

# fatherhood

## Research Bulletin

AUSTRALIAN FATHERHOOD RESEARCH NETWORK | BULLETIN 34 / JUNE 2016

**SMS4dads** 

## SPECIAL EDITION

- Feasibility study
- Working with Aboriginal dads
- Randomised Controlled Trial

**PhD Scholarship**  
applications open for research project

**A RESEARCHERS JOURNEY**  
exploring parents' partnerships

## Conference Papers



# Intro

The birth of a new baby can be the happiest time in a dad's life. But getting ready for the new arrival can be difficult and changes after the birth can also be hard to manage.

In this issue we take a look at SMS4dads and how this innovative project has aligned mobile technology with real, relevant and encouraging messages for dads.

We also check out the many follow-on projects stemming from SMS4dads including tailoring messages to mums and adapting tools for dads in the defence forces (p.10), a MoodTracker for Aboriginal Dads and alcohol messages project (p.11), along with conference papers (p.12) and much more.

We hope you enjoy this special issue of the bulletin. Feel free to connect with us... we'd love to hear about the work you are doing in your field with fathers and beyond.

editor

*R. Fletcher*



# fatherhood Research Bulletin

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## fatherhoodResearchBulletin

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# SMS4DADS



**SMS4dads aims to help dads navigate through the joys, changes and challenges of becoming a dad with info, tips and support – directly to dads phones**

**T**he birth of a new baby can be the happiest time in a dad's life.

But getting ready for the new arrival can be difficult and the changes after the birth can also be hard to manage. This is a time when dads are usually very busy and they may not have support available. When stress builds up dads may not know where to go or who to ask. Even with the internet there are so many options that it is not easy to find the right information.



SMS4dads is a new project to keep in touch with dads before and after the birth through their mobile phones. The brief text messages target three main areas: father-infant connection, father-mother support and coparenting, and fathers' self-care. The messages sent to the fathers' phones each week contain tips, information, prompts to action and links to other services for new dads. The messages are linked to the stage of development of the foetus or infant so that the topics are relevant to the issues facing parents.

Dads also regularly receive a Mood Tracker text asking for a response to 'How's it going?' Dads can reply with **Awesome** or **Cool** or **OK** or **Shaky** or **Bad**. Dads who respond 'bad' are asked if they would like someone to call them who is a specialist in talking to men with distress. Mothers are also invited to participate if their partner is enrolled in the study to ask for their perceptions of how SMS4dads worked for their partners.

## WHAT DO THE DADS SAY

**Dads have been willing and generous with their feedback and thoughts on their experience of SMS4dads. Here are a just a few of their comments....**

*We welcomed into the world (3 weeks early) a beautiful girl Sienna Grace last Tuesday. **The texts have been so helpful in getting to know her.** We have had some rough nights and I'm sure that will continue, however I wanted to let you know how much I appreciate the texts!! **They have been life changing for me and Sienna!***

***I have kept the messages on my phone** and I often flick through them while she is asleep*

*It's really good to know that there was **something out there for men***

*We'd talk about the messages* or the links about what's going to happen when the baby comes

*It helped me to take on a lot more responsibility*

*The messages made me think about me*

*I did not know much about baby blues*, the sleep one and expectations we have of each other when tired

Moodtracker made me think about keeping track of how I was going and *I started thinking about my mood*

*I was able to speak to my wife more* and find common ground, *I felt more confident* to talk to her about these things

*I opened all the links and read the info*

*I enjoyed the variety* of information

*It was a conversation starter* with my wife. We are both so busy working full time we don't have a lot of time to think about these things

The little tips like "tell her she's doing a good job" I'd tell her and she knew it was the messages and we'd have a bit of a giggle about it but *I never would have said that without the messages*

*Wish the service was around for my first two kids*



## EXAMPLE MESSAGES

Following are some example messages that dads receive from SMS4dads

*Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, and working together is success. Keep the communication open*

*There will be many different ways to sooth me. Swaddling or wrapping should be just right. Not too tight*

*Baby-proofing your home now will make things less stressful when I come along. You might be too busy looking after me then dad*

*Do you and your partner agree on what is important and what is not at this time? Keep talking to her about this because things are changing.*

*Breastfeeding. Great for baby, good for Mum, and easy on the wallet. If mum wants to breastfeed then let her know you want this for your family.*

*Sex might be on hold for a while. Try not to be impatient because this might damage the intimacy between you in the long run.*

*At 20 weeks my eyelids and eyebrows are forming and I can even blink! Not much to see yet but lots to look forward to.*

*Hey dad. I am going to double my length and triple my weight in the first year of life. Don't let this happen to you too*

*Show your partner kindness and let her know that you appreciate and support her where she is right now*

*Just because I am sucking my hands doesn't always mean I am hungry. It might be my way of chilling out*

**SMS4dads** is currently enrolling new dads  
To find out more visit [SMS4dads.com](https://SMS4dads.com)

# PROJECT HISTORY

Following the success of a six week pilot of the SMS4dads program, a twelve month trial is about to begin. The success of SMS4dads has been an almighty team effort with many contributors. Below are the SMS4dads staff who have been instrumental to the project's success.

## 2016 SMS4DADS PROJECT STAFF

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THE  
PEOPLE

## PROJECT TIMELINE

**2013** **Movember** puts out a call for large-scale innovative projects addressing the mental health needs of men and boys

**The Family Action Centre** invites researchers to join a Paternal Perinatal Depression Initiative (PPDI) to submit an SMS-based project to Movember

**Over 50 Senior Researchers** from across the perinatal professions sign up

**PPDI Project** A National Paternal Perinatal Depression Initiative (the SMS4DADS project) - developing text-based support for new fathers at risk of perinatal depression is submitted to Movember but fails to be selected

**2014** **PPDI Project continues**  
The researchers involved in the PPDI decide to continue to develop the project

### **beyondblue & healthy dads**

Discussions commence with *beyondblue* to support the development of SMS4dads as part of a 'Healthy Dads' initiative already underway with funding from Movember

**Advisory Group** for PPDI is formed

**Over 90 Researchers** and clinicians from Australia, UK, Italy, USA, Sweden and Canada join the PPDI

**Proposal Accepted** for a Feasibility Study and planning for SMS4dads commences in earnest

**Stayin' on Track** Project with young Aboriginal fathers incorporating SMS messaging and Mood Tracking is funded by The University of Newcastle and the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre

**2015** **Feasibility Study Commences**  
The SMS4dads Feasibility Study commences in February 2015 with recruitment start in June

# SCHOLARSHIP PHD OPPORTUNITY

## SMS4dads mobile phone information and support for new fathers

SCHOLARSHIP IN SMS4DADS SUITE OF RESEARCH PROJECTS UNDER SUPERVISION OF A/PROF RICHARD FLETCHER

There is limited understanding of how to assist new fathers with information and support during the perinatal period. SMS4dads is developing an early intervention platform of mobile phone based programs to assist fathers and their partners to manage the transition to parenthood



**INFORMATION**  
VISIT [WWW.SMS4DADS.COM](http://WWW.SMS4DADS.COM)

Applications are open until 30 September 2016

**T**he field of eHealth is developing and rapidly expanding. There are numerous empirical questions to be addressed if the potential of the SMS-4dads project is to be realised. The PhD candidate will work on an agreed aspect of this study. This study will provide essential new knowledge to inform future approaches to supporting fathers, and thereby their partners and families during the perinatal period.

### ■ ELIGIBILITY

Applications will have an undergraduate degree in Psychology, Public Health, Medicine, Social Sciences or equivalent with first class honours and preferably a Masters degree. Strong proficiency in English is essential and good communication skills. Applications are open to international and domestic candidates

### ■ SCHOLARSHIP DETAILS

The successful applicant will be supported by a scholarship for three years at \$26,288 (indexed annually), with the opportunity to apply for a 6 month extension. Faculty support of \$1500 per year for study-related expenses is also available

### ■ APPLICATIONS

Interested applicants are advised to send an email expressing their interest

### ■ CONTACT

[Richard.Fletcher@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Richard.Fletcher@newcastle.edu.au)

# FEASIBILITY STUDY

The SMS4dads Feasibility Study commenced in February 2015

**T**he Family Action Centre, at the University of Newcastle has been funded by *beyondblue* and Movember to conduct the research. The feasibility study tests recruitment, delivery of texts and mood tracking with men expecting a baby in the next 6 months, or fathers with infants under three months of age.



## DEVELOPING THE TEXT MESSAGES

*The feasibility study involved extensive testing of the brief text messages. Feedback on the first set of draft messages came from parents accessing Ngala in Western Australia and Tresillian in New South Wales. A pilot study then sent messages to a sample of dads across Australia for 6 weeks at different times testing the delivery software and dads' preferences for receiving the messages. As well, professionals from psychology, child psychiatry, obstetrics, early childhood, paediatrics, and midwifery, (45 in total) reviewed and rated the messages for clarity, usefulness and relevance. Websites that might provide useful information on the three target areas, father-infant, father-partner or father self-care, were also evaluated.*

## TESTING RECRUITMENT

Fathers were recruited through education sessions, flyers, and posters at Family Planning, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), and ultrasound services within the public health system in Newcastle, as well as via maternal Facebook forums reaching parents across Australia. As fathers enrolled the way that they heard about SMS4dads was recorded indicating the effectiveness of the various channels for recruitment.

## MONITORING WEBSITE & MOOD TRACKER USE

The software developed for the project monitored the number of fathers clicking on the website links that were sent to fathers. Responses to the Mood Tracker, sent every 3 weeks were also recorded indicating the level of distress.

Preliminary results are very encouraging with dads showing mums the messages and texts raising topics to talk about. Dads also reported Mood Tracker messages helped them to be more aware of their mood

## ACCEPTABILITY OF THE TEXT MESSAGES

Fathers can opt out easily by texting 'STOP' so that the number of fathers exiting the program provided a clear indication of acceptability. At exit fathers who consented were telephoned with a short evaluation interview. Mothers were also asked about their view of the program.

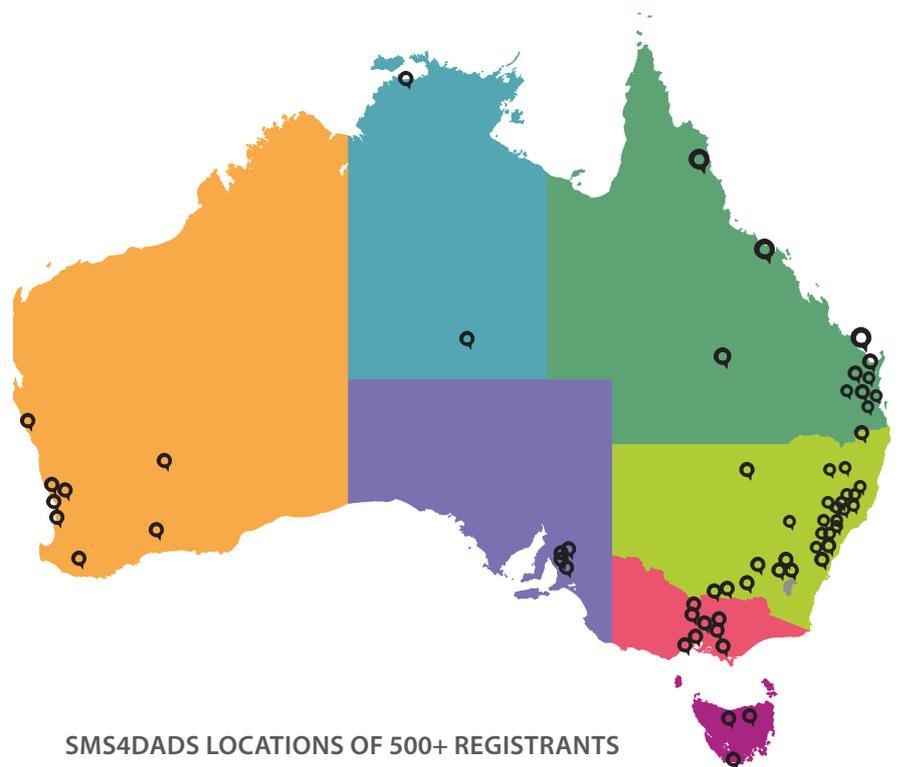
## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The feasibility study is not due to finish until September this year however the results to date suggest that SMS4dads is:

- Acceptable to new fathers
- Connects with dads who are distressed
- Provides useful information to new dads
- Encourages dads to interact with their new baby
- Boosts the relationship between dads and mums

Reports also show the following:

- Dads show mums the messages
- The texts raise topics to talk about
- The Mood Tracker messages too are reported to be helpful
- Even when dads say they don't reply to the regular reminder to 'check your mood' they say, it helps them to keep on track



SMS4DADS LOCATIONS OF 500+ REGISTRANTS

## ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

27,400 TEXT MESSAGES

Sent to 450+ DADS

Over 250 LOCATIONS

Across all Australian time zones

MOOD TRACKER message with 5 response options linked to the national Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia (PANDA) helpline

LOW DROP OUT from the program, approximately 11%

# FOLLOW-ON PROJECTS

SMS4dads expands to include both mums and dads, fathers working in defence forces, Aboriginal dads, alcohol messages and more...

**W**ith the successful launch of SMS4dads the project has received positive feedback and further funding to explore a wider audience and sub-groups of dads (and mums) across Australia. Furthermore, SMS4dads is tailoring messages for specific topic areas such as the influence of dads in healing maternal depression and anxiety and the role and effects dads use of alcohol has on maternal alcohol use and parenting.

**Funding from Defence Health, *beyondblue*, University of Newcastle, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre & Queensland Health sees the expansion of SMS4dads projects**

# 1

## Randomised Controlled Trial

SMS4dadsRCT – this trial will commence in July 2016. Intervention fathers will receive the full complement of SMS4dads messages while control group fathers will receive health promotion texts for six months before switching to full SMS4dads messages. Outcomes Depression, Anxiety, Distress, Coparenting and Alcohol use will be measured at 6 months. The study is funded by *beyondblue* and Movember

# 2

## Dads & Mums

SMS4Dads&Mums – this trial commencing in July 2016 is focused on the parenting partnership (coparenting). The study will aim to recruit couples who have been participating in SMS4dads after they have had their baby. The aim is to send the same messages to both mothers' and fathers' phones and emails with the intention of provoking positive coparenting behaviours, and the sharing of knowledge and experiences that will enhance parent perceptions of being on a shared parenting journey. As with SMS4dads, messages will be designed to fit with issues facing the parenting relationship at the time when they arrive. The study is funded by *beyondblue*

# 3

## Dads in Defence Forces

SMS4dadsDH – this randomised controlled trial will commence in August 2016 with fathers whose families are insured with Defence Health. Intervention fathers will receive the full complement of SMS4dads messages while control group fathers will receive health promotion texts for six months before switching to full SMS4dads messages. Depression, Anxiety, Distress, Coparenting and Alcohol use will be measured at 6 months. Funding contract under negotiation with Defence Health



# 4

## Young Aboriginal Fathers

Stayin' on Track – text messages and Mood Tracker were tested in the Stayin' on Track project with young Aboriginal fathers. Young fathers co-designed the website. Craig Hammond and Charlie Faulkner provided leadership and mentoring to the young fathers. The Mood Tracker used culturally appropriate options for responding: Solid, Deadly, OK, Low and Empty. Fathers' use and responses were recorded. Funded by the University of Newcastle & Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre

# 5

## Maternal Depression

SMS4dads for partners of distressed mum – SMS4dadsQLD

Fathers play a key role in healing maternal depression and anxiety. Partners of mothers attending perinatal mental health services in two regional centres in Queensland in 2016 will be invited to enrol in a tailored SMS4dads. Funding provided by Queensland Health

# 6

## Alcohol Messages

Maternal alcohol consumption during pregnancy can impair infant development. Fathers can influence mothers' drinking and fathers may also place the family at risk through their own alcohol consumption. Developing effective text messages addressing alcohol use for new fathers is being undertaken in 2016 as a Psychology Honours project



# RESEARCH CONFERENCE PAPERS

Two papers will be presented on the SMS4dads project at the **International Marce Society Scientific Conference 2016 MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA 26-28 SEPTEMBER 2016**



## SMS4DADS AUSTRALIA

### OBJECTIVES | BACKGROUND

Ten percent of new fathers are estimated to be experiencing depression (Paulson & Bazemore, 2010) however few will seek support. Mobile technology could potentially deliver support and parenting information to new fathers.

This feasibility study aimed to test the design, delivery and acceptability of SMS4dads, an intervention consisting of text messages and an interactive 'Mood Tracker', delivered to fathers over the perinatal period.

### METHOD

Fathers were recruited through clinics and social media. Kessler 6 score (Kessler et al., 2003) was collected at enrolment.

Brief text messages addressing father-infant and father-partner relationships and fathers' self care were sent from 6 months antenatally to 3 months postnatally. Messages averaged 14 per month including three-weekly 'mood tracker' with 5 mood options. Indicating the lowest option triggered telephone support. Acceptability, usefulness and satisfaction were measured through an online survey on exit.

### RESULTS

Results for the first 4 months are described here. The complete 8 month study results will be presented in September. Social media, antenatal educators and home visiting nurses were all effective recruiters. Over 300 fathers were recruited in four months and only 5% withdrew. Approximately half reported K6 scores consistent with moderate to high levels of distress however no fathers clicked the lowest mood option.

External web page links with further information were accessed by more than 50% of fathers.

### CONCLUSION | DISCUSSION

SMS messaging can reach men as they transition to fathers. Messages targeting infant care, partner support and self-care are acceptable to new fathers and links to further information are utilised. It is unclear if Mood Tracker messages led to increased awareness of mental health or to seeking support.

# ADAPTING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE PARADIGMS FOR DELIVERING SUPPORT TO NEW FATHERS VIA MOBILE PHONES

## OBJECTIVES | BACKGROUND

Mobile phones provide a potential conduit to reach time-poor fathers in the perinatal period. Following successful health-promoting models targeting diet, exercise, smoking and alcohol, text-based messages are being designed to deliver information and support to mothers and, more recently, to new fathers. However fathering behaviours lack the precision of typical health behaviours and men in the transition to fatherhood may need information, on relationships for example, which is less amenable to brief, one-way messages. A fathering-specific model of text-based information transfer is needed.



## OBJECTIVES | BACKGROUND

As part of a beyondblue-funded project delivering texts to new fathers a model of text-content development has been developed through three steps:

- 1** The key elements in developing content for text-based programs targeting common health behaviours were identified;
- 2** These were matched against the evidence of fathers' needs in the perinatal period to pinpoint conceptual overlap as well as gaps.
- 3** A draft model of father-specific information needs was applied to the message content delivered to the mobile phones of 350 new fathers over a 12 month period.

## RESULTS

The model of fathers' information needs linked to evidence of established behaviour change methods was applicable to the texts and provided a theoretical guide for evaluating the effectiveness of the mobile-phone based program. Differences from standard health promotion messaging were identified.



## CONCLUSION | DISCUSSION

New technologies will continue to be developed and utilised to promote health-related behaviours. Having evidence-based models for designing and evaluating novel approaches will be essential to provide effective support to new parents.



# SO MUCH STILL TO DISCOVER



**W**e are pleased at the development of the range of SMS4dads research projects. However, the more we investigate the more we see how much we don't know.

Developing support mechanisms for new fathers is just beginning and SMS4dads links two relatively undeveloped fields of text-based parenting support and fatherhood research. Having a dedicated PhD student for SMS4dads is certainly a step forward, as is the first Fatherhood Research Symposium to be held in July, but there are many aspects of web-based support for fathers and their families that remain to be investigated. In the Research section for this special Bulletin below we feature some examples from recently published Australian research which make a start on providing a solid evidence base for our work.

## **MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH IN THE TRANSITION TO FATHERHOOD**

### **FRB COMMENT**

*SMS4dads aims to improve new fathers' mental health and his relationships with his partner and his infant. While fathers are understood to experience anxiety during the perinatal period we lack measures of the rate and severity which would allow targeting interventions to high-risk fathers. The systematic review by Leach et al, which included several Australian studies found prevalence rates of between 4.1% and 16.0% antenatally and 2.4–18.0% during the postnatal period.*

### **BACKGROUND**

Men's experiences of anxiety within the perinatal period can adversely impact themselves, their partner and infant. However, we know little about the prevalence and course of men's anxiety across the perinatal period. The current review is one of the first to systematically review the published literature.



## METHODS

Five databases (PubMed, Psyc INFO, Cochrane, SCOPUS, and Web of Science) were searched to identify relevant papers published prior to April 2015. The literature search identified articles with data for expectant fathers (prenatal period) and/or fathers of an infant aged between 0 and 1 (postnatal period). The following data were re-extracted: (a) anxiety disorder prevalence (diagnostic clinical interviews), (b) 'high' anxiety symptom prevalence (above thresholds/cut-points on anxiety symptom scales) and (c) mean anxiety levels (anxiety symptom scales). Initially, 537 unique papers were identified. Subsequently, 43 papers met criteria for inclusion in the review.

## RESULTS

Prevalence rates for 'any' anxiety disorder (as defined by either diagnostic clinical interviews or above cut-points on symptom scales) ranged between 4.1% and 16.0% during the prenatal period and 2.4– 18.0% during the postnatal period. The data reviewed suggest the course of anxiety across the perinatal period is fairly stable with potential decreases postpartum.

## LIMITATIONS

Wide variation in study measurement and methodology makes the synthesis of individual findings difficult. Anxiety is highly comorbid with depression, and thus measures of mixed anxiety/depression might better capture the overall burden of mental illness.

## CONCLUSIONS

Anxiety disorders are common for men during the perinatal period. Both partners should be included in discussions and interventions focused on obstetric care and parent mental health during the perinatal period.

LEACH, L. S., POYSER, C., COOKLIN, A. R., & GIALLO, R. (2016). PREVALENCE AND COURSE OF ANXIETY DISORDERS (AND SYMPTOM LEVELS) IN MEN ACROSS THE PERINATAL PERIOD: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW. *JOURNAL OF AFFECTIVE DISORDERS*, 190, 675-686.

# RESEARCH ON SPECIFIC GROUPS OF FATHERS

## FRB COMMENT

*We also lack information on specific groups of fathers. The work by Atkinson and colleagues examines protective factors, such as employment and formal education, for anxiety and depression among young fathers (fathers whose partners are teenage mothers). This study is part of the Australian Father's Study, a longitudinal study of 1000 fathers through the antenatal period.*

## EMPLOYMENT MAY PROTECT FATHERS IN THE SETTING OF MATERNAL TEENAGE PREGNANCY FROM ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION: FINDINGS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN

### OBJECTIVE

There is limited research on fathers in the setting of maternal teenage pregnancy. Most studies report data from regions of social disadvantage and low education. We report on the levels of anxiety, depression and quality of life of fathers in the setting of maternal teenage pregnancy in an area where the unemployment rate is low.

### METHODS

Observational study of 50 fathers in the setting of maternal teenage pregnancy and 100 fathers whose partners were not teenagers (control), living within the same metropolitan healthcare region with high employment rates. Fathers were enrolled within the larger Australian Father's Study and were recruited from antenatal clinics and community settings. Researchers administered the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale and demographic questionnaires.

### RESULTS

Fathers in the setting of maternal teenage pregnancy were significantly younger than control fathers ( $p < 0.05$ ). After adjusting for demographic variables, fathers in the setting of maternal teenage pregnancy did not have levels of anxiety, depression or quality of life that were significantly different to control fathers.

### CONCLUSION

Fathers in the setting of maternal teenage pregnancy, when engaged in further education or employment have levels of anxiety, depression and quality of life comparable to control fathers.



ATKINSON AG, PETERSEN RW, QUINLIVAN JA (2016) EMPLOYMENT MAY PROTECT FATHERS IN THE SETTING OF MATERNAL TEENAGE PREGNANCY FROM ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION: FINDINGS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN FATHER'S STUDY. REPROD SYST SEX DISORD 5: 161

# IMPACT OF INTERVENTION ON FATHER'S MENTAL HEALTH

## FRB COMMENT

*Interventions with new fathers are beginning to be reported. As would be expected they vary markedly in what they offer to fathers. Pulling together the results of disparate intervention programs within a systematic review can provide pointers for further developing father-targeted programs and services. The review by Rominov et al suggests that, at this stage, teaching baby massage is one effective way to support new fathers.*

## A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF INTERVENTIONS TARGETING PATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PERINATAL PERIOD

### ABSTRACT

*Interventions targeting parents' mental health in the perinatal period are critical due to potential consequences of perinatal mental illness for the parent, the infant, and their family. To date, most programs have targeted mothers. This systematic review explores the current status and evidence for intervention programs aiming to prevent or treat paternal mental illness in the perinatal period. Electronic databases were systematically searched to identify peer-reviewed studies that described an intervention targeting fathers' mental health in the perinatal period. Mental health outcomes included depression, anxiety, and stress as well as more general measures of psychological functioning. Eleven studies were identified. Three of five psychosocial interventions and three massage-technique interventions reported significant effects. None of the couple-based interventions reported significant effects. A number of methodological limitations were identified, including inadequate reporting of study designs, and issues with the timing of interventions. The variability in outcomes measures across the studies made it difficult to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the interventions. Father-focused interventions aimed at preventing perinatal mood problems will be improved if future studies utilize more rigorous research strategies.*

ROMINOV, H., PILKINGTON, P. D., GIALLO, R., & WHELAN, T. A. (2016). A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF INTERVENTIONS TARGETING PATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PERINATAL PERIOD. *INFANT MENTAL HEALTH JOURNAL*, 37(3), 289-301.

## COUPLE BASED SUPPORT

### FRB COMMENT

*In the studies reviewed by Rominov et al, described above, interventions for couples showed no significant effect. Yet we know that fathering can only take place when a mother gives birth and that coparenting is an important factor in children's wellbeing.*

*In the papers below the focus is on fathers' role in maternal depression and breastfeeding. The psychosocial assessment of mothers is key to the national approach to identifying and assisting distressed mothers. Fathers are also key to mothers' mental health yet their involvement or even their presence at the assessment of the mothers has not been investigated. Rollans and colleagues examine the way that fathers are included or excluded by midwives and child and family health nurses as part of the mothers' assessment. Breastfeeding is another area where fathers are known to have a major impact but where services and public perceptions render the male half of the couple invisible. Building on an earlier study, the Fathers Infant Feeding Initiative (FIFI), that trialled a male-facilitated antenatal class and mail out information on breastfeeding White and colleagues have designed a gamified app for fathers to encourage their support of breastfeeding.*

## PARTNER INVOLVEMENT: NEGOTIATING THE PRESENCE OF PARTNERS IN PSYCHOSOCIAL ASSESSMENT AS CONDUCTED BY MIDWIVES AND CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH NURSES

### ABSTRACT

Universal screening for maternal depression and assessment of psychosocial risks has been integrated into the routine perinatal care provided in many Australian hospitals, but to date, partners/fathers have been largely excluded from the process. This study explored the ways in which clinicians in health service settings include partners who attend antenatal and postnatal visits with women. Qualitative data were collected using observations (n = 54), interviews (n = 60), and discussion groups (n = 7) with midwives and child and family health nurses who conducted the appointments. Transcripts from observations, interviews, and discussion groups underwent qualitative analysis, and key themes were identified. Results showed partners to have little or no involvement in psychosocial assessment and depression screening. Thematic analysis revealed four key themes: negotiating partner exclusion, partial inclusion, women's business or a couple concern? and they know anyway. Partner involvement appeared to be challenged particularly by mandatory interpersonal violence screening, which, according to health service policy, is to be conducted confidentially. Overall, results highlighted partner involvement in perinatal depression screening and psychosocial assessment processes and identified some of the benefits such as partner disclosure, but also the challenges and complexities of inclusion of partners. Clinical implications and directions for further education and research are discussed.

ROLLANS, M., KOHLHOFF, J., MEADE, T., KEMP, L., & SCHMIED, V. (2016). PARTNER INVOLVEMENT: NEGOTIATING THE PRESENCE OF PARTNERS IN PSYCHOSOCIAL ASSESSMENT AS CONDUCTED BY MIDWIVES AND CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH NURSES. *INFANT MENTAL HEALTH JOURNAL*, 37(3), 302-312.

# THEORY-BASED DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIALLY CONNECTED, GAMIFIED MOBILE APP FOR MEN ABOUT BREASTFEEDING (MILK MAN)

## BACKGROUND

Despite evidence of the benefits of breastfeeding, <15% of Australian babies are exclusively breastfed to the recommended 6 months. The support of the father is one of the most important factors in breastfeeding success, and targeting breastfeeding interventions to the father has been a successful strategy in previous research. Mobile technology offers unique opportunities to engage and reach populations to enhance health literacy and healthy behaviour.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of our study was to use previous research, formative evaluation, and behaviour change theory to develop the first evidence-based breastfeeding app targeted at men. We designed the app to provide men with social support and information aiming to increase the support men can offer their breastfeeding partners.

## METHODS

We used social cognitive theory to design and develop the Milk Man app through stages of formative research, testing, and iteration. We held focus groups with new and expectant fathers (n=18), as well as health professionals (n=16), and used qualitative data to inform the design and development of the app. We tested a prototype with fathers (n=4) via a think-aloud study and the completion of the Mobile Application Rating Scale (MARS).

## RESULTS

Fathers and health professionals provided input through the focus groups that informed the app development. The think-aloud walkthroughs identified 6 areas of functionality and usability to be addressed, including the addition of a tutorial, increased size of text and icons, and greater personalization. Testers rated the app highly, and the average MARS score for the app was 4.3 out of 5.

## CONCLUSIONS

To our knowledge, Milk Man is the first breastfeeding app targeted specifically at men. The development of Milk Man followed a best practice approach, including the involvement of a multidisciplinary team and grounding in behaviour change theory. It tested well with end users during development. Milk Man is currently being trialled as part of the Parent Infant Feeding Initiative (ACTRN12614000605695).

WHITE BK, MARTIN A, WHITE JA, BURNS SK, MAYCOCK BR, GIGLIA RC, SCOTT JA THEORY-BASED DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIALLY CONNECTED, GAMIFIED MOBILE APP FOR MEN ABOUT BREASTFEEDING (MILK MAN) JMIR MHEALTH UHEALTH 2016;4(2):E81



# OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE LINKS BETWEEN BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF FATHERING

## FRB COMMENT

*One area where there is little Australian research to report is in the way that biological aspects of fathering can be integrated into our psychological and social understandings of male parenting. While we have world-renowned reproductive scientists in Australia we are lacking researchers who can bridge across the world of hormones and genes into the social arena of father-infant interaction, fathering behaviours and roles. Gettler has published several landmark papers on the links between testosterone levels and fathering.*

*In a recent commentary titled *Becoming DADS Considering the Role of Cultural Context and Developmental Plasticity for Paternal Socio endocrinology* he provides an account of men's caregiving which incorporates evidence of testosterone influence as well as changes in fathers' roles at the society level.*

*Below is an excerpt...*

In our research in Metro Cebu, Philippines, my collaborators and I found that single men with higher testosterone at age 21 were more likely to be partnered fathers at age 26. During that 5-year time frame, men who transitioned from being single non-fathers to being newly partnered fathers experienced significantly larger declines in testosterone than men who remained single nonfathers (Gettler et al. 2011; fig. 1). The new fathers showed particularly large declines in testosterone if they resided with their children (Gettler et al. 2015). Fathers who were highly involved in day-to-day care and who coslept had lower testosterone than less involved fathers (Gettler et al. 2011, 2012). We recently showed that men's caregiving involvement and their testosterone change in tandem, longitudinally, so as fathers increase their caregiving through time, their testosterone declines (and vice versa; Gettler et al. 2015; figs. 2, 3). Thus, in Cebu, elevated testosterone among single non-fathers positions men to perform their subsequent roles as partners/parents, which, to the extent that they embrace opportunities for nurturance, leads to lower testosterone. Framed within my DADS model, our data illustrate intersections between fathers' "duration" of childcare and their testosterone and provide indicators of the contextual "salience" while shedding less light on "dedication" and "attitude." From a historical perspective, what is potentially taken for granted in that brief synopsis is that "opportunities for nurturance" (salience) only recently became somewhat commonplace for fathers in Metro Cebu.



There has been a nontrivial increase, on average, in paternal involvement in childcare from the early 1980s (at least) to the present in Metro Cebu (Gettler et al. 2015; Liu, Rubel, and Yu 1969; Tiefenthaler 1997). This general shift in parenting practices, in which some men ("generation two") are providing substantive direct care to their children (compared with their own fathers, "generation one"), conflicts with long-standing cultural models related to family life, gender roles, and concepts of masculinity (Dumont 1993; Medina 2001; Tan 1994). Traditionally, such hands-on care behaviours are ascribed to Filipino mothers, whereas fathers' roles in the family have historically aligned with breadwinning and instilling moral values and behaviours (Harper 2010; Medina 2001; Tan 1994). The root causes of this shift in paternal involvement are not clear and have not been explicitly studied to my knowledge. However, the historical trajectory coincides with the implementation of neoliberal economic policies in the Philippines, which increased female labor opportunities/participation (particularly through growth in urban service sectors), as well as financial crisis in East Asia, which disproportionately increased male unemployment and underemployment relative to females (Lim2000). This period in time also saw high rates of females migrating from the Philippines for international labour opportunities to send home remittances (Porio 2007). Pingol (2001) has specifically argued that female migration leads to a "remaking" of masculinities for Filipino fathers who stay behind and care for their children.

GETTLER, L. T. (2016). BECOMING DADS: CONSIDERING THE ROLE OF CULTURAL CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENTAL PLASTICITY FOR PATERNAL SOCIOENDOCRINOLOGY. CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY, 57(S13)



# PARENTING PARTNERSHIPS

A researchers' journey from researching fathers to exploring parents' partnerships

**R**esearcher Dr Chris May is Chief Investigator of the SMS4dads TO DADS AND MUMS (SMS4Dads&Mums) study and Senior Project Officer for SMS4dads. He describes his development of 'parenting partnerships' as central for approaching fathers' and families' wellbeing.

Although I worked in many different roles and environments during almost 26 years of paediatric nursing I was most influenced by 10 years as a diabetes nurse at Sydney Children's Hospital. In this role I worked closely with almost 400 families who were initially dealing with the crisis of having their child diagnosed with a chronic disease.

These families were living with continuous blood testing, multiple daily injections, constant worry about hypoglycaemia, and a nagging worry about the risk of long term complications. During this work I would see the families regularly, talk to them often by phone, and took many of the children on camps.

The point of all this is that I did get to know the families reasonably well and worked with many of them until their children had finished school. During this time I was struck by two things: how well families often worked together to share and manage this responsibility, and how much better they seemed to cope when there were high levels of father involvement.

Almost 10 years after I had moved on from the diabetes work took up the opportunity to explore the importance of fathering in families where there is a child with a disability in a research PhD. While working out how I was going to go about my study I was also learning about key indicators of parent and child outcomes such as parents stress, parenting self-efficacy, and coparenting theory. It became apparent to me that coparenting quality, rather than fathering involvement alone, may be a better explanation for why some families of children with diabetes, and other conditions, coped better than others.

I ended up exploring this idea in my research, and found that coparenting quality was a stronger predictor of parenting stress in a cohort of mothers and fathers of children with autism than any other factor; including severity of autism, socioeconomic position, and their sense of competence in parenting a child with autism. There are now many studies pointing to the importance of coparenting quality in relation to both child and parent outcomes but it also appears that the parenting partnership may be particularly important for fathers.

Parenting partnerships can be positively influenced through intervention but we need to know much more about how this can be done affordably, in a variety of settings, with families who will benefit the most, and on a scale that really does make a difference.



*“I was struck by two things: how well families often worked together to share and manage responsibilities, and how much better they seemed to cope when there were high levels of father involvement”*



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