

The way a family is formed impacts on whether poverty and inequality persist in the home.

A nuclear family is not the norm in South Africa. Many households are not formed around a marital couple and many children do not live with their parents. Where children live with only one parent, then typically it is their mother. Where they live with both their parents, fathers tend to play a much smaller role than mothers in childcare.

Distinguished Professor and holder of the Helen Suzman Chair in Political Economy at the University of Witwatersrand, Prof Dorrit Posel, analysed the National Income Dynamics Study to better understand how **the nature of family formation** contributes to poverty among women and children and to gender inequality.

The provision of primary childcare in South Africa is highly gendered. Mainly women provide care to children in the home, particularly African women, as they tend to live with more children than African men. In contrast, the financial support of children, e.g. schooling expenses, is not borne disproportionately by men. In African families it is women who mostly provide both the physical care and financial support of children.

African children are less likely to live with both parents. Where they live apart from their mothers,

The way a family is formed impacts on its ability to overcome poverty and inequality

it is other women, such as grandmothers or aunts, who provide primary care.

Temporary labour migration, a persistent feature among African homes, together with low marital rates and high rates of children born out of wedlock, help to explain the distinctive patterns of family formation among Africans.

Women's responsibility for the financial and primary physical care of children influences the type of employment women can access. Given that many women do not live in households with African men, the impact of gender differences in the labour market is not balanced at home. As a result, women are left to share their low income with children.

Prof Posel's **research** also found that African children devoted less time on learning activities, particularly outside of school hours. This study found that this time allocation is linked to the socioeconomic reality that African children live in poorer households and are confronted with environments that are not conducive to learning.

The findings from the research highlight the importance of developing an enabling environment that will allow for:

- Fathers to contribute to the care of children
- Women to combine childcare responsibilities with employment.
- Children in poor households to access skills, specifically in the home environment. [SM](#)

FAMILY DYNAMICS in Poverty & Inequality

