Paternity Leave and Shared Parental Leave

Photo by Johan Bävman courtesy of Parents At Work
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AFRC WORKING GROUPS PROGRESS

Systematic Review working group

Since the Symposium in May, the Systematic Review working group has refined the criteria for extracting data from papers. In other words, we have decided on what information we need from each paper, and how we will arrange this in a big table. Ultimately, this will probably be more than one table in the manuscript. Five members of the team trialled this process on 4 papers, and then we met by teleconference to discuss and resolve difficulties that we experienced.

There are 36 papers to be summarised — some describe fathers’ sleep, while others describe associations between infants’ sleep and fathers’ wellbeing. Each of the 9 member of the working group has been allocated four papers, and asked to complete the data extraction from these papers. Following this, we will each check the data extraction for four different papers. Then it’s time to start drafting the manuscript!

We have also discussed the possibility that the first manuscript may be a scoping review, rather than a systematic review. The procedure for conducting a scoping review, one of the main differences between systematic and scoping reviews is that a systematic review typically focuses on a well-defined question where appropriate study designs can be identified in advance, whilst a scoping review tends to address broader topics where many different study designs might be applicable. After completing our scoping review, it may become evident that there is a question that can be answered within a systematic review – then we have two manuscripts to write!

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Dr Laura Di Manno, School of Psychology, Deakin University
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Science Communication & Policy Group (SCPG)

We have been busy with both Men’s Health Week and Fathers Mental Health Day falling within the same week in June. This year, Men’s Health Week had a theme of “Men and Families: Making Healthy Connections” – a very relevant theme for the AFRC. To celebrate, the SCPG organised a “Twitter Chat” on our @ausfatherhood page and invited all AFRC members and the wider public to join us. We asked the Twitter community six questions about fathers’ health using the hashtag #HealthyDadsChat. Questions focused on the joys and difficulties of fatherhood, advice and support for dads, and how the community would like the future of fatherhood to develop. A big thankyou to Glen Poole from the Men’s Health Forum for his efforts in setting up the event and to Dr Matthew Roberts for his outstanding effort in moderating the event live on Twitter.

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The conversation had 25 contributors, with an estimated reach (i.e., people who viewed the conversation) of 8,663. Some of the responses from the community are listed below:

**Q1 What’s great about being a dad today?**
@ChrisMay050861: There is a lot more info and encouragement available for dads today. Not sure how this would be without the WWW but it seems that the world has woken up to the challenges and importance of fatherhood.

**Q2 What are common difficulties that dads face?**
@p1e7ro: Meeting the expectations and the challenges a full-time job brings to support your family, versus time with children and their sports/school programs, versus time spent assisting your partner with the day-to-day chores and investing time for your relationship #HealthyDadsChat
@FallonCook12: Our research suggests many fathers struggle to cope with their unsettled infant - feeling angry, depressed and overwhelmed. These dad’s need support. #healthydadchat #MensHealthWeek https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jpc.13311 ...

**Q3 What supports do dads find helpful?**
@mens_wa: Being able to talk with other dads including experienced dads. Affirmation that they are important to their children. Practical tips on bonding with and parenting their children and challenges of parenting. Services just for dads at times available for dads.

**Q4 What advice do you have for new dads?**
@drmwroberts: Second-time Dads with adult kids from a previous relationship often tell me they’ve learned from their mistakes of a decade or two ago: “Be there more.” #HealthyDadsChat

**Q6 How do we make that best-case scenario for tomorrow’s fatherhood happen?**
@Gillian_falkirk: do our best to raise our sons with a new idea of fathering, and Dads setting the example. Monkey see, monkey do! #HealthyDadsChat
@dads_groupinc: Collaboration, Discussion and Leadership at all levels from government to grass roots sharing a simple vision of the 3 key things we all can agree on that are most important to change in the ‘transition to fatherhood’ chapter @ausfatherhood @RelationshipsA2 #healthydadchat

Sam Teague – Deakin University
Aladdin Jones – Eastern Health
Matt Roberts – O’Connell Family Services
Chris May – University of Newcastle
Dom Alford – Relationships Australia
Tom Docking – Dads Group Inc
Glen Poole – Men’s Health Forum
Convenors: Dr Matthew Roberts mattwroberts@me.com and Sam Teague sam.teague@deakin.edu.au

### Intervention Research Working Group

The Intervention Research working group has progressed through a number of milestones since the May Symposium. The Sydney Local Health District granted ethical approval in early July 2018 for Tresillian Family Care Centres (NSW) to participate in our “Fathers and Sleep: A formative intervention research project”.

Although site-specific approval is still pending, this was a big step forward because authorisation could be now sought to conduct the study in any other NSW, Qld, Vic, SA, WA or ACT public health organisation (or so we thought!). Ethical approval had already been granted at Curtin University for Ngala to participate. Our third partner, Queensland Health, could quickly process reciprocal ethical approval we assumed now that Tresillian ethical approval had been granted. However, this week Natalie Pierssene, one of our Queensland WG co-investigators informed the group that Qld is transitioning to a new ethics platform along with Victoria. They are moving from the Human Research Ethics Application (HREA) site to the Ethics Review Manager platform.
Fortunately, despite this potential roadblock, Queensland are still able to complete their site-specific application with the ethics approval granted from Sydney Local Health District. This means we are on track to commence the study within the next few months.

The other key milestone achieved since May was for our expert clinicians/academics to fine-tune the questions for both the mother and fathers’ reference groups. This research phase is critical to provide formative input into the final fathers’ focus group schedule/mothers’ survey.

Finally, I’d like to thank Ms Julie Maddox, Clinical Nurse Consultant, Tresillian NSW who, along with Dr Greg Fairbrother, was instrumental in obtaining Tresillian’s involvement and ethical approval for participation in this study. Julie has recently moved to a new position and has stepped down as co-investigator. I’d like to extend a warm welcome to Ms Jacqueline Walker, acting Clinical Nurse Consultant at Tresillian and Dr Greg Fairbrother as new co-investigators joining the research team.

Dr Eileen Dowse, School of Nursing & Midwifery, University of Newcastle
Associate Professor Richard Fletcher, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle
Dr Nyanda McBride, Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University; National Drug Research Institute
Associate Professor Tess Knight, School of Psychology, Deakin University, Victoria
Dr Dawson Cooke, Ngala and School of Psychology, Curtin University
Dr Elaine Bennet, Ngala and Curtin University, WA
Ms Natalie Pierssene, Child, Youth & Family Health, Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service, Qld
Ms Nicole Stephenson Child, Youth & Family Health, Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service, Qld
Ms Angela McKee, Child, Youth & Family Health, Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service, Qld
Ms Sherrian Price, Child and Family Health Nursing Practitioner, NSW
Dr Karen Wynter, School of Nursing & Midwifery – Western Health Partnership, Deakin University.
Dr Jacqui MacDonald, School of Psychology, Deakin University
Jacqueline Walker, A/CNC; CNS Tresillian Early Intervention Home Visiting Program
Dr Greg Fairbrother, Patient and Family-centred Care Research Nurse Consultant, Sydney Local Health District Nursing and Midwifery Executive
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Data and Analysis Working Group

The Data and Analysis Working Group met on 21 May. We agreed on the final set of variables to be included in our cross-cohort analysis of paternal postpartum sleep problems and mental health. We have identified four Australian studies that have collected relevant data. These are: the 1) Men and Parenting Pathways Study at Deakin University; 2) the Triple B (Babies, Bumps and Beyond) Study at the University of New South Wales; 3) the Personality and Total Health (PATH) Through Life Study at the Australian National University; and, 4) the Peel Child Health Study, a collaboration of Western Australian universities.

Approval from each study’s team of investigators is required before the data are released to us. We have received approval from two of the four studies and we are waiting for confirmation from the remaining two. Once we have the data, we will analyse them separately for each cohort and then use meta-analysis to assess aggregated effects. The available data will allow us to examine father-reported postpartum sleep problems and associations with anxiety, stress and depressive symptoms.

Dr Jacqui Macdonald, Centre for Social and Early Emotional Development, Deakin University
Dr Liana Leach, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University
Dr Karen Wynter, School of Nursing & Midwifery – Western Health Partnership, Deakin University
Dr Jennifer StGeorge, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle
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‘Daddy, when are you coming to get me?’

US media have featured several stories of fathers from Central America being re-united with their young children after a federal judge had ordered all of the 103 children under 4 years of age who have been taken from their parents under the Trump “zero tolerance” immigration policy to be reunited with their parents. Fathers and children from Honduras and Guatemala who had been separated for weeks from their children without knowing what had happened to them were featured in the accounts. As many as 2,500 older children are yet to be reunited with their parents.

See https://wapo.st/2Af5zGm

Share the Joy - Shared parental leave for British dads

In 2015 the British Government introduced shared parental leave offering up to 50 weeks of leave, 37 of them paid, for eligible new parents. Parents can take time off separately or they can be at home together for up to six months. This new leave arrangement is not paternity leave as the 54 page UK Government guide to taking parental leave makes clear:

Note: the entitlement to SPL (Shared parental Leave) only arises where the mother is willing to give up some of her maternity entitlement. The leave and pay is not in addition to the mother’s maternity entitlement – it is simply another (more flexible) way of using the mother’s maternity entitlement. P9

This year, when it became clear that only 2% of dads were taking up the shared leave a new “Share the joy” campaign was launched with a new website and social media.

A leading men’s magazine launching MH Dad

By Luke Benedictus, Editor

Men’s Health is Australia’s biggest men’s magazine brand (readership: 493,000 / social media audience: 1.46m). Since launching here 20 years ago, our editorial philosophy has centred on giving men the tools they need to lead better lives by offering expert tips and tricks on health, fitness, careers and relationships.

A Men’s Health recent survey highlighted a notable development - modern dads are playing a more active role in their kids’ lives. Fifty-four per cent of the surveyed fathers claimed they now take 50-50 joint responsibility for raising their children. Meanwhile 48 per cent revealed they feel more involved and hands-on with their kids than their dad. Suddenly, fatherhood seems to loom larger in men’s lives than ever before.

That’s why we’re launching MH Dad, a new multi-platform section that will offer expert advice and support for fathers on how to survive the anarchy, tantrums and sleepless nights. MH Dad will also set out to drive awareness on key fatherhood issues and strive to help readers forge stronger connections with their families.

Kicking off in August, content in the first issue includes novelist Tim Winton’s reflections on fatherhood, one writer’s account of how he rekindled the bond with his monosyllabic teen son, plus an investigation on the value of parental leave. Plans are now afoot for an MH Dad podcast, plus we’re hosting a community event with Parents at Work, the social enterprise organisation campaigning to make it easier for working dads to forge an early connection with their kids (See ‘Fathering not minding’ in this issue).

This impetus for all this was compounded by my own experience. As a frazzled dad with two boys under the age of two, I struggled to find readily available local media to guide me through the chaos. At Men’s Health, we’ve got a proven track record for communicating with Australian men in a voice they respond to. Hopefully, MH Dad can contribute to the growing conversation on fatherhood and support Aussie dads to raise healthier, happier kids.

PROGRAMS AND FATHERS INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Aussie Dads photographic portraits and conversation starter

Aussie Dads, like its award-winning Swedish counterpart, is a collection of 20 portraits of Australian fathers who have taken extended parental leave to stay at home with their new born babies. The photos are designed to start a conversation - in our workplaces and community - to improve and widen the opportunities for men to equally participate in parental leave and engage in flexible work.

About Aussie Dads

Currently, only 2% of Australian fathers access government paid parental leave as a primary carer. The reasons for this are varied and the impact is significant – both in the home and the workplace. For those fathers who do take parental leave however the benefits are clear to their employers, their family and their own wellbeing.
Australia does not have a nationally legislated ‘shared parental leave’ approach to parental leave and as such fathers are often side lined as the ‘secondary carer’ taking no longer than two weeks off – if at all. Fathers have a limited opportunity to participate in being a primary carer. For the most part this is because breadwinner / homemaker gender ideals are still very entrenched in society and the workplace. The impact of this is that the ability to share the care is diminished for fathers, and the gender equality gap remains.

In 2017, as part of a global initiative to advance parental leave equality for fathers and to encourage organisations to adopt a shared parental leave approach in Australia, Parents At Work commissioned ‘Swedish Dads’ photographer, Johan Bävman to take a series of ‘Aussie Dads’ photographs. The exhibition will launch in Australia for the first time at the Opera House on the 23rd of August 2018 as part of a wider Global Parental Leave Equality Campaign to initiate policy and cultural change in workplaces and to normalise the conversation around men taking parental leave.

The exhibition will coincide with two business leaders events (in Sydney and Melbourne) and a free-to-public community ‘dads talk’ featuring Dr Vijay Roach, Professor Richard Fletcher and a panel of dads that are inspiring the charge forward.

For more information about the exhibition or to register for one of the events please email: info@parentsatwork.com.au

About Parents At Work

Parents At Work is a social enterprise and global education provider for families, working in partnership with progressive employers, industry groups and researchers to advance parental leave equality around the world and to create family friendly workplaces for all.

CONFERENCES

Why Fathers’ Care Matters: Enabling Gender Equity in Care and Work

**Event** date: 9am-4pm, Thursday 9 August 2018

**Venue:** University House Common Room, 1 Balmain Crescent, Acton, ANU, Canberra

**Cost:** Free

Fathers’ participation in caring for young children provides life-long opportunities for fathers, their partners and children. However, there continue to be entrenched social and structural barriers to fathers’ equal participation in care (e.g. only 2% of Australian fathers access government paid parental leave as a primary carer).

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The goal of this forum is to share our knowledge of why fathers’ care matters and what barriers prevent fathers from successfully combining work with care. The forum will include presentations from leading researchers (Professor Lyndall Strazdins (The ANU), A/Professor Richard Fletcher (University of Newcastle), Dr Jenny Baxter (Australian Institute of Family Studies), and Professor Jan Nicholson (La Trobe University)). There will be a panel discussion with policy and industry experts - led by Parents at Work CEO Emma Walsh, with representatives from Westpac, the Workplace Gender Equity Agency, Deloitte, and The Department of Social Services, as well as interviews engaging fathers’ own perspectives. We aim to set a clear research agenda for the next 5-10 years to take this issue forward. We welcome input from policy makers, industry experts, researchers, and parents from the general community to identify barriers to change and to generate a range of possible solutions.

Contact Lou Farrer on Louise.Farrer@anu.edu.au

Achieving Gender Equality by Sharing the Caring: Supporting and advocating for men sharing parental leave – a workshop for business leaders

In June this year Parents At Work, in collaboration with the Embassy of Sweden, University College London, Working Families UK, Working Mums UK and Dad.Info hosted a workshop with the UK business community to discuss;

- the benefits of advancing men’s participation in parental leave and flexible work
- sharing key research findings on the challenges that hold men back from participating in parental leave and flexible work
- ways to advance gender equality for men and women to participate in parental leave and flexible work and reduce prejudice and discrimination.

This event was made unique by the UK debut of the ‘Swedish Dads’ photographic exhibition by Johan Bävman and a preview of ‘Australian Dads’ photographs. The photos share the experiences of 23 Swedish Dads and 10 Australian Dads who stayed home with their families for at least six months, as Bävman did. These images shine a light on the caring needs of fathers and have been shown travelled the world as a voice for caring equality.

Bävman addressed the London workshop: “In Sweden, parents are offered 480 days of paid parental leave, with each parent exclusively having 90, so it’s common place to see groups of dads out during the day with their young children. I spent time with the dads I photographed, to capture the many emotions they have when they take time off work to care for their children. I saw them express tiredness, frustration, and of course an incredible amount of love. It’s something women have done for decades and centuries and never been recognised for, and now dads are doing it too.”

Emma Walsh, CEO of Parents At Work, introduced the event: “By putting their people first, and supporting them to be engaged parents as well as engaged employees, businesses can really thrive. Giving men an equal opportunity to share parental leave and work in a more flexible, family-friendly way, without detriment to their career or professional reputation, can have such a positive impact on them, as well as on their children, society, and the broader economy. It’s time for change.”
Three senior executives spoke – short videos of their presentations are included as links here:

[Siri Nomme, Head of Diversity & Inclusion EMEA, Norton Rose Fulbright] described the efforts made in this international law firm to engage working fathers so that they do take extended parental leave and the benefits evident to the firm when this occurs.

[Fiona Pargeter, EMEA Head of Diversity & Inclusion, UBS] (a Swiss multinational investment bank and financial services company) reported on what the business has learnt through the introduction of their shared parental leave scheme.

[Laurie Benson, Head of HR at Spotify, a Swedish entertainment company with over 3000 employees worldwide] explained how the parental leave scheme of 6 months on full pay for any new parent came about. (see an edited transcript of her comments at the Forum below)

**Parental leave policy at Spotify**

Spotify Technology S.A. is a music streaming service that launched in 2008 and is available in 65 regions. Spotify is headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden

- 6 months parental leave to both mothers and fathers when they have a baby
- Leave at full pay
- Leave can be taken flexibly over the first 3 years of the baby’s life
- No qualifying period

Laurie Benson, Head of HR – UK explained the thinking behind the parental leave policy at the Forum. Below is the edited transcript of her comments:

**Investing in parental leave**

*We as a business decided to invest... we’re quite small, there’s only 3,500 employees globally, we have this very low average age of our employees, the majority of our employees fall in that 20... 21-35 kind of bucket, so we kind of knowingly modelled expecting to invest in this, and I think we did make an investment choice here because also, you know, we ... we did offer managers...that we would support financially with cover for that role. In reality that doesn’t happen so much, because where people are taking two months off, usually it’s not very productive to have someone else come in and do that work, and ... the nice part of that is it has given people opportunities internally to kind of try a stretch role or do something else...*

**Approaching parental leave as a global company with a Swedish perspective**

...we kind of approached it from a very Swedish perspective actually, and took inspiration from the fact that our head office is there and that is part of the uniqueness of our brand, if you like, in terms of how we see ourselves in the market. And Sweden does lead the way a lot in this kind of thing but the legislation has helped a lot of social change in terms of how people have approached the role of being a parent. What we see is a great opportunity for us to extend that same opportunity to all of our officers across the world, so we decided to go with a global parental leave policy where all people that become parents within Spotify are able to take six months of full pay and we allow them to take that in a pretty flexible way.

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So there’s actually up to the third birthday of the child, or three years after the adoption, so that they can choose to use the leave at the time that makes most sense for them and their family.

The way that works is we are also very aware that although we are a Swedish business not everyone’s in Sweden and there is some social pressure in change which makes people feel like they aren’t expected to take leave. So you look at things, even with vacation in the US for example, a lot of companies have this unlimited vacation but there’s no expectation of you being actually able to take it sometimes, and the culture of the company doesn’t allow that. So what we wanted to do is to use our Swedish culture and the examples of that kind of go through the business and the examples that we have there. But also to set an expectation that we expect you to take at least a month at a time and you can only use it three times. So you’ve got three opportunities to use that leave, and that really sets an expectation that this is what we are expecting you to take and that you’re entitled to take, and it gives you that permission to take the leave essentially.

So I think we wanted to make sure that we were doing something culturally and in reality people could feel that it was safe to take that time off and that that was what we wanted them to do with the leave at the point of introducing it.

We have seen people use it in different ways. We launched this in November 2015, so we’ve had a couple of years now of people being able to use this policy. We’ve had over 400 people, which is terrifying in a way, but 400 people take leave and actually 67 percent of the people taking leave were men, which is a hugely nice feeling that men have felt able to do that. Of course we still have a reasonably big office in Sweden so that does help and it does help us to have those role models but actually as we’ve gone through the years and seen examples of people taking this leave — just a couple of weeks ago there’s an employee in Spain who was on the local morning news program talking about the fact he’d taken this time off and how much he’d enjoyed that time and opportunity to spend with his family. That wasn’t something that we’d organised or anything like that, so it’s like people are so proud about the opportunity they’ve had and how much value it’s added to them. It’s become a really valuable part of our employee’s life.

The other part that we’ve consciously decided not to do is we didn’t want to tether people to have to come back to work for a period of time in terms of repaying the leave, because we felt that sort of took away a little bit from the intent, that [00:04:48] sometimes important with your family and you should take it when you have the opportunity and when it’s right for you. And actually we haven’t particularly seen any negative results with that because 100 percent of the people who have been on leave have come back to work. And I think they’ve also advocated about how great it was to have that opportunity to have that time away and be able to come back and there’s a different sort of loyalty and engagement with the business that people have once they’ve had that opportunity as well.

No qualifying period

We thought about it a lot, but ... you know, should we have it be ... that we don’t withhold that during ... certain times and not others, it feels a bit arbitrary, really, if your intent is to have people have it. So actually, in countries where we have probationary periods, we say it’s not during the probation, because then that doesn’t give us the opportunity to understand the performance and that sort of stuff, but there’s only a couple of countries where we actually have that, so in other places, then it’s from immediately you’re employed.

And lots of people are like, “oh, it’s such a big risk, because won’t they just take it immediately and then never come back, and they’re not going to repay it?” but ... people don’t really ... people want an employer that thinks these things are important to them, and I think actually the reality is everyone has come back to work! So ... in reality, the risk hasn’t materialised for us.
Why don’t dads take parental leave?

In 2011, the UK passed the Additional Paternity Leave (APL) policy, but less than 1% of eligible fathers took APL in its first year. This study investigates reasons for nonuse of APL. We find four main reasons: financial costs, gendered expectations, perceived workplace resistance, and policy restrictions. First, most fathers emphasized the role of finances in their leave decisions, sometimes taking annual leave for their second week because statutory pay was not enough. Second, both mothers and fathers largely assumed that mothers would take longer maternity leave due to gender differences in earnings and a greater emphasis on maternal over paternal bonding. Third, fathers felt that their workplaces would not be fully supportive of longer leave. Fourth, APL provides low pay and little flexibility. Gender plays a prominent role in each of the four themes. We discuss implications for Shared Parental Leave (SPL), which recently went into effect. Based on our findings, SPL is unlikely to be effective.

Parental-leave policy for male lawyers in Helsinki and Montreal: cultural and professional barriers to male lawyers’ use of paternity and parental leaves

Family policies in Finland and French Canada (Québec) include fathers’ rights to paternity and parental leaves, which have resulted in more fathers using parental leave. Yet this policy has a limited outreach to male-dominated professions, including the legal profession. In this article, we examine attitudes to paternity and parental leaves among male lawyers and the motives behind their decisions to use or not use them. We approach the issue from the perspective of the legal profession’s professional ethos, which impacts lawyers’ attitudes and practices regarding work-life balance. In our analysis, we draw on 20 Finnish and 18 Quebecois interviews with current and former male lawyers from private law practices in two urban civil-law contexts: Helsinki, Finland and Montreal, Canada. The findings indicate that, in traditionally male-dominated professions, it is not enough to provide men with statutory right to paternity and parental leave. There is also a need for organizational solutions and peer encouragement in the work environment so that men feel comfortable taking leave.


Backlash in gender equality? Fathers’ parental leave during a time of economic crisis

In Europe, there has been an increasing emphasis on the equal rights of men and women to parental leave. Nordic countries such as Iceland are often seen as forerunners in the implementation of laws that promote gender equality by giving each parent non-transferable rights to parental leave. In October 2008 the Icelandic banking system collapsed and a severe economic recession followed. This can be seen as a natural experimental intervention and provides a unique opportunity to study potential changes in fathers’ use of parental leave in response to drastic economic changes and resulting policy changes. Our data show that during the years 2003-2007, a time of economic prosperity, Icelandic fathers on average used 3 months of parental leave. After this event, father’s use of parental leave declined, while the reverse could be seen for mothers who progressively took a longer leave with partial pay. Our analysis suggests that a decline in fathers’ use of parental leave can be traced back to the dramatic collapse of the economic system and the subsequent substantial lowering of the maximum payment during parental leave. The most dramatic changes were seen for fathers in high-income groups whose payments during parental leave were most severely cut. The data suggest that after the economic collapse and resulting policy changes, women have become increasingly responsible and men decreasingly responsible for childcare duties – an alarming trend from the standpoint of gender equality. Possible remedies and courses of action are discussed.

The concept of playfulness in father-child interactions

FRB Comment by Dr Jennifer StGeorge, Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle. As the field of research on fathers’ interactions with children has matured, researchers are now attempting to capture the qualities of stimulation and unpredictability that were identified in the earlier studies of Michael Lamb and Daniel Paquette, amongst others. As a developmental researcher, my own starting point for understanding fathers’ play was rough and tumble play. Together with colleagues, I helped to develop a scale that measured the rough and the tumble of that apparently joyful but controversial play type. Our Rough and Tumble Play Quality scale captures dimensions of warmth, control, sensitivity, winning and losing, physical engagement and playfulness, as both individual and dyadic behaviours (Fletcher, StGeorge & Freeman, 2013). As I have also written about in a child development encyclopaedia, and without semantic trickery, if rough and tumble play is not playful, it’s not play, it is aggression. But as researchers seek to name other elements within fathers’ playfulness that is not physical rough and tumble, the division between playful and non-playful is not as clear-cut. What is a workable definition of playfulness? Where does playfulness start and stop? And how might it be measured? In answering the last question, there are several choices: do we code behaviours that, in sync with other behaviours, function to create a playful interaction (like touch), or, do we code the cognitive/psychological elements of the interaction (such as humour)? And what might be the usefulness of having these different windows on fathers’ playfulness?

Taking the first approach named above, Sethna et al. (2018) investigated fathers’ playfulness by measuring the frequency and or intensity of particular behaviours that jointly functioned as playfulness. The behaviours included the frequency or intensity of the following dimensions...

- physicality (gross motor stimulation)
- playful excitation (sudden, unexpected verbal or non-verbal behaviours)
- tactile stimulation (gentle or vigorous touch)
- active engagement (stimulation via paternal behaviour, affect, facial expression, and tone of voice)

With this collection of behaviours serving as a measure of playfulness, the researchers were able to establish that fathers’ playfulness was influenced by the extent of their depressive feelings: depressed fathers were less unpredictable, and less actively stimulating with their 3-month-old babies. The usefulness of this particular behavioural measure is that it reflects fathers’ typical play style at the same time as containing elements that are theoretically and empirically related to depressive affect, helping us to better understand the ecology of fathering.

Taking the second approach, Menashe-Grinberg and Atzaba-Poria (2017) analysed fathers’ playfulness by way of the creativity, imagination, humour, pretend play and curiosity embedded in his play interactions. This approach draws on psychology to cast playfulness as a particular disposition that assumes an experience of fun and or joy at the same time as creativity or imagination is activated. The overall playfulness of fathers’ interaction throughout a 10-minute toy-play session with their toddler was rated from low to high. The researchers established that the more fathers were playful, the less negative their toddlers were during the play session, however, this only held if fathers were also ‘sensitive’ and ‘structuring’ (organising the play, setting limits). That is, being playful may only be effective if fathers are also sensitive and structuring. The usefulness of this measure is its link to more general measures of adult playfulness, thus a strongly plausible construct. There is more research required to link it to children’s cognitive functioning.

So while the terms ‘play’ or ‘playfulness’ are familiar and used frequently in many different contexts, the breadth of the concept leaves a lot of room for investigation in terms of the relationship between fathers (and mothers’), playfulness and their children’s development. If this looks like something that fires up your own imagination and curiosity, there is a PhD Scholarship available for just this topic. See https://www.newcastle.edu.au/research-and-innovation/graduate-research/phd-scholarships/phd-scholarships/father-child-interaction-child-development-and-mechanisms-of-influence
Depression and playfulness in fathers and young infants: A matched design comparison study.

**Background:** Depression in fathers in the postnatal period is associated with an increased risk of some adverse child developmental outcomes. One possible mechanism for the familial transmission of risk is through the negative effects of depression on parenting and the parent-child relationship. So far, evidence indicates that depressed fathers tend to be more withdrawn in their early interactions. However, the interaction dimensions studied to date may not be able to detect and accurately classify unique features of father-infant play—including physically stimulating and highly rousing episodes of play. Hence, in this matched design comparison study, we set out to examine, for the first time, links between diagnosed paternal depression in the postnatal period and playfulness in father-infant interactions.

**Methods:** Fathers and their infants were assessed when the infants were 3 months old. Paternal depression was diagnosed using a structured psychiatric interview. Currently depressed (n = 19) and non-depressed (n = 19) fathers were individually matched on age and education. Fathers were filmed playing with their children. Four dimensions were coded for paternal playfulness during free-play: physicality, playful excitation, tactile stimulation and active engagement.

**Results:** Depressed fathers, compared to non-depressed fathers, engaged in fewer episodes of playful excitation (mean scores: 0.71 vs. 2.53, p=0.005), less gentle touch (mean time: 38.57 vs. 53.37, p=0.015) and less active engagement (mean scores: 2.29 vs 3.24, p = 0.044). When controlling for infant fretfulness, the findings remained largely unchanged.

**Limitations:** The sample size was small and the sample was limited to mostly white, well-educated fathers.

**Conclusions:** Playful paternal behaviours as early as 3 months differ between fathers with and without depression. These changes may help in understanding children’s risk in relation to paternal psychopathology and could be a target for future family interventions.


Mother–child and father–child play interaction: The importance of parental playfulness as a moderator of the links between parental behavior and child negativity.

**ABSTRACT:** Based on the premise that father–child play is an important context for children’s development and that fathers “specialize” in play, similarities and differences in the role of playfulness in the father–child and mother–child relationship were examined. Participants in this study included 111 families (children’s age: 1–3 years). Father–child and mother–child play interactions were videotaped and coded for parental playfulness, sensitivity, structuring, and nonintrusiveness as well as child negativity. Results indicated that mothers and fathers did not differ in playfulness and that mothers and fathers who were higher in playfulness had children with lower levels of negativity. However, playfulness differently moderated the links between parents’ and children’s behaviors for mothers and fathers. A double-risk pattern was found for mothers, such that the links between child negativity and maternal sensitivity, structuring, and nonintrusiveness were significant only for the subgroup of mothers with low levels of playfulness.

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When fathers had low levels of playfulness, these effects were negligible. These findings demonstrate the important role that parental playfulness has on parent–child interaction as well as the need to examine moderation patterns separately for fathers and mothers.


RESEARCHER PROFILE

The Perinatal Assessment of Paternal Affectivity (PAPA): A new screening tool based on fatherhood research.

Franco Baldoni, MD, PhD (Department of Psychology, University of Bologna, Italy)

The assessment of perinatal affective disorders in fathers represents a difficult challenge for clinicians and researchers. More frequently than in mothers, depression in fathers may occur in comorbidity with other disorders whose symptoms could overlap with the affective one, or mask it, causing complicated clinical pictures. Especially frequent among these are anxious disorders and abnormal illness behaviour (somatization, functional syndromes, chronic pain, hypochondria). Moreover, instead of asking for help, men tend to contain their discomfort through "externalizing" strategies (such as drinking alcohol, smoking or other risky behaviors) or express their problems by acting-outs and loss of impulse control, especially anger attacks.

The Perinatal Assessment of Paternal Affectivity (PAPA) (Baldoni et al., 2016, 2018) is a new self-report questionnaire for the screening of affective symptoms in fathers. It has been developed on recent research on perinatal affective disorders and assesses different dimensions of paternal affective problems: anxiety, depression, irritability/anger, relational and couple difficulties, somatic complaints, dangerous behaviors and addictions (smoking, alcohol, drugs, gambling, internet abuse, physical or sexual compulsive and risky behavior). It also considers some ethnic and socio-cultural influences.

The PAPA, translated in different languages, is composed of 11 questions asked in an understandable way and printed on a single A4 page. It is simple and quick to compile (taking only five minutes) and it can be easily administered by physicians or nurses in the waiting room in a public or private consultation setting (also during telephone interviews). The purpose of the questionnaire is not to make a diagnosis of an affective disorder, but to identify fathers who show a significant risk in this regard. The PAPA was officially introduced in 2016 at the WAIMH congress in Prague in a dedicated symposium and the data of the multicentric validation study were presented in 2018 at the WAIMH congress in Rome.

References:


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From psychosomatics to fatherhood research

Franco Baldoni

MD, PhD, Associate Professor in Clinical Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Bologna, Italy

I began to be interested in fathers from a psychological perspective at the beginning of the 90s, when, after becoming father myself and after years of psychosomatic research at the University of Bologna, I had the opportunity to study parental affective disorders and illness behaviour during the perinatal period. I was a doctor, but a psychoanalyst too, and a member of a family therapy team in public services. Considering my psychoanalytic and systemic training, it seemed natural to me carry out research by addressing the parental couple, and not only the mother. I had planned to talk to parents, as well as giving them self-report questionnaires — but I found myself immediately in difficulty. Most of the fathers did not come to meetings and when they came, they usually spoke instead of the mother. The doctors themselves and the nurses considered this normal and tended to address only the mothers. I experienced what today is called “maternal gatekeeping” and understood that the problem was complex and had social and cultural implications. With much effort and patience, I collected data from both parents and published a study comparing depression, anxiety and somatization in mothers and fathers. Following this, I began to be considered one of the first Italian researchers who took care of the fathers: a great and unexpected responsibility!

In the same years I began to be interested in attachment theory and to study the role of the father from this perspective. Affective disorders in fathers and paternal attachment became the most important fields of research within my Attachment Assessment Lab at the Department of Psychology of Bologna. In 2013 I organised “Fathers and Perinatality: Attachment, Adaptation and Psychopathology”, the first International congress on this issue. Since then I have published articles and held workshops and lectures on the father for public and private institutions. More recently, I have been collaborating with Australian researchers, in particular Stephen Matthey, University of Sidney, with whom I have developed the PAPA, a questionnaire for the screening of paternal perinatal affective disorders.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Fathers Special Edition of Fatherhood Research Bulletin

In September we will be producing a special edition of the Fatherhood Research Bulletin focused on research and programs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Fathers.

The special edition will be co-edited by Charlie Faulkner, Chairperson of Awabakal Aboriginal Corporation, Craig Hammond, Senior Coordinator, Indigenous Projects, Family Action Centre, Faculty of Health and Medicine at The University of Newcastle, and Richard Fletcher.

The issue will be sponsored jointly by First 1000 Days Australia, based at the Indigenous Health Equity Unit, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne and The Fathers & Families Research Program, Family Action Centre, Faculty of Health and Medicine, University of Newcastle.

Please send any descriptions of the programs, perspectives and research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers to:
richard.fletcher@newcastle.edu.au
Fatherhood Research Bulletin now searchable

Twenty six issues of the Fatherhood Research Bulletin are now available for downloading or searching.

The Fatherhood Research Bulletin is now being hosted by UON’s open access repository, NOVA. All current and previous issues of the Bulletin have been archived in NOVA and the fulltext of each issue can be searched within the collection. Or you can browse by issue.

ONGOING RESEARCH

Exploring the embodied narratives of primary caregiving fathers...

The aim of my project is to gain a richer understanding of the everyday lives of primary caregiving fathers: how do you make sense of your daily interactions and responsibilities?

Selection criteria: Fathers who have provided the main physical, emotional, and social care and responsibility for a young child/children, for a period of at least one year. Participants must be 18yrs+, have not recently experienced distress or mental illness, and not be currently involved in family legal proceedings or with Department of Community Services.

Participation will involve a video recorded interview approx. 1hr, in-person or by Skype/Zoom. This project has been approved by the Torrens University Australia HREC.

Contact: Simon Williams: 0406366600

Please view in HTML. If HTML is not accessible or you are having trouble viewing the links go to http://www.newcastle.edu.au/research-and-innovation/centre/fac/research

Or contact Richard Fletcher: richard.fletcher@newcastle.edu.au