

Symposium on Fatherhood Research in Australia: Where are we up to? Where to from here?

A report on the Symposium held on 20th July 2016 at the University of Newcastle



Symposium Convenor:

Richard Fletcher

Symposium Chairs:

Francis Kay-Lambkin, Jan Nicholson, Jennifer Baxter, Rebecca Giallo, Jennifer StGeorge, Cate Rawlinson, Karen Wynter, Philip Morgan

Symposium staff:

Chris May, Jaime Wroe, Jody Crouch, Shirley McIlroy



Introduction

In 2004, as part of the Fatherhood Research Report, the Engaging fathers Project at the University of Newcastle's Family Action Centre brought together researchers to assess the state of knowledge about Australian fathers. The report *Fatherhood research in Australia* was the first comprehensive account of published research on the subject of fatherhood in Australia. The report found that while 'fathers and family separation' had received considerable attention questions surrounding father's role in maintaining their families, or how they influence the development of infants and children remain largely unanswered for Australian populations; this was especially the case for marginalised groups such as Indigenous, gay and young fathers. Research was also meagre on fathers facing special difficulties because of their own physical or mental disability, family poverty or substance abuse and the effects of fathering on conditions that may be suffered by children also had not been well studied.

At that time, only a limited number of researchers considered fathers to be a significant component of their research activities. Since 2005 a groundswell of interest in fathers, both in Australia and internationally, has led to increased recognition of the gaps in our understanding of male parenting.

In 2016 researchers from across Australia were invited to come together to discuss, plan and collaborate. The aim was not only to consider the evidence that is currently available from the journal articles and books produced by Australian researchers on the topics of fathers and fatherhood but to compare perspectives and plans and to seek to build collaborative approaches to primary, applied and translational research projects.

Richard Fletcher

FATHERHOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

PARTICIPANTS

Researchers from 22 institutions participated in the Symposium.

Title	First Name	Surname	Institution
Dr	Jennifer	Baxter	Australian Institute of Family Studies
Dr	Titia	Benders	Macquarie University
Dr	Elaine	Bennett	NGALA
Mr	James	Brown	USQ
Mr	Matthew	Burn	The University of Sydney
Ms	Liz	Comrie-Thomson	Burnet Institute
Mr	Paul-Auguste	Cornefert	The University of New South Wales
Dr	Elisabeth	Duursma	UOW
Dr	Rakime	Elmir	Western Sydney University
A/Professor	Richard	Fletcher	The University of Newcastle
Mr	Gilles	Forget	QUT
Dr	Rebecca	Giallo	Murdoch Childrens Research Institute
Professor	Alan	Hayes	The University of Newcastle
A/Professor	Frances	Kay-Lambkin	The University of Newcastle
Dr	Liana	Leach	The ANU
Dr	Jacqui	Macdonald	School of Psychology Deakin University
Dr	Chris	May	The University of Newcastle
Dr	Silke	Meyer	CQU
Professor	Phil	Morgan	The University of Newcastle
Professor	Jan	Nicholson	La Trobe University
Ms	Cate	Rawlinson	Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health
Dr	Maria	Reboredo	The University of Sydney
Dr	Elisha	Riggs	Murdoch Childrens Research Institute
Ms	Maryanne	Robinson	The University of Newcastle
Dr	Mellanie	Rollans	University of Technology
Dr	Holly	Rominov	Australian Catholic University
Professor	Jane	Scott	Curtin University
Dr	Jennifer	St George	The University of Newcastle
Ms	Rebecca	Wright	Beyondblue
Ms	Jaime	Wroe	The University of Newcastle
Dr	Karen	Wynter	Monash University

FATHERHOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

PROGRAM

PROGRAM FATHERHOOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

July 20th Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle

Welcome, Acknowledgement of country

Craig Hammond, Senior Project Officer
Indigenous Projects at the Family Action Centre gave the acknowledgement of country.

Chair Frances Kay-Lambkin:
Introduction

Frances led participants in an exercise representing their experience of researching fathers to set the tone for the Symposium

Convenor Richard Fletcher: The State of Research into Fatherhood in Australia

Richard presented a snapshot of the development of fatherhood research in Australia. Following public interest and policy attention to men's health and boys' education research examining fathers and fathering has emerged.

Presentation sessions: How, On what basis, Why?

The 35 researchers divided into three groups to present their work within the themes

Chairs: Jennifer Baxter, Rebecca Giallo, Jennifer StGeorge

- 1. How? Recruitment and engagement of fathers,**
- 2. On what basis? Models of fatherhood**
- 3. Why? Your journey/approach**

The research profiles of all those attending are being compiled with a view to being included in a special edition of the Fatherhood Research Bulletin

Panel presentation and discussion.
Chair: Francis Kay-Lambkin.
Discussants: Jennifer Baxter, Rebecca Giallo, Jennifer StGeorge

After morning tea the Chairs from the previous small group sessions led the discussion of the three themes. A summary of this discussion is presented in the following pages.

Panel presentation on Future pathways. Chair: Jan Nicholson.
Panellists: Jane Scott, Jacqui Macdonald, Chris May

After the lunch break (lunch courtesy of the Faculty of Health and Medicine) the three panellists presented their views of where fatherhood research might go in the next years.

Breakout sessions: Chairs for sessions: Cate Rawlinson, Karen Wynter, Philip Morgan

Participants moved into three groups to discuss:

- 1. For you personally, and for the field, what do we need done, right now, in five years, in 10 years?**
- 2. Where are the opportunities for us to work together?**
- 3. Who could be invited to assist us?**

A summary is presented in the following pages.

Moving forward together – plenary Francis Kay-Lambkin and Richard Fletcher

A final plenary discussion heard individual comments evaluating the day.

FATHERHOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

THE STATE OF FATHERHOOD RESEARCH IN AUSTRALIA

Presented by Dr Richard Fletcher

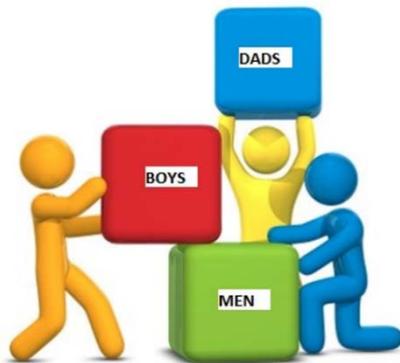
The state of research into Fatherhood in Australia

Presentation to
Fatherhood Research Symposium
University of Newcastle July 2016

Dr Richard Fletcher
Fathers and Families Research Program,
Family Action Centre, Faculty of Health and Medicine,
The University of Newcastle



Research into fathers in Australia followed on from and, to a certain extent, built on, two distinct major policy and social issues: Men's Health and Boy's Education.



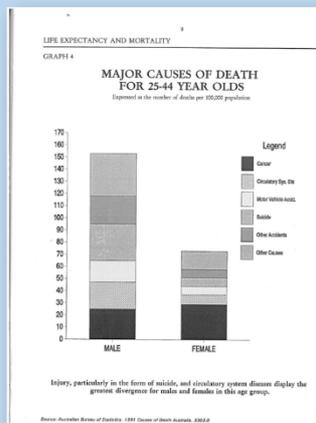
Men's Health. The first group to recognize that males might have particular needs were not senior managers or policy makers but front-line service staff and family members. During the 1990s, nurses in health services and parents in school settings, mostly mothers, raised the alarm about the dire outcomes for men and for boys. In the case of testicular cancer, for example, the mother of a young man diagnosed with this cancer lobbied successfully to raise community awareness of this condition and to develop resources and programs providing information and support for affected men. Hospital-based nurses frustrated at men's lack of preparedness for surgery created their own education sessions and lobbied surgeons to better attend to the social aspects of the men's conditions (Fletcher 2001).

In 1992 I published these graphs as a booklet that circulated throughout Australia. Although the data was from freely available mortality tables from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the booklet caused a ripple of interest in men's Health.

Two years later the Australian Parliamentary Research Service commissioned me to write a report on men's health. It was published as *Testosterone Poisoning or Terminal Neglect? The Men's Health Issue*

1990s Men's Health

- Testosterone Poisoning or Terminal Neglect? The Men's Health Issue
- *"...one would hope that existing services are meeting someone's needs and if they're not meeting women's needs they're presumably meeting men's needs"* Dr Stephen Duckett, Director of Policy and Planning for the Health Department of Victoria



1990s Men's Health The idea that men's needs were being overlooked or minimised by human services was given little consideration at that time. In a highly publicised court case during 1992, the Director of Health Planning for the State of Victoria was asked if women's services were funded because women were assessed as having

a greater need than men. "No" he replied, "We assume that the health system is working for somebody, and it's not working for women, so it must be working for men" (Fletcher 1996).

2000s boys not doing well

- Suicide
- Education
- ADHD
- Sexual Violence



2000s Boys not doing so well.

The alarming rates of suicide among young males, including schoolboys from all levels of society, highlighted the seriousness of the issue. While girls' suicide attempts were more common the lethality of the boys' methods – guns and hanging – underlined their desperation and their 'no turning

back' mentality. The suicide deaths of boys at six times that of girls galvanised attention to the struggles that many boys were experiencing. Parents and teachers began to call for boys' education programs to sit alongside those for girls and news items comparing male and female outcome indicators were regularly published.

Unfortunately, an academic backlash argued that boys were advantaged as part of hegemonic masculinity and so did not need special attention except to be made to give up their power. Nevertheless, a wide-ranging shift brought boys' education and health needs into public discussion.

FATHERHOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

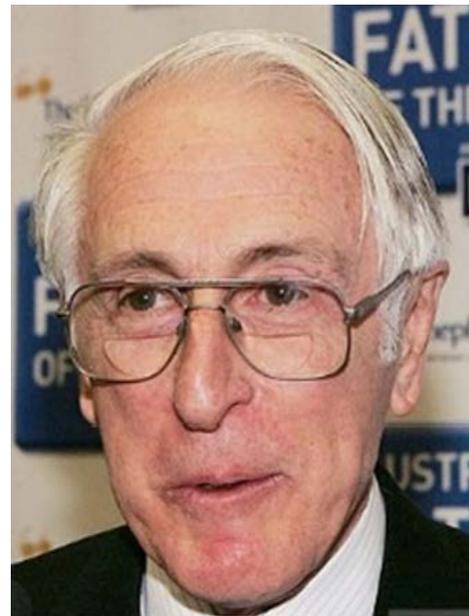
Fathers – 2000. References to new fathers were included in the 2010 Male Health Policy and the question of role models for boys in schools led to fathers' involvement, for example, in reading programs with young children. As part of a shift during this period to be more inclusive of men's needs, a national

Mensline was established. This free telephone service offered information and referral for men (fathers) with family and relationship concerns. When the adversarial, court-based system for settling custody disputes between parents was overhauled in 2006, the new arrangements followed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by recognising children's right to enjoy an ongoing relationship with both parents. An important shift in the new legislation was the presumption in law that fathers and mothers would share the care after separation (Kaspiew et al., 2011). Although only a tiny fraction of separated families took their disputes to court, the adoption of 'shared care' as a preferred option, in place of the standard arrangement of fathers' access every second weekend, implied valuing fathers' role in raising children.

Skip forward to 2004. Fathers were in the spotlight in positive and not so positive ways. Professor Graeme Clark was recognised as Father of the Year for his development of cochlear implants. Steve Irwin made headlines feeding crocodiles while holding his baby.

Fathers – 2000s

- Family Relationship Centres
- Child Support Agency
- Men and Family Relationships program
- Father inclusive practice

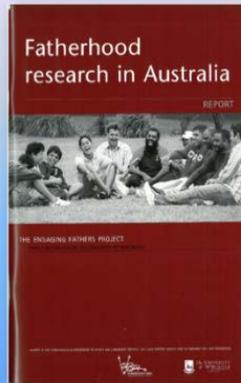


FATHERHOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

FATHERHOOD RESEARCH IN 2004

Fatherhood Research In Australia 2004

- ▶ Professor Colin Binns, Head, School of Public Health, Curtin University of Technology, WA.
- ▶ Dr Robyn Dolby, Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW
- ▶ Professor John Condon, Department of Psychiatry, School of Medicine, Flinders University, SA
- ▶ Professor David de Krester, Director & Carol Holden, Project Manager, Andrology Australia
- ▶ Joye McLaughlin, Family and Community Statistics, Australian Bureau of Statistics
- ▶ Jan Nicholson, Centre for Health Research – Public Health, QUT
- ▶ Emeritus Professor Pat Noller, Director, University of Queensland Family Centre
- ▶ Shawn Phillips, Mensplace Western Australia
- ▶ Bruce Smyth, Research Fellow, Australian Institute of Family Studies



For the discussion of fatherhood research though the most important event of 2004 was the holding of the *Fatherhood Research in Australia* forum at The University of Newcastle. This was the first time that researchers were brought together to formally consider the state of research into Australian fathers.

The advisors on the project are listed on the above slide. It is worth noting that none of the participants would have considered themselves fatherhood researchers. They attended and contributed because they considered the topic interesting but few academics at that stage considered fatherhood as a realistic research field.

The Forum and report were funded by grants from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, the Child Support Agency and the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The *Fatherhood Research in Australia* report identified published research that reported data on Australian fathers. The extent of topics covered in the research up until that time is shown (in rough terms) on the adjacent slide.

Fatherhood Research In Australia

- ▶ family formation **Lots**
- ▶ fathers and child development **Little**
- ▶ fathers and family separation **Heaps**
- ▶ work and family balance **Lots**
- ▶ fathers of young adults **Very little**
- ▶ fathers with an illness or substance abuse **Hardly any**
- ▶ culturally and linguistically diverse fathers **None**
- ▶ gay fathers **None**

The report made four recommendations:

1. A national forum be supported to enable practitioners who work with fathers within a family context to present their work and to participate in the formulation of guidelines for practitioner training and organisational development to work more effectively with fathers for the benefit of children and families. **This was held in 2005**

2. The Commonwealth provide resources to establish an independent Fatherhood Research Website to offer information to programs policy advisers and practitioners online on recent research evidence in the area of fatherhood and families. The website would also provide a base for a coordinator to support a network of researchers interested in father's contribution to family wellbeing. **A grant from the Australian Research Network for Children and Youth (ARACY) allowed the first meeting and launch of the Fatherhood Research Bulletin**

3. A paper on evaluating fathers parenting programs be commissioned to review existing evidence if the effectiveness of parenting programs for fathers and to propose guidelines for funders, program planners and managers when evaluating parenting programs for fathers.

4. Priority driven research into early intervention with fathers and families be funded through: Developing a priority driven research agenda in the area of fatherhood with support from a wide range of stakeholders; and, Allocation of resources to priority-driven research through peer-review of investigator-initiated proposals within broadly-defined priorities, and through commissioned research

The national Forum on Father-Inclusive Practice in 2005 attracted more than 100 practitioners, managers and researchers from across Australia. This forum introduced the concept of father-inclusive practice (following the surge of interest in child-inclusive practice in the counselling and welfare services dealing with separated parents).

Fatherhood Research In Australia 2004

Recommendations

- A national forum for practitioners who work with fathers **YES (2005)**
- A Fatherhood Research Website to support a network of researchers interested in father's contribution to family well being **(Sort of... FRB)**
- Priority driven research into early intervention with fathers
- A paper on evaluating father's parenting programs be commissioned

FATHERHOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

PRINCIPLES FOR FATHER INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Do you include fathers in your work with families?

We would like to give you the opportunity to tell other - practitioners, managers, educators and policy advisors - about your work

national forum

**focus
areas**

Health

Mental Health Services
Child & Family Services

**Family Support
Services**

Counselling
Youth Services
Separated Families
Volunteer Home Visiting
Professional Home Visiting

**Parenting and
Community
Education**

Indigenous
Family Skills
CALD Programs
Parenting Programs

**Early Childhood
& Education**

OOSH
Schools
Playgroups
Family Day Care
Centre based care

Do you include fathers in your work with families?

An important outcome of the Forum was a set of *Principles for Father-inclusive Practice*, which provided a framework for services to consider when planning father-focused initiatives. The principles include Father Awareness (identifying the fathers in the service catchment areas), Respect for Fathers (avoiding deficit perspectives focused on fathers' inadequacies), and Staff Strengths

(recognizing the personal value placed on fathers by staff even when fathers were not involved professionally). The language of the principles acknowledges the role of father-figures and stepfathers while not losing sight of the importance of fathers' biological link to their children.

SO WHERE HAVE WE COME TO IN 12 YEARS SINCE THE FATHERHOOD RESEARCH FORUM WAS HELD?

Rather than try to repeat the exercise of surveying all of the research on Australian fathers I have chosen some publications from 2015 and 2016 which signify important developments in the field of fatherhood research from 2004.

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.

The systematic review of the *prevalence and course of anxiety disorders (and symptom levels) in men across the perinatal period* by Liana Leach and colleagues is significant because anxiety is the less commonly identified mental health concern (depression is the most readily identified). The fact that there are sufficient papers (43 papers: not all from Australia but Australian studies were included) to complete a systematic review signifies that the field of fatherhood research has matured and that Australian researchers are tackling formerly unrecognised fatherhood issues.

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

The *Theory-Based Design and Development of a Socially Connected, Gamified Mobile App for Men About Breastfeeding* paper by Becky White and colleagues is an achievement in three ways:

- This study applies currently novel techniques (gamification) to an important aspect of fathers' role (supporting breastfeeding);
- The study marks the development of ongoing collaboration by a group of researchers focusing on fatherhood over a number of years
- The research group responsible have linked research skills in epidemiology, clinical practice and health promotion to produce an intervention addressing fathers.

Lloyd, A. B., Lubans, D. R., Plotnikoff, R. C., & Morgan, P. J. (2015). Paternal Lifestyle-Related Parenting Practices Mediate Changes in Children's Dietary and Physical Activity Behaviors: Findings From the Healthy Dads, Healthy Kids Community Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of physical activity & health*, 12(9).

The paper by Adam Lloyd and the team from the Education faculty here at the University of Newcastle marks a step forward in unpacking the everyday notion of role modelling that is regularly applied to fathers. This study is an example of exploring the mechanisms of paternal influence that we rarely see in the many studies where role modelling is invoked. They measured fathers' modelling of physical activity, his co-physical activity and beliefs about healthy eating.

Gettler, L. T. (2016). Becoming DADS: considering the role of cultural context and developmental plasticity for paternal socioendocrinology. *Current Anthropology*, 57(S13).

...And the gaps? Finally, I also wish to point to where in Australian research I see the major gaps. Of course in an emerging field of study there are bound to be many areas that have been missed. The lack of specific theory applied to fatherhood and fathering, for example, is regularly pointed out. A recent contribution addressing this gap is the paper by Lee Gettler where he links evidence evolutionary and phylogenetic perspectives with neuroendocrinology and social changes affecting fathers. In Australia we have world class scientists in male reproductive health as well as plenty of bright psychologists and social scientists but we lack multidisciplinary efforts to link biological, psychological and social evidence in understanding fatherhood.

FATHERHOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

One of the difficulties in a field where the social context has a major impact on the behaviours and relationships under investigation is that social arrangements might change quickly. It is quite a task to keep up with what new fathers, for example, are thinking about their role when the community around them, and their working environment is shifting in ways that are not easily predicted.

Let me illustrate with three examples:

Changes in the context of fatherhood research



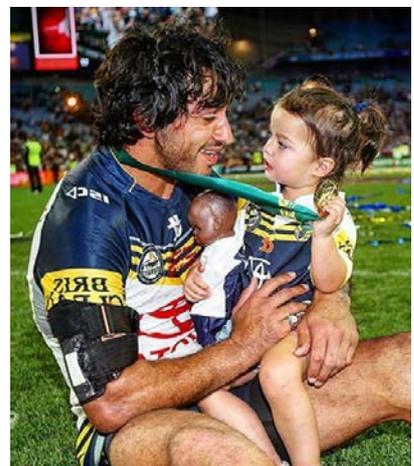
The Royal Commission into Family Violence took seriously the need to discuss fathers as part of the solution to eliminating family violence. And Rosie Batty, pictured here with her son Luke also modelled an approach to dealing with the catastrophic violence of her husband without simply painting him as an ogre.

Changes in the context of fatherhood research. Looking for markers of change among ABS data on time use may imply that nothing much has happened to the roles of mothers and fathers over recent decades. Advertisers are one group in the community whose livelihood depends on reading the shifts in public feelings and values. The central character in this contemporary Volvo ad is the protective, loving, sensitive father.



And another mark of shifting ideas of what is considered acceptable for fathers, is evident in this photo that gained national coverage after Jonathan Thurston's Cowboys Rugby League team won the grand final last year. At a time when convention has it that you whoop it up with your mates and get 'pissed' Jonathan walked straight to the stand where his wife was holding his daughter Frankie and took her onto the field to show her his medal and share the moment of victory.

It is up to us, who are meeting here today, to keep our finger on the pulse of the change in the social dimensions of fatherhood while we investigate the biological, psychological and service delivery domains of fathers' lives.



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END OF PRESENTATION

SUMMARIES OF THE DISCUSSIONS

Barriers to recruiting fathers into research studies

- ATTITUDES – “INVISIBLE PARENT” – WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH NEEDED
 - Practitioners reluctant to talk to men – need training in how to engage men: practitioner years of experience predicts confidence in and rates of father engagement; practitioner training in how to engage fathers predicts confidence in engaging fathers, anxiety about domestic violence; clients are the women – difficult to negotiate
 - 6% of interventions to improve physical activity in obese prevention in kids involve fathers. Not mentioned in limitations, 1% tried to actively engage dads.
 - Why isn't the qualitative feedback received from fathers about their anxieties during perinatal period translating into population based rates of anxiety and depression in men?
 - Most often via women – generally easier, especially via health services...difficult if the relationship between mother and father is not good, danger that men will feel “confronted” about what they are doing/not doing
 - Men not typically invited to be part of the health service relationship. Often asked to leave for “sensitive” parts of the consultation. “why can't I be here?”
 - Men not invited – prenatally, postnatally
 - “women's business”
 - Men excluded – partially or completely – in assessment, information provision, support That antenatal may not be best time for educating about fathering and co-parenting, but postnatal period is; focus off birth

Ways to recruit fathers into research studies

- FLEXIBILITY – TAKE PROGRAMS/PROJECTS/RESEARCH TO WHERE MEN ARE, AT A TIME THAT SUITS THEM
 - Engage fathers living within and outside the primary household
 - Engage men directly via Community meetings, following mobilisation by community leadership, health workers, peer mobilisers
 - Online important, non in-person (phone, etc.)
 - Invite mothers and children too?
 - Practitioners need to be embedded in the research/program for success
 - May not be open to receive information about postnatal period in the antenatal period ...may just be focussed at that time on pregnancy and birth. When is a good time to provide information/support to men at these different stages?
 - Attention to the language used to invite fathers to be involved (i.e., fathers rather than parents)
 - Different ways to participate (face to face interviews, telephone interviews, survey methods, online)
 - Availability outside of business hours
 - Provide father inclusive practice training to researchers, health professionals and other staff

- TARGET OUTCOMES/ISSUES THAT ARE VALUED BY FATHERS
 - Strong reluctance to identify challenges of fatherhood with depression and anxiety
 - New dads seek information reactively (opportunistic window in which to intervene)
 - Self-care important - Improved male partner emotional, physical, and financial support for family health
 - Child as the hook for engaging fathers
 - Father's don't seem to spend as much "alone time" with their children
 - Fathers as bread winners – and influence of role as provider
 - Fun and active games, health related fitness, fundamental movement skills, rough and tumble
 - Focus on relationships – partner, father-child
 - Supporting father's confidence as a dad (self-efficacy) – promote warmth and consistent parenting, and reduce hostility
 - Give men something tangible/concrete "to do" – e.g. massage, play, etc. Transition times: co-parenting makes sense to dads as a triad; use the triad as access to dads
 - Services with dads in mind: with, talk about, encouraging mothers to include dads; "what do you know about fathers" – resources
 - Give a voice to fathers – give them a chance to tell their story (i.e., qualitative approaches have been effective!)

1. Models of fatherhood being utilised in research

- CO-PARENTING
 - Within-family sharing of care
 - redesigning parenting programs to include specific integration of fathers
 - Being a good father also means being a good partner
 - Men as partners and agents of change in gender inequality and children health.
 - Involve expectant and new fathers to improve maternal and child health care seeking.
 - Improved couple communication and joint decision making about family health
- ATTACHMENT
 - Parent-infant attachment theories
- POPULATION BASED APPROACH
 - Are fathers of infants different from other populations of men in terms of their mental health (e.g., men who haven't had children, fathers of older children)
 - Children's views of fathers, work hours, relationships – gender and age influences here, along with whether the father lives in the primary household Recognition that father involvement and fatherhood is evolving and challenging. That there is marked variation in families and in parenting roles in society, across cultures etc.

- GENDER EQUALITY
 - Men as partners and agents of change in gender inequality and children health.
 - Engaging men is also an opportunity to challenge gender stereotypes and gender inequality
 - Challenges and issues associated with gender stereotyped roles of parenting and fathering
- FATHERS IN THE WORKPLACE
 - And how that affects parenting.
- LIFECOURSE/LIFE TRANSITIONS APPROACH
 - utilise large community-based longitudinal datasets to investigate if men's mental health changes across the transition to fatherhood
 - Evolutionary approaches: the traditional role of fathers as protector and how this role has evolved over social time; how the caregiver role evolves for fathers

2. Fatherhood Researchers' journeys/approaches

- Longitudinal survey data – realised a big gap existed in understanding what fathers are actually doing in the context of their families (including separated families), barriers, opportunities, interface between work and family (influence of mother's employment, labour markets), father involvement, within-family sharing of care, children's views of fathers and relationships.
- Commissioned research
- Stand-alone research studies – father focussed
- Child protection – evolved into an interest in engaging fathers in parenting programs
- Came to work with fathers from first working with mothers – surveys asking a “little bit about” mental health, transitions
- A personal passion – our passion has come from our experiences of either being a father, a partner of a father, or a child of a father. One participant said that as a father they sometimes feel like ‘...a stranger in someone else's world’
- Clinical experiences – some of us have worked in clinical, educational or early childhood settings have been attuned to fathers' experiences, the lack of support or neglect they receive, and the challenges in engaging and involving them
- “Slow burn” – some of us have been working with fathers in services or conducting research for a while now, but it has been slow in building momentum, primarily due to funding constraints.
- Came from Medical Model approach, realising gaps in understanding

3. Advocacy

- Collect data that is relevant to inform policy.
- Collect data is relevant to translation.
- Position paper as a result of today that is focussed on fatherhood – invite policy makers to comment on this – we have the evidence – let’s just get on and do it. Let’s start scaling these up in the real world.
- How do we get the language out there to understand the main issues and significance of the issue?
- Biggest challenge is funding – need to make the argument that investing in fathers results in better health and mental health of children, women, education, workforce.
- CRE in fatherhood research.
- Risk of promising everything and delivering nothing.
- Equal opportunity for dads to recruit mums, and not just mums recruiting dads.
- Don’t assume that men don’t want to talk about these issues. Assumptions inform how we do and construct studies.
- Interesting experience – focus of research was on dads, and ethics committee said that the researcher had to include mums.
- What about same sex couples? Every child benefits from having a positive male and female role model in their lives.
- Difficulty – everyone has a father – people evaluating grants etc. all have a perspective on fathers and what would/wouldn’t work.
- Don’t fit fathers into our existing service models. Let’s try to think about how we can work within existing constraints to better engage fathers/families.
- Need to re-conceptualise our focus – fathers are not hard to engage, our services and our research is hard for fathers to engage in our research.
- Move now to go from just father-child research to “co-parenting” and “family-based”. This is a positive move in the field. But, while we say it’s about both parents we need to also be saying “we need to focus on fathers particularly”.
- Attachment is important in understanding how people engage with “parenting” and related issues.
- Need to focus particularly on “being a father” – and that has an impact on men’s health. Men become fathers and it changes their life.
- If we want to work with fathers, then we have to make them more visible as a distinct group.
- Fathers are important in other cultures, as a way to interact with families.

2. FUTURE PATHWAYS DISCUSSION

What needs to be done?

- As a model, how did Early Childhood get ahead?
 - Influences such as maternal suicide rates, cost benefit analysis, champions, gender equality for women, economic drivers, structural change
- Strategies:
 - Change the discourse, need thought leaders
 - Need advocates – celebrities, champions
 - Authoritative evidence, irrefutable evidence of father involvement etc.
 - Economies - need to demonstrate the cost of father...
 - Methodology – need quant and qual to describe the breadth and depth of the issues
 - Reconfigure services such that normative = designed as “father accessible”
- Broader field needs challenge
- National alliance for advocacy
- Strategic and specific policy for men’s health
- Strategic planning that involves both researchers and services
- Mandated policy for perinatal and focus of perinatal on routine care
- Economic rational – e.g., collaborate within Australia to establish neurological evidence
- Services, workforce, scale and translation
- Services and research need to include supervision, co-design programs with fathers; test and communicate.
- Cultural adaptations for evidence-based programs e.g. Healthy Dads Healthy Kids
- Educate early childhood workers: including men
- Multicultural: Engage ethnically diverse and Indigenous communities (one in 4 born overseas, 200 different languages in Aust)
- Inclusive approaches to engaging dads and understanding of diversity of what it means to be a dad

What need to be done in the next 5 years?

- Need strong advocacy movement – fatherhood
- Messaging persuasive / maternity → what is the message? Who and how is it being delivered?
- Celebrate differences between fathers and mothers
- Learning from Mental health - mother /child fathers perspective
- Using technology and ambassadors
- Consensus statement
- Strategic planning for moving forwards – advocates, leaders, gaps in evidence
- Research fathers effect on child development
- National alliance for advocacy formed to inform Policy makers
- Development new shared language for parents and parenting

FATHERHOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

- Find an economic rationale for what we are doing
- Developing relationships with key players
- More conferences, symposiums to talk about research where we can come together; Community of practice?; Create a Journal to focus on fathers research
- father inclusive practice audit;
- pragmatic story telling of fathers experiences to engage dads;
- Supervision of support processes that encourage clinicians to develop expertise
- Dads are considered the norm to include in work
- Co-design programs with fathers input
- Fathers need to be included in curriculum and develop a consistent message about the important aspects of social and emotional wellbeing in transition to fatherhood

What need to be done in the next 5-10 years?

- Diverse research team / multi lingual
- Need to include fathers = studies / ethics – what about mum?
- More men / male voices
- Scalable effective ways of achieving outcomes
- Policy change, education of students, funded programs
- parenting education programs in schools
- strategic policy and focus on men's health
- working with 'parent services' rather than 'maternity services'; focus on parents, not just women
- Continued theoretical framework development
- Develop a Centre for Research Excellence, Implementation Science and translation of research into practice

Who could be invited to assist us?

- Involve from the start:
- Practitioners in Early Childhood, Domestic Violence, DEC /DoH
- True ambassadors
- Policy makers
- Community advice groups
- Fathering project W.A and globally e.g. Fatherhood Institute U.K.
- Parenting groups

FATHERHOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

FINAL COMMENT FROM THE CONVENOR

There was a wide range of experience among those attending, from senior professors with established track records in winning grants and completing large scale studies to postgraduate students, early-career and mid-career researchers. The summaries presented in the pages above do not adequately convey the buzz of the discussion that led to the points. The tone of the conversations throughout the day clearly demonstrated how rewarding it can be to have a room full of researchers who share an interest in fatherhood and fathering.

While there was no intention, in planning the Symposium, to come to define an agreed program of action, it was hoped that participants would see merit in continuing to develop the field of fatherhood research. In the closing discussions several suggestions were made to keep the group in regular contact and to form some body or organised way to promote attention to research on fatherhood. We will follow-up these suggestions and, in concert with those who participated and the larger group of interested researchers, strive to move the field forward at a pace that means we will not have to wait another 12 years to bring fatherhood researchers together.

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