

Fatherhood Research Bulletin



Bulletin 32





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NEWS from the Australian Fatherhood Research Network

Symposium

Attention fatherhood researchers: Invitation to Symposium on Fatherhood Research in Australia

Researchers investigating fathers, fathering or fatherhood are invited to a Symposium on Fatherhood Research in Australia to be held at the University of Newcastle, NSW on 20th July 2016.

Changing social constructions of family and the role of fathers and the contribution of fathers the care and education of infants and children are accepted generally by professionals and the public. Yet there remain major gaps in our understanding fathering, and we lack effective ways in which to engage with fathers.

Invited participants will be expected to present a brief account of their research (details to be decided closer to the event) and to participate in discussion on future directions for research in this area. The Symposium, under the auspices of the Family Action Centre, School of Health Sciences in the Faculty of Health and Medicine and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth will provide transport to and from airports or rail, morning tea and lunch. Billets can be arranged for those who decide to stay in Newcastle overnight.

Indicate your interest in participating in the Symposium by contacting Richard Fletcher:

Richard.fletcher@newcastle.edu.au.

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

In 2005, as part of the Fatherhood Research Report, we brought together researchers to assess the state of knowledge about fathers. This report 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 had fathers as 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.

We are proposing in 2016 to invite those who are actively engaged in researching fathers to come together to discuss, not only 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.

The results of our symposium will be edited and published as a special edition of the Fatherhood Research Bulletin.

ON THE WEB



Zuckerberg's important message on miscarriage

FRB comment: When men who are celebrities raise personal issues, social media can boost public awareness about important topics. When Facebook guru Mark Zuckerberg revealed that he and his wife went through three miscarriages while trying to get pregnant, the post went viral.

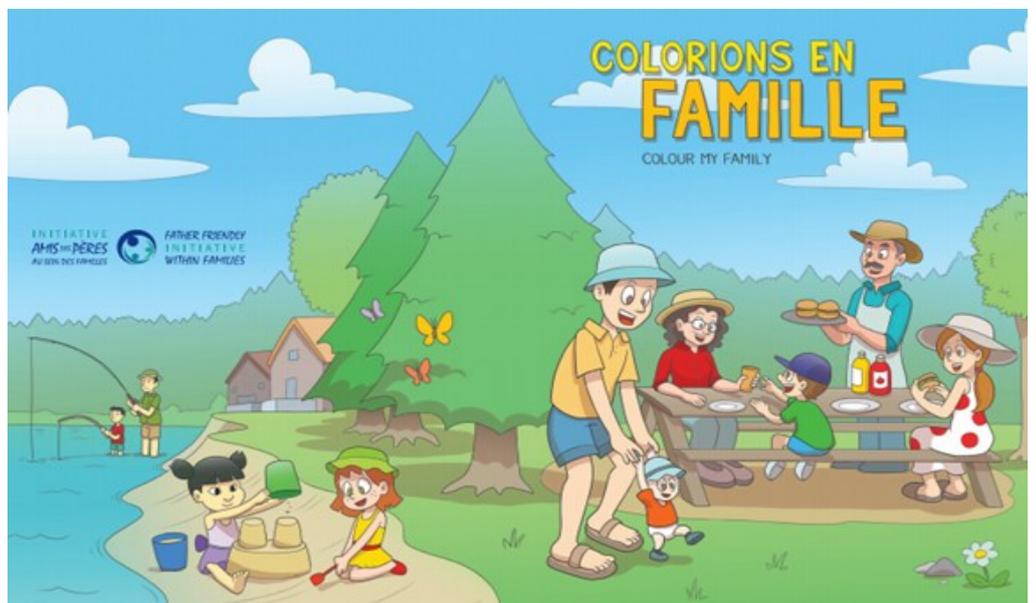
Go to: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/05/opinions/abbott-declercq-pregnancy-loss/>

Colour my family

The Father Friendly Initiative within Families (FFIF) in French-speaking Quebec Canada has created a colouring book featuring simple and realistic activities and interactions of children with their fathers, as well as with the rest of the family or friends. This colouring book is geared toward children 2 to 9 years old.

Go to: http://iap.uqo.ca/sites/iap.uqo.ca/files/colorions_en_famille.pdf

FRB comment: Watch the brief YouTube clip on the project (with subtitles)



Media portrayal of father's time – Church of Latterday Saints



FRB comment: Many groups are promoting fathering via new and creative avenues. The Church of Latterday Saints' have recently launched innovative videos that highlight the enjoyment around father-child interaction through the use of humour and father-child play. These videos present as short films that work in the space between the imagination and the real world.

Go to: <https://www.lds.org/media-library/video/homefronts?lang=eng>

Go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jds1QZrJq1Y>

Approaches to Father Engagement and Fathers' Experiences in Home Visiting Programs

FRB comment: This report discusses approaches that home visiting programs use to engage fathers, the challenges they face, the strategies they use to overcome these challenges, and benefits of participating from the perspective of fathers and program staff.

Early childhood home visiting programs typically target pregnant women and mothers of young children, but some



programs have begun including fathers as well. The study aimed to understand how home visiting programs engage fathers, what fathers' experiences are in those programs, and the perceived benefits of fathers' participation. Qualitative interviews were conducted with home visiting program administrators, staff members, and participating fathers and mothers in five programs implementing strategies to engage fathers in home visiting services.

The accompanying brief, *Engaging Low-Income Fathers in Home Visiting: Approaches, Challenges, and Strategies*, summarizes key findings from the report.

Go to: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/20151130_fahv_report_finalized_b508.pdf

Supporting your partner when you have a baby



FRB comment: Pilkington and colleagues have produced a guide offering new and expecting parents information and suggestions on how to support your partner during pregnancy and following childbirth as well as tips on how to stay mentally healthy during the transition to parenthood. These recommendations are based on the expert opinions of clinicians and researchers who specialise in perinatal mental health, as well as people who have experienced perinatal depression and anxiety. See Pilkington et al (2015). Modifiable partner factors associated with perinatal depression and anxiety: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of affective disorders*, 178, 165-180 which was reported in *Fatherhood Research Bulletin* 28.

Go to: https://issuu.com/partnerstoparents/docs/supporting_your_partner_when_you_ha

PROGRAMS AND FATHER INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Perinatal Distress in Fathers and Non-birth Mothers

Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia (PANDA) presents a one day workshop discussing the support needs of fathers and non-birth mothers in cases of perinatal distress



When: Tuesday 22 March – 9am (for 9.15) to 4.30pm

Where: Melbourne University Hawthorn Campus – Cinema 442 Auburn Rd Hawthorn (free parking on campus)

Program

Setting the scene and learning outcomes - Sarah Marlowe, PANDA Community Education and Training Coordinator

Fathers experiences of perinatal anxiety and depression - Assoc. Prof. Richard Fletcher, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle

Working with couples as parents - Timothy O'Leary, Clinical Psychologist and Educator

What's it like for new fathers? - Thomas Docking and Murray, Dads Group Inc

Effective approaches to supporting carers- Suzanne Hurley, Senior PANDA National Helpline Counsellor

Working effectively with LGBTI-parented families- Karen Field, Drummond Street Services CEO

Questions, reflections, feedback and close - Sarah Marlowe, PANDA Community Education and Training Coordinator

Newborn Behavioural Observation



FRB comment: *When clinicians examine a newborn in front of their parents using the Newborn Behavioural Observation system there is an opportunity to use observational strategies to sensitize parents to the competencies and individuality of their newborn. Fathers have been noticed to respond very well to the evidence (observations) highlighting the capabilities of their new baby.*

At the Newborn Behavioural Observation training program in Melbourne recently the homework assignment was to:

Write a letter to baby Reynard's father to give him a picture of his newborn son as a person while he is away for work and could not meet his son for several more weeks....

Here is one of the student responses (names have been changed)

Dear Godfrey,

My name is Jane and I am the midwife who today had the pleasure of meeting your wife Janette and your healthy newborn son Reynard. I just wanted to take this opportunity to share with you what your son is like and what took place as we all spent time together. Reynard was awake when I arrived and this gave me the opportunity to hold him, introduce myself and have a chat to him. He was particularly interested in looking at me when I spoke to him, and as I held him propped in my arms he readily turned his head to look at a red ball that I showed to him. Your wife and I then shared some lovely moments when she spoke to Reynard- he readily turned his head to look at her and, as she held him in her arms, he gazed up towards her and listened when she told him about your family. Jeannette struck me as rightly proud of him already. She commented how calm and easy-going he seems. We both noticed his strength as he showed how he could lift his head and how he could move his body when I placed him on his tummy. I'm sure you must be eager to meet him and you will no doubt share some similar experiences as you get to know him.

Warm regards,

Jane

Mt Isa three day Engaging Fathers Event

Mount Isa – Gulf Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services in partnership with government and non-government agencies have for the better part of 8 months been organising a three day Engaging Fathers Event over 2 months. The aims that we have had for this event was to:



- Highlight the importance of children having positive and safe connections to fathers and father figures.
- Identify both the challenges and opportunities involved in working with father inclusive practice, Domestic Violence and engaging fathers at every step.
- Develop a better understanding of the changing role of men in today's society and how that impacts on father inclusive practice.
- Develop greater confidence in our theory, knowledge and skills.
- Promote a collective commitment to improve practice and systems in this area of work.
- Learn new skills.
- Network with other staff in the field.
- Develop relationships with colleagues/peers.
- Discuss and/or develop regional strategies

We have kicked off our event recently over the 15th and 16th of February with David Mandel. Through his years of work with child welfare systems, has developed the Safe and Together™ model to improve case practice and cross system collaboration in domestic violence cases involving children. He has also identified how a perpetrator pattern-based approach can improve our ability to help families and promote the development of domestic violence-informed child welfare systems. We are rounding off our Event with a Seminar on the 15th of March with our Key Note Speaker Dr Richard Fletcher. Dr Fletcher leads the Fathers and Families Research Program (FFRP) within the Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle. A core principle that our planning group for our Event feel strongly about, is that as agents of change for our respective organisations we need to change our expectations and beliefs relating to the role of fathers, for the benefit of the whole family and wider society. We see this Event as an opportunity to highlight what we are doing well within the Mount Isa and Gulf Communities and what we can do better.

Working out Dads

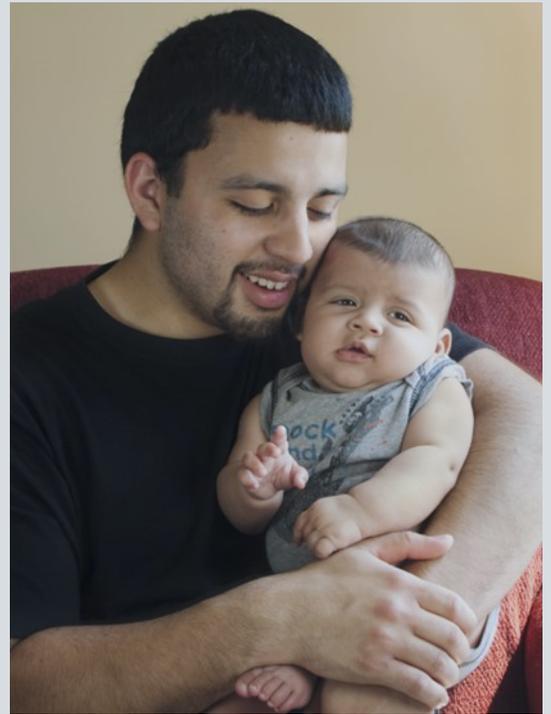
After nearly two years in development and an ongoing search for funding, Victorian Early Parenting Organisation Tweddle is launching an exciting new program for fathers called Working Out Dads. The program will run in Maribyrnong and Wyndham for up to 70 dads during school term.

Working Out Dads is for dads living full time or part time with their 0-4 aged children. The program combines 1 hour of facilitated discussion and 30 minutes of guided fitness. The 6 week program includes weekly text messages, handouts and online resources spanning the topics of parenting, relationships, mental health, fitness and wellbeing. It has been developed in partnership with men's groupwork consultant Andrew King and will be accredited and available to share with other organisations

The therapeutic program which will be run by experienced facilitators Scott Hall and Nathan Tarr is for dads experiencing stress, anxiety or depression or have a partner experiencing mental health challenges and/or parenting difficulties.

Tweddle look forward to the outcomes of the pilot which will also assess the time of group, the number of participants, course content and referral uptake. We hope that the dads will connect beyond the group and we will be following up to gauge longer term impacts. They are currently recruiting for the first round of twenty dads. More information is available at www.tweddle.org.au

- *Photo courtesy of Tweddle*



DV & Dads - Small Steps for stopping Family Violence early in the families that you see

An invitation to a Preview Workshop developing a new approach to Family Violence including with fathers - even when stopping family violence isn't in your job description.

Practitioners are invited to register as participants in this Small Steps Preview Workshop to be held in central Sydney on 4th and 5th April. To register contact tara.payling@newcastle.edu.au

Small Steps is a practical, skills-based workshop for family workers, teachers, case workers, early childhood staff, youth workers, nurses and allied health professionals. The workshop focus is on activities and strategies to safely discuss fathers' behaviours (including with fathers) when interacting with families where there may be family violence. The Small Steps workshop is being developed as part of the Master of Family Studies at the University of Newcastle.

Putting up a 'No to Violence' poster is good. But it is not enough. Everyday encounters are opportunities to take small steps away from accepting violence in the family. Focusing only on the mother is also not sufficient. The purpose of the skills-focus in this workshop is to be able to raise awareness with mothers and fathers that things could be done to remove violence from the home.

The **Small Steps** Workshop will cover:

- Being smart about safety.
- Effective risk assessment.
- How to ask about violence that is just hinted at.
- Getting comfortable with men-talk about conflict.
- Having start-off conversations with mothers about strife at home.
- Seeing where the men are and what motivates them.
- The skill of noticing and highlighting ambivalence.
- Bringing fathers into the conversation.
- The practice of being curious about what is going on at home.
- Working with parenting values that lead to change.
- Family violence is a scary topic.

So when it is not your specific job, the temptation is to leave it to the experts. However, staying clear of any talk about abusive behaviour keeps family violence a secret and does nothing to help the families that you care about.

The **Small Steps** workshop is:

- Not 'opening a can of worms' but using a package of practical skills and knowledge
- Not 'making it worse' but being part of the solution
- Not 'a little knowledge is dangerous' but realistic small steps that any professional can take to safely nudge families toward taking action to make it better.

The presenters

Lyn Stoker is a social worker who has worked for over thirty years in women's health, public health and in community services. The issue of domestic violence has been central to many of her clients and all of the services, over this time. She currently teaches part time in the Master of Family Studies at the Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle, teaching in the intensive family practice stream including a specific course on Responding to domestic and family violence. She also works part time as a mediator, trainer and assessor with local family based services.

Richard Fletcher has been engaging and researching fathers for more than 30 years. As a founder of 'Fathers Against Rape' he worked in schools with young men to address rape. He has led groups for men using violence, home-visited at risk men with their babies, and engaged with fathers through health, education, community and welfare services and conducted innovative programs for young Aboriginal fathers. As a researcher he has advised NGOs and government departments on how to engage hard-to-reach males for the benefit of all the family.

RESEARCH

Fathering Support Programs

FRB Comment: *Sensitive engaged fathering provides benefits to all trajectories of an infant's development alongside fostering healthier partnered relationships and a more successful transition to, and experience of, parenthood for both mothers and fathers. However, to date, engaging fathers in community-based parenting programs has been a difficult task. Previous research has focused on fathers' experiences to draw explanation for poor program uptake. Alternatively, Glynn and Dale drew upon the experiences of professional staff to gain insight into the perceived challenges fathers face when engaging with services. The authors report three important areas for service improvement: the quality of the facilitator, program content and the philosophy of the organisation. The study by Epstein and colleagues highlights the benefits of a strategic approach to program delivery, with couples experiencing high levels of interpersonal conflict most likely to benefit from attendance in a parenting program. Alternatively, McHale and partners targeted unmarried African-American couples, which were recruited into an antenatal program to develop interpersonal relationship skills in readiness for the arrival of their baby. The program included a 4-week post-birth booster session and the majority of couples showed improvements across a range of interpersonal interactions based on pre to post-test observations. Another approach to engage fathers was tested by Fagan, where mothers only were recruited into a program that educated mothers on the importance of father-infant interactions. The authors report significant improvement across a range of co-parenting relationship variables. These studies provide alternative strategies and insights that may be useful for service providers endeavouring to engage fathers or to optimise father engagement within the family unit. In addition, Gervais and colleagues provide a simple 6-step model for developing theory-based fathering programs.*

Engaging dads: Enhancing support for fathers through parenting programmes

Parenting programmes purport to improve the parenting capacity of both mothers and fathers; however it is predominantly mothers who participate. Father participation is important because fathers have a positive impact on both child development and behaviour, and outcomes for children are enhanced when both parents participate in parenting programmes. This article draws upon a study (via an online questionnaire) that explored the views of social workers about the issues affecting fathers' participation in parenting programmes. The results showed that participants considered the qualities of the programme leader, the programme content and the philosophy of the service delivery organisation to be the most important issues impacting on father participation. From the perspective of change, qualities of the programme leader and organisational philosophy were considered the most feasible to address. The sample comprised three times more female than male participants and there was an evident difference in viewpoint according to gender on issues including the gender of the programme leader and the gender make-up of the group.

Glynn, L., & Dale, M. (2015). Engaging dads: Enhancing support for fathers through parenting programmes.

More than One Way to Get There: Pathways of Change in Coparenting Conflict after a Preventive Intervention

This study explored pathways of change in the levels of conflict couples experienced after Supporting Father Involvement, an evidence-based, prevention-oriented couples and parenting intervention that included a diverse low-income and working class group of participants. Pathways of change were examined for couples with baseline conflict scores that were initially low, medium, and high. The growth mixture model analysis found that the best-fitting model for change in couples' conflict was represented by three distinctly different change patterns. The intervention was most successful for High-Conflict couples. This finding contributes to a growing literature examining variations in how relationships change over time and the process of change, especially for couples in distress. This study supports further investigation into the impact and costs associated with universal interventions versus those that target specific groups of higher risk families.

Epstein, K., Pruett, M. K., Cowan, P., Cowan, C., Pradhan, L., Mah, E., & Pruett, K. (2015). More than one way to get there: Pathways of change in coparenting conflict after a preventive intervention. *Family process, 54*(4), 610-618.

Improvements in Unmarried African American Parents' Rapport, Communication, and Problem-Solving Following a Prenatal Coparenting Intervention

This report examines effects of a coparenting intervention designed for and delivered to expectant unmarried African American mothers and fathers on observed interaction dynamics known to predict relationship adjustment. Twenty families took part in the six-session "Figuring It Out for the Child" (FIOC) dyadic intervention offered in a faith-based human services agency during the third trimester of the mother's pregnancy, and completed a postpartum booster session 1 month after the baby's arrival. Parent referrals for the FIOC program were received from a county Health Department and from OBGYNs and Pregnancy Centers in the targeted community. All intervention sessions were delivered by a trained male-female paraprofessional team whose fidelity to the FIOC manualized curriculum was independently evaluated by a team of trained analysts. At both the point of intake ("PRE") and again at an exit evaluation completed 3 months postpartum ("POST"), the mothers and fathers were videotaped as they completed two standardized "revealed differences" conflict discussions. Blinded videotapes of these sessions were evaluated using the System for Coding Interactions in Dyads. Analyses documented statistically significant improvements on 8 of 12 variables examined, with effect sizes ranging from moderate to large.

Overall, 14 families demonstrated beneficial outcomes, 3 did not improve, and 3 showed some signs of decline from the point of intake. For most interaction processes, PRE to POST improvements were unrelated to degree of adherence the paraprofessional interventionists showed to the curriculum. However, better interventionist competence was related to decreases in partners' Coerciveness and Negativity and Conflict, and to smaller increases in partner Withdrawal. Implications of the work for development and delivery of community-based coparenting interventions for unmarried parents are discussed.

McHale, J. P., Salman-Engin, S., & Covert, M. D. (2015). Improvements in Unmarried African American Parents' Rapport, Communication, and Problem-Solving Following a Prenatal Coparenting Intervention. *Family process, 54*(4), 619-629.

Pilot study of a program to increase mothers' understanding of dads

The present study evaluated the effects of mothers' participation in an 8-week coparenting intervention program, Understanding Dad™, on mothers' awareness and attitudes regarding how their relationships with fathers influence paternal involvement with children, knowledge of healthy pro-relationship skills, and relationship self-efficacy. Thirty four mothers were recruited from four sites to participate in a study that used a pre-test/post-test one-group design. Over the course of this 8-week program, mothers demonstrated moderate to large gains in each of the outcome measures, after controlling for mothers' educational level. Moreover, there was one significant within-subjects interaction effect for time 9 location. That is, mothers made significantly greater gains in pro-relationship knowledge in one of the intervention sites. Implications for future research are discussed.

Fagan, J., Cherson, M., Brown, C., & Vecere, E. (2015). Pilot study of a program to increase mothers' understanding of dads. *Family process, 54*(4), 581-589.

The Father Friendly Initiative within Families: Using a logic model to develop program theory for a father support program

The transition to fatherhood, with its numerous challenges, has been well documented. Likewise, fathers' relationships with health and social services have also begun to be explored. Yet despite the problems fathers experience in interactions with healthcare services, few programs have been developed for them. To explain this, some authors point to the difficulty practitioners encounter in developing and structuring the theory of programs they are trying to create to promote and support father involvement (Savaya, R., & Waysman, M. (2005). *Administration in Social Work, 29*(2), 85), even when such theory is key to a program's effectiveness (Chen, H.-T. (2005). *Practical program evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications). The objective of the present paper is to present a tool, the logic model, to bridge this gap and to equip practitioners for structuring program theory. This paper addresses two questions: (1) What would be a useful instrument for structuring the development of program theory in interventions for fathers? (2) How would the concepts of a father involvement program best be organized? The case of the Father Friendly Initiative within Families (FFIF) program is used to present and illustrate six simple steps for developing a logic model that are based on program theory and demonstrate its relevance.

Gervais, C., de Montigny, F., Lacharité, C., & Dubeau, D. (2015). The Father Friendly Initiative within Families: Using a logic model to develop program theory for a father support program. *Evaluation and program planning, 52*, 133-141.

Miscarriage and still birth

FRB comment: *When fathers who are celebrities raise personal issues, social media can boost public awareness. When Facebook guru Mark Zuckerberg described his experience with miscarriage the topic became instantly more visible. (See On the Web) The papers reported here may now receive more coverage and the research into this important area of support for fathers may grow. Burden and colleagues found that for fathers who have experienced the impact of stillbirth, especially those who perceive their social role as the support person to their partner and wider family, can feel marginalised and unacknowledged as a grieving parent, potentially increasing the risk of enduring psychological problems. The aim of their study was to better understand how fathers experience bereavement to assist health professionals in minimizing its negative impact as well as build appropriate and acceptable health care provision to parents and families worldwide. Evens and Read highlight how past studies have overlooked the role men played in domestic health care practices. Their article, “before midnight she had miscarried”: Women, Men, and Miscarriage in Early Modern England, considers a range of medical literature, spiritual diaries, and letters to illustrate how men are and always have been a central feature of many women’s experiences of miscarriage by representing the trauma of miscarriage as not a uniquely feminine experience.*

From grief, guilt pain and stigma to hope and pride – a systematic review and meta-analysis of mixed-method research of the psychosocial impact of stillbirth

Background: Despite improvements in maternity healthcare services over the last few decades, more than 2.7 million babies worldwide are stillborn each year. The global health agenda is silent about stillbirth, perhaps, in part, because its wider impact has not been systematically analysed or understood before now across the world. Our study aimed to systematically review, evaluate and summarise the current evidence regarding the psychosocial impact of stillbirth to parents and their families, with the aim of improving guidance in bereavement care worldwide.

Methods: Systematic review and meta-summary (quantitative aggregation of qualitative findings) of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies. All languages and countries were included.

Results: Two thousand, six hundred and nineteen abstracts were identified; 144 studies were included. Frequency effect sizes (FES %) were calculated for each theme, as a measure of their prevalence in the literature. Themes ranged from negative psychological symptoms post bereavement (77 · 1) and in subsequent pregnancies (27 · 1), to disenfranchised grief (31 · 2), and incongruent grief (28 · 5), There was also impact on siblings (23 · 6) and on the wider family (2 · 8). They included mixed-feelings about decisions made when the baby died (12 · 5), avoidance of memories (13 · 2), anxiety over other children (7 · 6), chronic pain and fatigue (6 · 9), and a different approach to the use of healthcare services (6 · 9). Some themes were particularly prominent in studies of fathers; grief suppression (avoidance) (18 · 1), employment difficulties, financial debt (5 · 6), and increased substance use (4 · 2). Others found in studies specific to mothers included altered body image (3 · 5) and impact on quality of life (2 · 1). Counter-intuitively, some themes had mixed connotations. These included parental pride in the baby (5 · 6), motivation for engagement in healthcare improvement (4 · 2) and changed approaches to life and death, self-esteem, and own identity (25 · 7).

In studies from low/middle income countries, stigmatisation (13 · 2) and pressure to prioritise or delay conception (9) were especially prevalent.

Burden, C., Bradley, S., Storey, C., Ellis, A., Heazell, A. E., Downe, S., ... & Siassakos, D. (2016). From grief, guilt pain and stigma to hope and pride—a systematic review and meta-analysis of mixed-method research of the psychosocial impact of stillbirth. *BMC pregnancy and childbirth*, 16(1), 1.

“before midnight she had miscarried”: Women, Men, and Miscarriage in Early Modern England

Reproduction and childbirth in the early modern era have sometimes been represented as a uniquely feminine experience. Similarly, studies of domestic medicine have in the past overlooked the role that men played in domestic health care practices. This article builds on recent work that resituates men within both of these discourses by considering the ways in which men understood, discussed, and responded to the threat and occurrence of miscarriage in the women they knew. It considers a range of medical literature, spiritual diaries, and letters to illustrate that men were a central feature of many women’s experiences of miscarriage.

Evans, J., & Read, S. (2015). “before midnight she had miscarried” Women, Men, and Miscarriage in Early Modern England. *Journal of Family History*, 40(1), 3-23.

Fathers and child literacy and language development

FRB comment: Research has shown a strong link between father and paternal involvement and children’s educational attainments. Varghese’s article, *The Determinants of Father Involvement and Connections to Children’s Literacy and Language Outcomes: Review of the Literature*, highlights ways that fathers support their children’s literacy and language development, specifically looking at father’s involvement and children’s outcomes as well as identifying gaps in the literature around important contextual factors that may significantly impact on a child’s literacy development. They also highlight the unique contribution fathers make to children’s early academic achievements through the use of engagement in reading and writing activities, use complex language, and responsive parenting behaviours. In addition, Baker and colleague’s found that fathers’ language input predicted children’s receptive vocabulary and applied problems scores above and beyond mothers’ language input. Both Baker et al. and Dennis and Stockall’s articles discuss the value of father-child play and storybook reading. Their findings show active physical play interactions in fact do contribute to their child’s early literacy development while simultaneously strengthening the bond between father and child.

The Determinants of Father Involvement and Connections to Children’s Literacy and Language Outcomes: Review of the Literature

This review synthesizes findings from the literature about the impact of father involvement on children’s literacy and language outcomes. Various proximal and distal factors influence levels of fathers’ involvement in literacy activities and fathers’ contributions to language development. Fathers’ education, income level, residence status, and relationship with the child’s mother were indirect factors associated with children’s literacy and language outcomes. Fathers also made unique, direct contributions to their children’s literacy and language outcomes through the use of complex language, engagement in reading and writing activities, and responsive parenting behaviors. This review concludes by identifying gaps in the literature about other important contextual factors that may influence father involvement and about specific types of literacy activities that fathers engage in with their children.

Varghese, C., & Wachen, J. (2015). The Determinants of Father Involvement and Connections to Children’s Literacy and Language Outcomes: Review of the Literature. *Marriage & Family Review*, 1-28.

Fathers' language input during shared book activities: Links to children's kindergarten achievement

The present study used data from the Family Life Project (FLP) to examine predictive relations between fathers' and mothers' language input during a wordless picture book task in the home just before kindergarten entry and children's letter–word identification, picture vocabulary, and applied problems scores at the end of kindergarten. Fathers' and mothers' language input was defined as the number of different words and mean length of utterance and was measured using Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT). Hierarchical regression analyses with demographic controls revealed that mothers' mean length of utterance predicted children's applied problems scores. More importantly, fathers' mean length of utterance predicted children's vocabulary and applied problems scores above and beyond mothers' language. Findings highlight the unique contribution of fathers to children's early academic achievement. Implications for future research, practice, and policy are discussed.

Baker, C. E., Vernon-Feagans, L., & Family Life Project Investigators. (2015). Fathers' language input during shared book activities: Links to children's kindergarten achievement. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 36*, 53-59.

Fathers' Role in Play

Fathers and paternal role models make a unique contribution to children's development. There is some research to suggest that the types of play males engage in with children is typically more active and thus offers unique possibilities for embedding activities for language and literacy development. In this article, we offer suggestions for how preschool special education teachers can assist fathers and paternal role models as they work and play to enhance the language and literacy skills of their children through reading activities, dramatic play, and pretend or free play.

Dennis, L., & Stockall, N. (2016). Fathers' Role in Play. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 41*(4).

Focus on Family: It's OK to Play: The Importance of Playing While Reading Aloud to Young Children: Susan Catapano, Editor

The family is a child's first and most important teacher, and the home environment is the primary classroom. From birth until the start of formalized schooling, children spend countless hours constructing knowledge in the home with their family. Early family-child interactions are pivotal experiences, often priming children for later academic success. A great deal of research focuses on storybook reading as a prominent parent-child learning activity (Bus, van IJzenendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Commission on Reading, National Academy of Education, 1985; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). The play context also has a long-standing history as an influential area for child development (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993).

Often, however, adult-child storybook reading and play are viewed as necessarily occurring in isolation from one another. The vignette above highlights a scenario where a child who is playing creatively is asked to choose between continuing to play and reading a story with her father. Both activities are enjoyable and both have been proven to be beneficial to overall development. Rather than keeping the activities separate, can we combine them? This article examines the benefits of adult-child storybook reading and adult-child play activities. The argument is made that integrating play and storybook reading is advantageous for both children and adults. The author provides some tips for seamlessly bringing the two activities together.

Kenney, C. K. (2016). Focus on Family: It's OK to Play: The Importance of Playing While Reading Aloud to Young Children: Susan Catapano, Editor. *Childhood Education, 92*(2), 161-163.

The role of a father during pregnancy and birth in low-income countries

FRB comment: *Given the multicultural nature of our population, paying attention to fathers' roles in low and middle-income regions overseas may give us valuable guidance for services in Australia. Understanding the way that maternity services in these countries include and support fathers may be particularly important as the birth rate for many groups from Oceania, North Africa and South-east Asia are relatively high compared the national rate (ABS Births 2014). However there has been little attention to the experiences of fathers of refugee or immigrant backgrounds as they negotiate maternity services while dealing with the challenges of settlement. The qualitative study by Riggs and colleagues examining Afghan fathers' views is a welcome contribution to this field. Although the men played a major support role during pregnancy and postnatally they were rarely asked by health professionals about their own concerns. The authors call for a 'broader preventive and primary care approach' to include support for fathers. Lessons can also be learned from efforts taking place outside of Australia. Research on fathers' place in the birth process in low and middle income countries however starts from a markedly different point from most Australian studies that assume access to high quality maternity services. As Ganle and Dery underline in their paper title 'What men don't know can hurt women's health' in Ghana women's access to maternal care is strongly affected by fathers' knowledge of safe care and negative attitudes to maternity services. Several regions have seen attempts to improve maternal health by targeting fathers' knowledge and understanding. Zamawe et al. describe a successful mass media campaign in Malawi while Bich and colleagues report a successful community-based education intervention in Viet Nam to mobilize fathers' support for early breastfeeding. Systematic reviews by Yargawa & Leonardi-Bee and by Aguiar & Jennings support the importance of fathers' engagement for mothers' access to services (but no effect on birth outcomes) and identify poor service design and attitudes of health care staff as barriers. Interestingly, Yargawa & Leonardi-Bee also found that father's involvement antenatally and postnatally had greater benefits than their involvement at the birth.*

Fatherhood in a New Country: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Experiences of Afghan Men and Implications for Health Services

Background: Fathers of refugee background are dealing with multiple, interrelated stressors associated with forced migration and establishing their lives in a new country. This has implications for the role of men in promoting the health and well-being of their families. **Methods:** Afghan community researchers conducted interviews with 30 Afghan women and men who had recently had a baby in Australia. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with health professionals working with families of refugee background.

Results: Fourteen men, 16 women, and 34 health professionals participated. Afghan men reported playing a major role in supporting their wives during pregnancy and postnatal care, accompanying their wives to appointments, and providing language and transport support. Although men embraced these roles, they were rarely asked by health professionals about their own concerns related to their wife's pregnancy, or about their social circumstances. Perinatal health professionals queried whether it was their role to meet the needs of men. **Conclusion:** There are many challenges for families of refugee background navigating maternity services while dealing with the challenges of settlement. There is a need to move beyond a narrow conceptualization of antenatal and postnatal care to encompass a broader preventive and primary care approach to supporting refugee families through the period of pregnancy and early years of parenting. Pregnancy and postnatal care needs to be tailored to the social and psychological needs of families of refugee background, including men, and incorporate appropriate language support, in order to improve child and family health outcomes.

Riggs, E., Yelland, J., Szwarc, J., Wahidi, S., Casey, S., Chesters, D., ... & Brown, S. (2015). Fatherhood in a New Country: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Experiences of Afghan Men and Implications for Health Services. *Birth*. 1-7.

Continues next page

'What men don't know can hurt women's health': a qualitative study of the barriers to and opportunities for men's involvement in maternal healthcare in Ghana

Background: The importance of men's involvement in facilitating women's access to skilled maternal healthcare in patriarchal societies such as Ghana is increasingly being recognised. However, few studies have been conducted to examine men's involvement in issues of maternal healthcare, the barriers to men's involvement, and how best to actively involve men. The purpose of this paper is to explore the barriers to and opportunities for men's involvement in maternal healthcare in the Upper West Region of Ghana.

Methods: Qualitative focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews were conducted with adult men and women aged 20–50 in a total of seven communities in two geographic districts and across urban and rural areas in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Attride-Stirling's thematic network analysis framework was used to analyse and present the qualitative data.

Results: Findings suggest that although many men recognise the importance of skilled care during pregnancy and childbirth, and the benefits of their involvement, most did not actively involve themselves in issues of maternal healthcare unless complications set in during pregnancy or labour. Less than a quarter of male participants had ever accompanied their wives for antenatal care or postnatal care in a health facility. Four main barriers to men's involvement were identified: perceptions that pregnancy care is a female role while men are family providers; negative cultural beliefs such as the belief that men who accompany their wives to receive ANC services are being dominated by their wives; health services factors such as unfavourable opening hours of services, poor attitudes of healthcare providers such as maltreatment of women and their spouses and lack of space to accommodate male partners in health facilities; and the high cost associated with accompanying women to seek maternity care. Suggestions for addressing these barriers include community mobilisation programmes to promote greater male involvement, health education, effective leadership, and respectful and patient-centred care training for healthcare providers.

Conclusions: The findings in this paper highlight the need to address the barriers to men's involvement, engage men and women on issues of maternal health, and improve the healthcare systems – both in terms of facilities and attitudes of health staff - so that couples who wish to be together when accessing care can truly do so.

Ganle, J. K., & Dery, I. (2015). 'What men don't know can hurt women's health': a qualitative study of the barriers to and opportunities for men's involvement in maternal healthcare in Ghana. *Reproductive health*, 12(1), 93.

The effect of mass media campaign on Men's participation in maternal health: a cross-sectional study in Malawi

Background: Men's participation in antenatal, childbirth and postnatal care is crucial to the health of the mothers and neonates. Nevertheless, very few men participate in maternal health, especially in developing countries. Mass media is one of the popular and effective tools for health promotion and behavioral change globally. However, this approach is rarely recognized in maternal health literature and its impact on men's participation in maternal health is not thoroughly understood. Therefore, the objective of this study was to assess the effect of mass media campaign on men's involvement in maternal health.

Methods: A cross-sectional study involving 3,825 women of childbearing age (15–49 years) was conducted between July and December 2013 in Malawi's Mchinji district. Our interest was to establish if husbands of the women who were exposed to the maternal health radio program called Phukusi la Moyo (PLM) were significantly different to those of the women who were not exposed, especially in terms of their involvement in maternal health. We collected data on exposure to the radio campaign and men's involvement in maternal health through face-to-face interviews using electronic structured questionnaires.

The univariate, bivariate and multiple logistic regression analyses were used during analysis of the data. The level of significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Results: Husbands of the women who were exposed to the PLM radio program were more likely to participate in antenatal care (OR 1.5 [95% confidence interval 1.3-1.8]), to be involved in childbirth (OR 1.7 [95% confidence interval 1.5-2.0]) and to participate in postnatal care (OR 1.9 [95% confidence interval 1.7-2.2]) than their counterparts.

Conclusion: The use of mass media in promoting the involvement of men in antenatal care, childbirth and postnatal care is effective. Henceforward, we recommend the inclusion of mass media in projects or interventions designed to promote men's engagement in maternal health.

Zamawe, C., Banda, M., & Dube, A. (2015). The effect of mass media campaign on Men's participation in maternal health: a cross-sectional study in Malawi. *Reproductive health*, 12(1), 31.

Father's involvement and its effect on early breastfeeding practices in Viet Nam

Fathers have an important but often neglected role in the promotion of healthy breastfeeding practices in developing countries. A community-based education intervention was designed to mobilize fathers' support for early breastfeeding. This study aimed to evaluate an education intervention targeting fathers to increase the proportion of early breastfeeding initiation and to reduce prelacteal feeding. Quasi-experimental study design was used to compare intervention and control areas located in two non-adjacent rural districts that shared similar demographic and health service characteristics in northern Viet Nam. Fathers and expectant fathers with pregnant wives from 7 to 30 weeks gestational age were recruited. Fathers in the intervention area received breastfeeding education materials, counselling services at a commune health centre and household visits. They were also invited to participate in a breastfeeding promotion social event. After intervention, early breastfeeding initiation rate was 81.2% in the intervention area and 39.6% in the control area ($P < 0.001$). Babies in the intervention area were more likely to be breastfed within the first hour after birth [odds ratio (OR) 7.64, 95% confidence interval (CI) 4.81-12.12] and not to receive any prelacteal feeding (OR 4.43, 95% CI 2.88-6.82) compared with those in the control area. Fathers may positively influence the breastfeeding practices of mothers, and as a resource for early childcare, they can be mobilized in programmes aimed at improving the early initiation of breastfeeding.

Bich, T. H., Hoa, D. T. P., Ha, N. T., Vui, L. T., Nghia, D. T., & Målqvist, M. (2015). Father's involvement and its effect on early breastfeeding practices in Viet Nam. *Maternal & child nutrition*. 1.10.

Male involvement and maternal health outcomes: systematic review and meta-analysis

Background: The developing world accounts for 99% of global maternal deaths. Men in developing countries are the chief decision-makers, determining women's access to maternal health services and influencing their health outcomes. At present, it is unclear whether involving men in maternal health can improve maternal outcomes. This systematic review and meta-analysis aimed to investigate the impact of male involvement on maternal health outcomes of women in developing countries.

Methods: Four electronic databases and grey literature sources were searched (up to May 2013), together with reference lists of included studies. Two reviewers independently screened and assessed the quality of studies based on prespecified criteria. Measures of effects were pooled and random effect meta-analysis was conducted, where possible.

Results: Fourteen studies met the inclusion criteria. Male involvement was significantly associated with reduced odds of postpartum depression (OR=0.36, 95% CI 0.19 to 0.68 for male involvement during pregnancy; OR=0.34, 95% CI 0.19 to 0.62 for male involvement post partum), and also with improved utilisation of maternal health services (skilled birth attendance and postnatal care). Male involvement during pregnancy and at post partum appeared to have greater benefits than male involvement during delivery.

Conclusions: Male involvement is associated with improved maternal health outcomes in developing countries. Contrary to reports from developed countries, there was little evidence of positive impacts of husbands' presence in delivery rooms. However, more rigorous studies are needed to improve this area's evidence base.

Yargawa, J., & Leonardi-Bee, J. (2015). Male involvement and maternal health outcomes: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of epidemiology and community health*, 69(6), 604-612.

Impact of Male Partner Antenatal Accompaniment on Perinatal Health Outcomes in Developing Countries: A Systematic Literature Review

Encouraging male partners to accompany women to antenatal care (ANC) is an important first step in engaging men on maternal and newborn health. However, little is known regarding the impact of male partner antenatal accompaniment beyond HIV-related perinatal outcomes. A systematic review was conducted to synthesize the evidence on the influence of male accompaniment on non-HIV outcomes during pregnancy and into the postpartum period. Eligible studies were published in English from 2003 to 2013 and evaluated the effect of male antenatal accompaniment on perinatal health in a developing country. Four electronic databases and selected reference lists were searched. Out of 84 potential citations retrieved, seven publications were retained for the assessment of male antenatal accompaniment's influence using iterative thematic analysis. During pregnancy, male antenatal accompaniment positively impacted women's knowledge of danger signs, but did not affect birth preparedness, ANC utilization, or miscarriages. During labor and delivery, men's ANC presence was associated with increases in institutional delivery and skilled birth attendance, but with no effect for birth-related outcomes. During the early postnatal period, male antenatal accompaniment was associated with higher uptake of postnatal services, but with mixed effects on breastfeeding and newborn survival. Couples' increased communication on pregnancy care and men's subsequent motivation to ensure safe delivery may explain these observed benefits. Inadequate communication, late accompaniment, or partner type may explain the lack of influence on some outcomes. More efforts are needed to expand the implementation and evaluation of male involvement strategies to improve perinatal health.

Aguiar, C., & Jennings, L. (2015). Impact of male partner antenatal accompaniment on perinatal health outcomes in developing countries: a systematic literature review. *Maternal and child health journal*, 19(9), 2012-2019.

ONGOING RESEARCH

Adoption

Looking for research and information on male adult adoptees and parenting of their children

Jigsaw post adoption centre (www.jigsawqueensland.com) is seeking material to use in their forthcoming program for male adoptees. The average age of the men involved is around 40 years old. Most would be the result of forced adoptions until the late 1970's. The service is in contact with many adult male adoptees and an increasing number of birth fathers.

For more information or to provide assistance with resources contact:

Chris Mundy, Information, Support and Referral Worker chris.mundy@jigsawqld.org.au

The Fathers' Play Project

FRB comment: Research with families with a toddler 18-23 months in the Hunter or Central Coast regions– Please distribute if relevant to the families you work with.

The Fathers' Play Project is an exciting new research project that explores how dads' play helps children develop.



Who are we looking for?

Mums and Dads with a toddler 18-23 months in the Hunter or Central Coast region.

How do you participate?

1. Mum & Dad complete online surveys
2. Dad takes part in a dad-child play session
3. Mum or Dad brings child for a (free) developmental assessment

For more information or to participate,

Please contact: Jennifer StGeorge - 4921 6690

Or click [here](#) to register your interest.

FAMILY ACTION CENTRE NEWS

Master of Family Studies

Applications for intake in Semester 2 2016 are now open. The degree focuses on theoretical and practical knowledge in core areas of family work including trauma-informed practice, working with vulnerable families, and working with men. If you would like more information about the degree, please contact the Program Convenor, Dr Jennifer StGeorge, (02) 4921 6690, or Jennifer.Stgeorge@newcastle.edu.au

The Fatherhood Research Bulletin 32 edited by Associate Professor Richard Fletcher and compiled by Jaime Wroe and Tara Payling.