & Ross, E. (2023). Understanding the perceived psychosocial impact of father absence on adult women. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 53(2), 199–210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463221130194>
- Raturi, R., et al. (2023). Parental absence and adolescent depression/psychosocial outcomes in LMIC contexts: Panel and cohort studies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2076070>
- Robinson, E. L., StGeorge, J., & Freeman, E. E. (2021). A systematic review of father–child play interactions and the impacts on child development. *Children*, 8(10), 881. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children8100881>
- Sele, JP (2025). (PDF) Sacred Music as a Catalyst for Theological Reflection and Social Development: A Critical Review of African Christian Liturgical Traditions. *Journal of Fine and Creative Arts, Music, Media and Communication Studies* (Vol 1 No 2, 2025) Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/396717884\\_SACRED\\_MUSIC\\_AS\\_A\\_CATALYST\\_FOR\\_THEOLOGICAL\\_REFLECTION\\_AND\\_SOCIAL\\_DEVELOPMENT\\_A\\_CRITICAL\\_REVIEW\\_OF\\_AFRICAN\\_CHRISTIAN\\_LITURGICAL\\_TRADITIONS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/396717884_SACRED_MUSIC_AS_A_CATALYST_FOR_THEOLOGICAL_REFLECTION_AND_SOCIAL_DEVELOPMENT_A_CRITICAL_REVIEW_OF_AFRICAN_CHRISTIAN_LITURGICAL_TRADITIONS) [accessed Dec 11 2025].
- Sele, JP; Zongo, PK (2025). Youth Unemployment and Its Impact on Nigeria's Socio-Economic Landscape. *Greener Journal of Social Sciences*, 15(1): 258-270, <https://doi.org/10.15580/gjss.2025.1.082625131>.
- Sánchez-Castro, J. C., Pilz González, L., Arias-Murcia, S. E., Mahecha-Bermeo, V. A., Stock, C., & Heinrichs, K. (2024). Mental health among adolescents exposed to social inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: A scoping review. *Frontiers in Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1342361>
- Sear, R., & Mace, R. (2019). Cross-cultural evidence does not support universal evolutionary explanation for father absence and accelerated reproduction. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 374(1777). <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2018.0112>
- UNICEF LAC. (2023). *Children who stay behind in Latin America and the Caribbean while parents migrate: Regional brief*. UNICEF.
- Wang, F., et al. (2024). The impact of parental migration patterns, timing, and duration on child health and behaviour. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12, 1439568. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1439568>
- Zúñiga, M. L., et al. (2024). Examining the effects of parental migration on youth mental health and substance use: A qualitative study in rural Yucatán, México. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1368619>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tee Jay Whittaker is a Jamaican-Kittitian scholar-practitioner with formal training in theology, counseling, education, and pastoral ministry. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Pastoral Ministry (with a minor in Counseling) from the Caribbean Wesleyan College, Jamaica, and later completed a Master's degree in Christian Studies, Wesley Biblical Seminary, U.S.A, along with a Postgraduate Diploma in Education and Training in General Sciences, Jamaica. He currently serves as a pastor and guidance counselor, where he integrates faith-based leadership, counseling practice, and educational guidance in the formation of youth and families. He is a scholar with the [Eagle Scholars Forge](#), an initiative of [Sele Media Africa](#) which is a premier practical academic development program dedicated to raising African and Caribbean scholars through rigorous practical-based training in scholarly writing, research, and publication. His research and writing focus on father absenteeism, youth mental health, family systems, spiritual development, and community-based intervention within Caribbean and developing-world contexts. Through his ministry and scholarship, he is committed to advancing culturally grounded, trauma-informed, and socially responsive frameworks for strengthening families, churches, schools, and youth-serving institutions.