

Experiences and constructions of fatherhood amongst socially disadvantaged fathers involved in the NIHR-funded THRIVE trial: a PhD study

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Introduction

In recent decades dominant norms of masculinity and fatherhood have changed considerably (Lamb, 2013; Morgan, 2005). The state - primarily through health and social services - has placed increasing responsibility on parents to ensure the future wellbeing of their children.

Both of these changes involve the extension of middle class values and practices onto working class families. However, we know relatively little about how this affects deprived and socially-excluded fathers (Buston, 2010).

The PhD Study

A qualitative study has been designed to explore the fatherhood expectations and experiences of socially marginalised men in Glasgow.

The PhD study is nested in a large NIHR funded Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) – THRIVE (see box). The study will recruit partners of the women involved in the trial.

Study Aims

To find out:

1. What are the fatherhood constructions of the men in the THRIVE trial?
(how involved do they expect to be in their children's lives? What discourses do they use to talk about their fathering identity? What is their idea of a 'good' father?)
2. What shapes these men's constructions of fatherhood?
(predominant cultural norms of fatherhood? Peers? Upbringing? Partner? Social circumstances? Media?)
3. How do their constructions of fatherhood affect their attitudes towards the THRIVE parenting interventions?



Literature Review

INCREASING RESPONSIBILITY ON PARENTS

- DWP Report – "Troubled Families" (2012) – increased pressure on low-income parents to take responsibility for children's outcomes.
- Critique: Levitas (2012) – current gov't policy conflates issues of families 'in trouble' with those 'causing trouble'. Placing blame with parents, not taking into account poverty and structural reasons for poor outcomes.

MEN & PARENTING INTERVENTIONS

- Parenting interventions have typically targeted mothers
- Little is known about how men's attitudes affect engagement or outcomes

Difficulties of engaging fathers in parenting programmes:

- Fathers may perceive fewer benefits than mothers
- Services perceived as female-oriented (Bayley et al, 2009)
- Men may unintentionally sabotage intervention outcomes if respond in negative ways which undermine mother (Stolk, 2008)

MEN'S CONSTRUCTIONS OF FATHERHOOD / MASCULINITY & FATHERHOOD

- Current discourses of masculinity and fatherhood reflect debates around the level and nature of men's involvement with children and childcare.
- Growing body of literature on how middle-class men engage with these ideas, but much less work with socially disadvantaged fathers.



What is the THRIVE trial?

THRIVE is a 3-arm RCT comparing two antenatal parenting interventions (vs. treatment as usual) for vulnerable mothers and their at-risk children



AIM: to increase mother-child bonding and maternal mental health.

- Vulnerable women recruited for a range of reasons: mental ill-health, substance abuse, domestic violence or complex social care needs
- Fathers are included in all four sessions of one of the interventions but only invited to one session (out of six) in the other.

Conclusions & Next Steps

- Little is known about men's attitudes towards parenting interventions and how these might affect their own or their partners' engagement with interventions.
- Limited research on the fatherhood views and experiences of socially disadvantaged men in the UK.

This study aims to address these gaps. Pilot work is due to begin in September 2013.



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