

The Bulletin is produced by Richard Fletcher on behalf of the AFRN Steering Group: Prof. Trevor Cairney, University of New South Wales; Dr Richard Fletcher, University of Newcastle; Prof Ilan Katz, University of New South Wales; Samantha Page, Early Childhood Australia; Prof Bruce Maycock, Curtin University of Technology; A/Prof Campbell Paul, Royal Children's Hospital, Vic.



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Contact

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



# Fatherhood Research Bulletin

Bulletin 28

April 2015

<b>NEWS from the Australian Fatherhood Research Network</b>	<b>2</b>
Promoting the PPDI	3–4
<b>RESOURCES ON THE WEB:</b>	
<b>Paternity leave report</b>	
Companies like to promote their offering of paternity leave And changes can be seen supporting dads to care for babies Photographing Swedish fathers who are taking paternity leave	5–11
<b>RESEARCH</b>	<b>5–11</b>
<b>Gay fathers and children of gay fathers</b>	
Child Well-Being in Same-Sex Parent Families: Review of Research Prepared for American Sociological Association Amicus Brief	
Adoptive Gay Father Families: Parent–Child Relationships and Children's Psychological Adjustment	
The health perspectives of Australian adolescents from same-sex parent families: a mixed methods study	
How statewide LGB policies go from "under our skin" to "into our hearts": Fatherhood aspirations and psychological well-being among emerging adult sexual minority men	
<b>What is unique or special about fathering</b>	
Should Researchers Conceptualize Differently the Dimensions of Parenting for Fathers and Mothers?	
Essential Differences in the Meaning and Processes of Mothering and Fathering: Family Systems, Feminist and Qualitative Perspectives.	
Attachment Theory and Fathers: Moving From “Being There” to “Being With”	
<b>Discovering motivation for change in fathers who use violence</b>	
‘I Miss My Little One a Lot’: How Father Love Motivates Change in Men Who Have Used Violence	
<b>Understanding the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of fathers’ support</b>	
Modifiable partner factors associated with perinatal depression and anxiety: A systematic review and meta-analysis	
A new model of father support to promote breastfeeding	
<b>ONGOING RESEARCH</b>	<b>12</b>
\$2.6 million for ‘Like Father Like Son	

## NEWS from the Australian Fatherhood Research Network

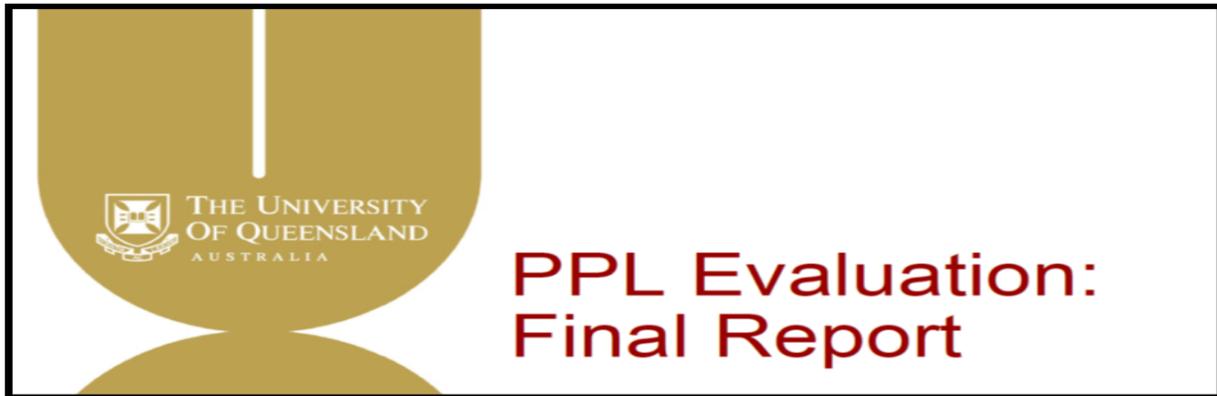
### Promoting the PPDI

The broad agenda of the Paternal Perinatal Depression Initiative is to have services across the perinatal period address new fathers' mental health for the benefit of the family. This approach will require changes in several areas: how services view fathers, the way that we identify mental health needs and how fathers understand their role. Advances in these areas will support the PPDI agenda. Researchers from the two main research projects coming under the banner of the PPDI (SMS4dads and Stayin on Track – see FRB no27) are active in discussing the issues relating to fathers' perinatal mental health among mainstream and Aboriginal populations as well as the broader ideas surrounding father-inclusive practice. Recent and future presentations which include information about PPDI, SMS4dads and Stayin on Track are:

Presentation	Event	Presenter	Project information
Refining father-Inclusive Practice	WEBINAR: ARACY and AIFS webinar. March 2015	R. Fletcher, J. StGeorge	SMS4dads
IT for engaging fathers	WORKSHOP: NT Health and Welfare seminar, Alice Springs NT. April 2015	R. Fletcher	SMS4dads
Stayin on Track for young Aboriginal fathers	POSTER: 13 <sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference. May Darwin, NT	D. Perkins	Stayin on Track
Fathers role in child development	INVITED ADDRESS: Nurturing for the Next Generation Conference. NSW Health May 2015 Sydney, NSW	R. Fletcher	SMS4dads, Stayin on Track
Digital Dads: using internet and mobile phone technology to link 'hard to reach' fathers with information and support	INVITED ADDRESS: ARACY Coming together for Australia's children. June 2015 Hobart, TAS	R. Fletcher	SMS4dads, Stayin on Track
Keeping young Aboriginal fathers on track	PAPER ; SNAICC National Conference Community Voices: Sharing Knowledge & Practice. September Perth WA	C. Hammond	Stayin on Track
Keeping young Aboriginal fathers on track	KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Men's Health Gathering. October 2015 Terrigal, NSW	C. Hammond	Stayin on Track

## RESOURCES ON THE WEB

### Paternity leave report



**FRB comment:** In 2011 when Australia commenced paid paternity leave it was strongly suggested that fathers would now have time to bond with their baby and take a bigger part in their infant's care. In March this year the Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Scott Morrison released the final evaluation of the Paid parental Leave Scheme. While the media release focused on the principal aim of the scheme - helping women to get back to work after they've had children, the report also mapped changes in fathering associated with the uptake of paternity leave. The results were less than encouraging. In the first two months after the birth of their child, fathers took one extra day. But after the first six months, they took no more leave than they had before the introduction of the scheme. Dads caring for the baby across all the basic jobs from feeding to playing did improve early on but again, by 12 months there was no difference. The report can be downloaded <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programmes-services/paid-parental-leave-scheme/paid-parental-leave-evaluation>.

For a discussion of the scheme and the issues see this Conversation article <http://theconversation.com/leave-isnt-enough-to-change-fathers-role-in-caring-for-kids-39245>

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### Companies like to promote their offering of paternity leave

From the KPMG website:



Paid parental leave KPMG is proud to announce a market-leading parental leave program which includes up

to 18 weeks paid leave for new parents who are primary caregivers, up to 3 weeks paid leave for non-primary caregivers and broadens the scope of the firm's policies to include adoption and fostering. The new approach ensures flexibility in the way the parental leave payments are received, no lengthy return time requirements between subsequent parental leave and no associated claw back requirements. The changes provide a minimum of 12 weeks payment for employees with 2 years tenure or less, increasing to 18 weeks paid parental leave for employees who have been with the firm for 8 years or more.

<http://www.kpmg.com/au/en/careers/whykpmg/rewards-benefits/pages/parental-leave.aspx>

## RESOURCES ON THE WEB

And changes can be seen supporting dads to care for babies



Seaworld Gold Coast QLD amenities Photo J. Wroe

### Photographing Swedish fathers who are taking paternity leave

The photographs are part of a project 'Swedish Dads' by photographer Johan Bävman "I started this project when I was home with my



own son. I had a hard time finding anything that was written for me as a father. So I got the idea that I wanted to document fathers during their parent leave, to hear why they wanted to be home with their children and what they hoped to learn from it."

As the dad shown here, who is taking 10 months paternity leave put it "My wife and I try to be as equal as possible in our everyday life. Our son Holger was diaper-free at the age of 4 months, something we both worked really hard on during the first months, and which I am very proud of today. My day consists of cooking and playing with my son."

See <http://www.buzzfeed.com/lynzybilling/this-is-what-it-looks-like-when-men-are-allowed-to-take-60-d#.dj62Ejz7Z>

## RESEARCH

### Gay fathers and children of gay fathers

***FRB comment:** As the FRB is being compiled there continues to be discussion over the legality of gay marriage in Australia. As in other countries the issue taps into spiritual and moral values as well as beliefs about the parenting of gay fathers and lesbian mothers. In the fatherhood research field there has been relatively little attention paid to gay fathering. The review by Manning et al prepared for the American Sociological Association looks at the evidence used in an ‘amicus curiae (literally, friend of the court) brief. This is expert evidence for the court setting out what is probably the most researched aspect of gay fathering: the possible effect on children’s development of having two gay parents. The answer, that these children do as well or better than children of heterosexual couples, is generally accepted. The UK study by Golombok et al extends the evidence of gay fathering in cases of adoption. In this study the children of gay fathers report fewer behaviour problems than those of heterosexual couple families. From the perspective of adolescents in an Australian sample, their gay families are essentially normal but the stigma is the problem. Finally Bauermeister in the USA documents the link between depressive symptoms and legal frameworks in states denying gay men the chance to be fathers.*

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#### **Child Well-Being in Same-Sex Parent Families: Review of Research Prepared for American Sociological Association Amicus Brief**

Recent legal cases before the Supreme Court of the United States were challenging federal definitions of marriage created by the Defense of Marriage Act and California’s voter approved Proposition 8 which limited marriage to different-sex couples only. Social science literature regarding child well-being was being used within these cases, and the American Sociological Association sought to provide a concise evaluation of the literature through an amicus curiae brief. The authors were tasked in the assistance of this legal brief by reviewing literature regarding the well-being of children raised within same-sex parent families. This article includes our assessment of the literature, focusing on those studies, reviews and books published within the past decade. We conclude that there is a clear consensus in the social science literature indicating that American children living within same-sex parent households fare just, as well as those children residing within different-sex parent households over a wide array of well-being measures: academic performance, cognitive development, social development, psychological health, early sexual activity, and substance abuse. Our assessment of the literature is based on credible and methodologically sound studies that compare well-being outcomes of children residing within same-sex and different sex parent families. Differences that exist in child well-being are largely due to socioeconomic circumstances and family stability. We discuss challenges and opportunities for new research on the well-being of children in same-sex parent families.

Manning, W. D., Fetto, M. N., & Lamidi, E. (2014). Child well-being in same-sex parent families: Review of research prepared for American Sociological Association Amicus Brief. *Population research and policy review*, 33(4), 485-502.

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## RESEARCH

### **Adoptive Gay Father Families: Parent–Child Relationships and Children's Psychological Adjustment**

Findings are presented on a U.K. study of 41 gay father families, 40 lesbian mother families, and 49 heterosexual parent families with an adopted child aged 3–9 years. Standardized interview and observational and questionnaire measures of parental well-being, quality of parent–child relationships, child adjustment, and child sex-typed behavior were administered to parents, children, and teachers. The findings indicated more positive parental well-being and parenting in gay father families compared to heterosexual parent families. Child externalizing problems were greater among children in heterosexual families. Family process variables, particularly parenting stress, rather than family type were found to be predictive of child externalizing problems. The findings contribute to theoretical understanding of the role of parental gender and parental sexual orientation in child development.

Golombok, S., Mellish, L., Jennings, S., Casey, P., Tasker, F., & Lamb, M. E. (2014). Adoptive Gay Father Families: Parent–Child Relationships and Children's Psychological Adjustment. *Child development, 85*(2), 456-468.

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### **The health perspectives of Australian adolescents from same-sex parent families: a mixed methods study**

*Background* Research involving adolescents from same-sex parent families provides an important contribution to the evidence base on their health, well-being and the impact of stigma. To date reports on the perspectives of adolescents with same-sex attracted parents have been limited. This study aimed to describe the multidimensional experiences of physical, mental and social well-being of adolescents living in this context.

*Methods* A mixed methods study of adolescents with same-sex attracted parents comprising of an adolescent-report survey of 10- to 17-year-olds and family interviews with adolescents and their parents. Data were collected in 2012 and 2013 as part of the Australian Study of Child Health in Same-Sex Families.

*Results* The findings from qualitative interviews with seven adolescents and responses to an open-ended survey question ( $n = 16$ ) suggest four themes: perceptions of normality, positive concepts of health, spheres of life (including family, friends and community) and avoiding negativity. The quantitative sample of adolescents with same-sex attracted parents ( $n = 35$ ) reported higher scores than population normative data on the dimensions general health and family activities within the Child Health Questionnaire (CHQ) as well as higher on the peer problems scale on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Perceived stigma correlates with lower health and well-being overall.

*Conclusions* Positive health outcomes are informed by the ways adolescents conceptualize health and how they construct their spheres of life. Peer relationships, and community perspectives of same-sex families, inform perceived stigma and its correlation with poorer health and well-being. Although adolescents see their families as essentially normal they are negatively affected by external societal stigma.

Crouch, S. R., Waters, E., McNair, R., & Power, J. (2014). The health perspectives of Australian adolescents from same-sex parent families: a mixed methods study. *Child: care, health and development*.

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## RESEARCH

### **How statewide LGB policies go from "under our skin" to "into our hearts": Fatherhood aspirations and psychological well-being among emerging adult sexual minority men**

Researchers have noted increasingly the public health importance of addressing discriminatory policies towards lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) populations. At present, however, we know little about the mechanisms through which policies affect LGB populations' psychological well-being; in other words, how do policies get under our skin? Using data from a study of sexual minority young men (N = 1,487; M = 20.80 (SD = 1.93); 65 % White; 92 % gay), we examined whether statewide bans (e.g., same-sex marriage, adoption) moderated the relationship between fatherhood aspirations and psychological well-being. Fatherhood aspirations were associated with lower depressive symptoms and higher self-esteem scores among participants living in states without discriminatory policies. In states with marriage equality bans, fatherhood aspirations were associated with higher depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem scores, respectively. Fatherhood aspirations were associated negatively with self-esteem in states banning same-sex and second parent adoptions, respectively. Our findings underscore the importance of recognizing how anti-equality LGB policies may influence the psychosocial development of sexual

Bauermeister, J. A. (2014). How Statewide LGB Policies Go From "Under Our Skin" to "Into Our Hearts": Fatherhood Aspirations and Psychological Well-Being Among Emerging Adult Sexual Minority Men. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 43(8), 1295-1305.

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### **What is unique or special about fathering**

**FRB comment:** *The question of what is unique to fathers and fathering has been difficult to pin down. During pregnancy and birth the differences between fathers and mothers are obvious but we can plainly see in our families and neighbourhoods that mother and father roles are converging. When it comes to research we have a variety of approaches and conclusions available. In the research on children's development there is a growing stream of evidence pointing to the different effects and pathways for mothering and fathering. But studies of parents' behaviours find a great deal of overlap. In the latest issue of the Journal of Family Theory & Review experienced fatherhood researchers wrestle with this question. There are eloquent arguments both ways. With parenting behaviours in mind Jay Fagan and colleagues propose that we should avoid conceptualizing fathers' and mothers' behaviours differently. They suggest a general model of parenting. Rob Palkowitz and colleagues see it differently. They point out that behavioural measures miss the processes and meanings of mothering and fathering. Even if both parents performed the same behaviours, they suggest, the parents themselves and their children would see differences in meaning. A third paper, with the intriguing title 'From 'being there to being with', emphasising attachment processes, depicts fathering as neurologically different to mothering.*

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### **Should Researchers Conceptualize Differently the Dimensions of Parenting for Fathers and Mothers?**

This article asks whether researchers should seek separate conceptualizations of fathers' and mothers' parenting behaviors. We posit that there is not sufficient evidence to conclude that the constructs of fathering and mothering are unique. Our argument is based on 3 sets of findings. First, there have been a number of studies showing that fathering and mothering constructs are the same.

*Continued on next page*

## RESEARCH

Second, there is evidence that fathers' parenting behaviors affect children's outcomes in ways that are similar to the effects of mothers' parenting behaviors. Third, fathers and mothers are becoming more similar in terms of their roles, the types of behaviors with which they engage children, and the amount of time they spend with children.

Fagan, J., Day, R., Lamb, M. E., & Cabrera, N. J. (2014). Should Researchers Conceptualize Differently the Dimensions of Parenting for Fathers and Mothers?. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 6(4), 390-405.

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### **Essential Differences in the Meaning and Processes of Mothering and Fathering: Family Systems, Feminist and Qualitative Perspectives.**

Although empirical studies have not consistently documented differences in mothering and fathering, differences in conceptualizations, opportunities for enactment, and meanings of mothering and fathering can be clearly demonstrated through family systems as well as feminist theories and qualitative research traditions. We argue that employing the same measures to assess fathering and mothering behaviors will document considerable differences in the involvement of mothers and fathers while masking differences in the roles, meanings, and processes associated with those behaviors. The employment of convergent behavioral measures can profitably occur in conjunction with efforts to identify theoretically rich areas where mothering and fathering are distinct in terms of processes and meanings; this will allow us to document essential differences noted in the lived experiences of family members.

Palkovitz, R., Trask, B. S., & Adamsons, K. (2014). Essential Differences in the Meaning and Processes of Mothering and Fathering: Family Systems, Feminist and Qualitative Perspectives. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 6(4), 406-420.

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### **Attachment Theory and Fathers: Moving From "Being There" to "Being With"**

Attachment theory has played an important role as a framework for exploring and explaining parent-child relationships and the impact of early relationships on child and adult development. This review focuses on our evolving understanding of attachment theory related to father-child relationships during the early childhood years. The history of research questions about fathers and the attachment process are reviewed with attention to the changing social context. A family model of attachment research as it relates to fathers is presented. The article reviews the practice literature and the application to parent and family education. A final section addresses future directions for research and practice and the integrations of family systems, neuroscience, and ecological theory with attachment theory.

Palm, G. (2014). Attachment Theory and Fathers: Moving From "Being There" to "Being With". *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 6(4), 282-297.

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## RESEARCH

### Discovering motivation for change in fathers who use violence

**FRB comment:** *A fathers' longing for connection with his children is being recognised as a key motivator in programs that seek to help men to alter their behaviour. This broadens the conceptual framework for those working with fathers who have been abusive. It is encouraging to see that practitioners have not simply noted that fathers express these views but have instigated a research project to explore the effects.*

The researcher (Timothy Broady) writes:

The findings presented in this paper emerged from an ongoing evaluation of Taking Responsibility – an 18 week group program which aims to facilitate change for men who have used violence and abuse in their intimate and family relationships. As a long-standing element of the Relationships Australia (NSW) Family Safety Program, Taking Responsibility is designed to support men to take responsibility for their actions and to adopt alternative ways of relating. The evaluation project included pre-group and post-group surveys, as well as in-depth interviews with consenting group members following the completion of the course. While these interviews were primarily focused on participants' experiences of the course itself and any impact they believed their participation had enabled within intimate relationships, the men were also given the opportunity to discuss their fathering relationships and any changes in their parenting as a result of course participation. Parenting (and specifically fathering) is not specifically written into the course program, yet feedback from group leaders (through clinical forums and other organisational information sharing procedures) has suggested that it is regularly raised within group discussions. Despite fathering not being a major focus of the interview schedule, participants used the mention of their children as a launching pad to share their personal stories and fathering experiences far more than any other avenue of questioning. This spontaneous sharing led us to investigate this topic in more depth by exploring the fathering related themes raised throughout the interviews. Even though this was not planned as a specific focus of the evaluation, these findings have been incorporated with clinical feedback to inform future developments of course content, particularly surrounding the potential to utilise fathering relationships to encourage and enable change amongst group participants.

For further information contact: Timothy Broady [trbroady@gmail.com](mailto:trbroady@gmail.com)

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#### **'I Miss My Little One a Lot': How Father Love Motivates Change in Men Who Have Used Violence**

This paper presents selected findings from a research-based evaluation of a men's domestic violence intervention programme, which aims to assist men to develop alternative ways of relating to their partners, children and others. The qualitative component of this evaluation involved conducting interviews with 21 group participants after their completion of the course. These interviews investigated several issues, including participants' perceptions of their relationships with their children. The main theme underpinning all discussions of children was an expression of love, in that love for their children served as a motivation to stop using violence and to develop alternative ways of relating to all family members. The paper concludes by discussing the potential of men's relationships with their children as powerful contexts, or points of leverage, through which the impact of their violent behaviour can be realised and confronted. By realising the impact that violent behaviour can have on children's wellbeing and fathers' interpersonal relationships with them, it is argued that intervention programmes can support men to develop more appropriate ways of relating to their children, and thus safeguard children from potential long-term consequences of domestic abuse.

Broady, T. R., Gray, R., Gaffney, I., & Lewis, P. (2015). 'I Miss My Little One A Lot': How Father Love Motivates Change in Men Who Have Used Violence. *Child Abuse Review*.

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## RESEARCH

### Understanding the 'what' and 'how' of fathers' support

**FRB comment:** *Two obvious areas for fathers to support mothers are breastfeeding and depression. While fathers are regularly told to 'be supportive' in both of these areas there is little information on how to offer support or even what types of support might be helpful. The two papers below make a start on unpacking this vague but crucial area of fathering. In the case of depression and anxiety Pilkington and colleagues selected studies reporting modifiable partner factors and depression or anxiety outcomes. Although the studies showed the familiar bias in who was studied (100 mother only, 7 father only and 12 both) the results provide evidence for the types of support that are most likely to succeed in preventing depression or anxiety. As Pilkington explains in her introduction, advice from professionals and parents was used to build on this evidence to produce a resource for parents. The paper from Sherrif and colleagues in the UK offers a pragmatic model of factors that are key to fathers support for breastfeeding. The model should be useful for professionals aiming to educate and encourage fathers to help their partners maintain breastfeeding.*

The researcher (Pam Pilkington) writes:

When somebody close to me experienced difficulties during the transition to parenthood, I noticed that their partner was unsure of what to do or how to help. I became interested in how partners can support one another to reduce their risk of developing depression and anxiety during pregnancy and following childbirth. Systematic reviews [See the review below] have established that partner support protects against perinatal mood problems. But there is a need for this knowledge to be translated into practical advice on HOW partners can support one another. Our research aimed to address this need using the Delphi method.

The Delphi method is widely used as a cost-effective way of developing mental health promotion guidelines that are based on research evidence and expert opinion. A wide range of potential actions that partners can take were derived from a review of websites and research on partner support and perinatal depression and anxiety. Two panels of perinatal mental health experts (21 consumer advocates and 39 professionals) independently rated the extent to which they believed each action to be important for the prevention of perinatal depression and anxiety. Actions that were rated as important or essential by at least 80% of both panels were included in the final guidelines. This process identified 214 recommendations as important or essential in reducing the risk of perinatal depression and anxiety. These recommendations have been formatted into an attractive information booklet, for dissemination to new and expectant parents: [http://issuu.com/partnerstoparents/docs/supporting\\_your\\_partner\\_when\\_you\\_ha](http://issuu.com/partnerstoparents/docs/supporting_your_partner_when_you_ha)

For information contact Pam Pilkington [pam.pilkington@acu.edu.au](mailto:pam.pilkington@acu.edu.au)

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#### **Modifiable partner factors associated with perinatal depression and anxiety: A systematic review and meta-analysis**

Background: Perinatal distress is a significant public health problem that adversely impacts the individual and their family. The primary objective of this systematic review and meta-analysis was to identify factors that partners can modify to protect each other from developing perinatal depression and anxiety.

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## RESEARCH

**Method:** In accordance with the PRISMA statement, were reviewed the risk and protective factors associated with perinatal depression and anxiety symptoms that partners can potentially modify without professional assistance (PROSPERO referenceCRD42014007524). Participants were new or expectant parents aged 16 years or older. The partner factors were sub-grouped in to themes (e.g., instrumental support) based on a content analysis of the scale items and measure descriptions. A series of meta-analyses were conducted to estimate the pooled effect sizes of associations. **Results:** We included 120 publications, reporting 245 associations with depression and 44 with anxiety. Partner factors with sound evidence that they protect against both perinatal depression and anxiety are: emotional closeness and global support. Partner factors with a sound evidence base for depression only are communication, conflict, emotional and instrumental support, and relationship satisfaction. **Limitations:** This review is limited by the lack of generalizability to single parents and the inability to systematically review moderators and mediators, or control for baseline symptoms. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that future prevention programs targeting perinatal depression and anxiety should aim to enhance relationship satisfaction, communication, and emotional closeness, facilitate instrumental and emotional support, and minimize conflict between partners.

Pilkington, P. D., Milne, L. C., Cairns, K. E., Lewis, J., & Whelan, T. A. (2015). Modifiable partner factors associated with perinatal depression and anxiety: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of affective disorders*, 178, 165-180.

### A new model of father support to promote breastfeeding

Research shows that fathers can have a considerable influence on a mother's decision to initiate and continue with breastfeeding. Despite this, many health professionals and broader care services (including maternity services) fail to engage meaningfully and systematically with fathers in supporting breastfeeding. Although the importance of the father's role in supporting breastfeeding has been known for some time, little is known about the nature of this support. No clear delineation of which behaviours and attributes constitute father support, or differentiate it from other kinds of support, is provided in the current literature base. The purpose of this study was to analyse empirically the concept of 'father support' in relation to maternity services and broader health settings. It aimed to clarify the meaning of 'father support' to enable comprehension and application in practice, education and research. As a result, we present a new model of father support to promote breastfeeding, and focus specifically on some of the practical implications for health practitioners in supporting breastfeeding couples.

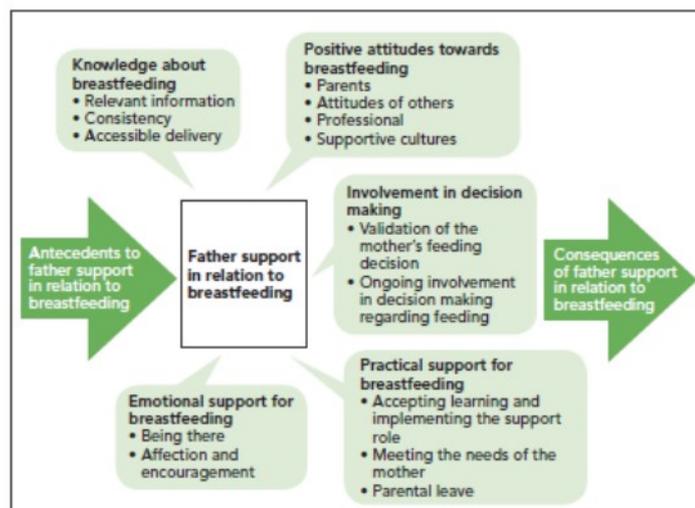


Figure 1. A simplified model of father support to promote breastfeeding

Sherriff, N., Panton, C., & Hall, V. (2014). A new model of father support to promote breastfeeding. *Community Practitioner*, 87(5), 20-24.

## ONGOING RESEARCH

### **\$2.6 million for 'Like Father Like Son: Fathers against Violence and Aggression' project**

A team of investigators led by Prof Mark Dadds at UNSW (and including Prof Rhoshel Lenroot, UNSW; Dr Eva Kimonis, UNSW; Dr Caroline Moul, UNSW; Dr David Hawes, University of Sydney; Prof Vicki Anderson, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne; and Prof Paul Frick, University of New Orleans and Australian Catholic University) have been awarded \$2.6 million from the Movember Foundation for a Project titled 'Like Father Like Son: Fathers against Violence and Aggression'. This three year project brings together a national collaboration of cross-disciplinary researchers, clinicians, policy leaders and consumer groups with the aim of improving the engagement of fathers in parenting interventions for childhood conduct problems.

It is well established that childhood conduct problems are the most identifiable and reliable precursor, and greatest risk factor, for a lifetime of antisocial behavior and violence, as well as other adult mental health issues. Violence and antisocial behavior are largely male phenomena, and the key to stopping the intergenerational transmission of these problems is through healthy parenting. Evidence-based parenting programs are effective in reducing the early signs of violence and antisocial behaviour, but fathers have a relatively low level of engagement with mental health agencies responsible for treating these problems. Consequently, responsibility for preventing and treating early-onset conduct problems falls predominantly to women (mothers). Importantly, however, evidence indicates that treatment for childhood conduct problems is more effective when fathers participate.

The Like Father Like Son Project will investigate a range of innovative strategies for enhancing engagement of fathers in evidence-based interventions for childhood conduct problems at the national level. These strategies will be informed by surveys and focus groups for fathers about their preferences for content and delivery methods, and will include web-based intervention modules specifically designed for fathers; a training program for clinicians to improve skills in engaging fathers in treatment; and a national media campaign, which will recruit key public figures as role models to present brief media advertisements to endorse the Fathers Against Violence and Aggression message and promote participation in the web-based parenting intervention.

Contact Lucy Tully, PhD Senior Project Leader, Like Father Like Son Project [l.tully@unsw.edu.au](mailto:l.tully@unsw.edu.au)

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<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/research-and-innovation/centre/fac/research>

Or contact Richard Fletcher:

[richard.fletcher@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:richard.fletcher@newcastle.edu.au)

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