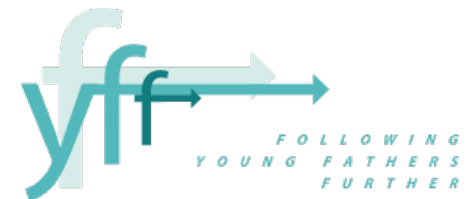


Using co-creation in a qualitative longitudinal programme of research to affect social change: methodological innovations in research with marginalised fathers

Professor Anna Tarrant
University of Lincoln
atarrant@lincoln.ac.uk
@Profatarrant

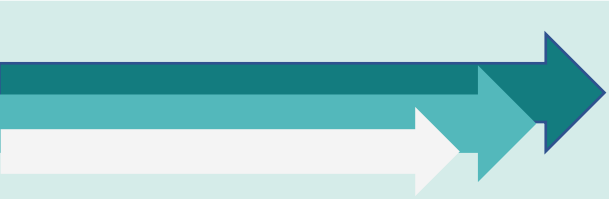




Presentation Overview



- The importance of a dynamic account of young fathers' parenting trajectories and support needs,
- The importance of father-inclusion; but what do we mean by it?
- Fostering an environment of practice and support that is compassionate, redemptive, and strengths-based,
- Collaborations for the purposes of translating findings into community, practice, and policy action.
- The value of investments in young fathers' participation for them, their children, and their families.



The Following Young Fathers research programme

Creating a legacy through QL impact research

Following Young Fathers QL study, ESRC, 2010- 2015 (Neale et al. 2015)

- Two phase extended study: up to four waves of fieldwork over five years with core sample of 31 young fathers from varied backgrounds. Interviews with practitioners.
- Collaborative design and co-production of knowledge with policy and practice partners was essential.

FYF RYD (Responding to Young Dads) Impact Study (2016-17) (Tarrant and Neale, 2017),

- Collaboration with key practitioners to test novel ways of working with/supporting young dads.

Following Young Fathers Further, UKRI, Future Leaders Fellowship 2020-2024 (Tarrant 2020-24)

- Multi-strand and multi-partner:
 - Follow up with young fathers interviewed in a baseline study (Neale et al. 2015),
 - International comparative study between UK and Sweden (Johansson and Andreasson)
 - Co-creation of a new social intervention in Grimsby (East England seaside town),
 - North East Young Dads and Lads – co-creation of knowledge and outputs to improve outreach and support for minoritised young fathers and DigiDAD





The existing evidence base



- Predominantly focused on young mothers, the stigma they experience and how this influences policy and practice responses (Neale and Patrick, 2016; SmithBattle et al. 2018),
- Young fathers stigmatised and misrepresented in public and policy discourses as feckless, deadbeat and absent,
- Where young fathers had been included in research designs it was often as the co-parent and based on a very small sample (Neale and Patrick, 2016),
- There was a need for a dynamic and longitudinal focus on young fathers that tracked their trajectories and support needs over time and created a more nuanced picture based on their perspectives,
- This is what Following Young Fathers set out to achieve, making a major contribution to the evidence-base about young fatherhood in the UK



Learning from Following Young Fathers



- **Unplanned conceptions** (Neale, Patrick and Lau Clayton 2015): in all but two cases, conceptions not planned, the young men were shocked and distressed. No agency and were not consulted in decisions to keep a child. But *an unplanned child does not mean an unwanted child*
- **Young men adhered strongly to an ethos of *engaged fatherhood***. They were keen to adjust to the pregnancy and develop roles as ‘good’ fathers, including if single and non resident.
- **Relationships with child’s mother and maternal grandmothers** pivotal in ability of young men to develop a role as a parent: tensions between ideology of mother-child dyad and engaged fatherhood polarised for this age group (Neale and Lau Clayton, 2014; Neale and Patrick, 2017)
- **A lack of relational, educational/socio-economic and housing resources** severely hampered the capacity of many young men to develop and sustain a role as a parent (Neale and Ladlow 2015a, Neale and Davies 2016; Neale and Patrick, 2017).
- **Compounded for vulnerable young men:** those living in *entrenched poverty, young offender fathers*, those brought up in the *care system*, and those with *mental health problems* (Neale and Ladlow 2015b; Ladlow and Neale 2016; Lau Clayton 2017).

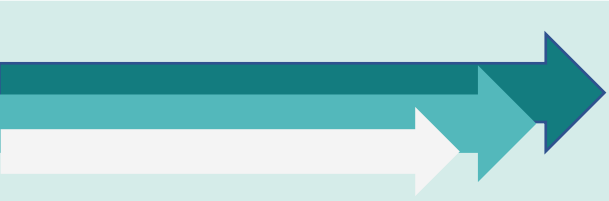


What we know about young fathers and support



- Young fathers are more likely to have to navigate a range of disadvantages and have significant support needs:
 - They are more likely to come into the orbit of mainstream and specialist services,
 - Engagement is hampered by a widespread view that young fathers are ‘hard to reach’. Turning this around requires a focus on how far services are ‘hard to access’ for this client group (Hadley 2014),
 - They experience a combination of *support*, *surveillance* and *sidelining* in professional contexts,
 - Where surveillance and sidelining represent a risk-based approach, seeing young fathers as a resource for their children is central to a more compassionate and caring ethos,
 - Value in creating a virtuous circle of engagement, trust and mutual respect - young fathers respond well when professionals offer holistic support and respond to a diversity of needs and experience,
 - Fostering an environment of practice and support that is compassionate, redemptive, and strengths-based.

Neale and Davies (2015); Neale (2016); Davies (2016); Lau Clayton (2016); Tarrant et al. (2022)



The support ecosystem in the UK



- Welfare system and policies reflecting over a decade of austerity and the privatisation by stealth of health, housing and education,
- A policy and practice landscape that under-serves men as fathers (Maxwell et al. 2012; Scourfield et al. 2014; Ferguson, 2016),
- Support for fathers is hampered by a combination of structural, cultural and organisational barriers (Phillip et al. 2018),
- Pervasive gendered occupational cultures;
 - Persistence in gendered ways of thinking about fathers and acceptance of stereotypes that assume disinterest in parenting among men;
 - Limited training and reflective supervision for professionals,
 - Constraints on workload capacity; and
 - Maternal reluctance to champion the involvement of fathers (Ferguson, 2016; Bateson et al. 2017; Phillip et al. 2018).
- In public health there is continued emphasis on the prevention of teenage conceptions and pregnancies at the expense of support (e.g. Owens 2022).



The value of father inclusion



The broader benefits of father involvement are becoming much better established in research, reflecting cultural shifts in expectations:

The benefits of promoting father-inclusion in service and support settings is also emerging (Bateson et al. 2017), perhaps less so in organisational contexts,

Both contribute to:

- 1) Promoting fathers' well-being,
- 2) Building fathers' capacity to support mothers' psychological well-being,
- 3) Promoting maternal health behaviours,
- 4) Promoting children's mental health and development.

What does father-inclusion mean?



Knowledge

- Historical discourse of father involvement
- Parental roles
- Fatherhood research and theories
- Power dynamics

Skills

- Cultural humility & competence
- Communication
- Engagement
- Participatory strategies
- Resource brokering/service navigation
- Interprofessional collaboration

Mindset

- Aware of self & others
- Strengths perspective
- Ethical
- Professional

In part, an ethos combining several elements:

- recognising the diverse circumstances, strengths and interests of fathers,
- taking a positive approach to the diversity of men, their needs and expectations,
- encouraging men and service providers to openly acknowledge and value fathering.

Rollins (2020)



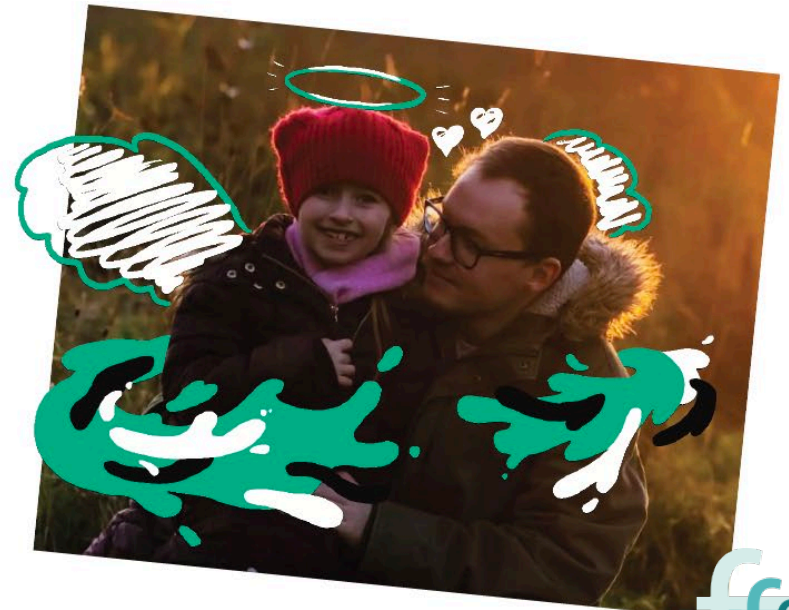
What dads say

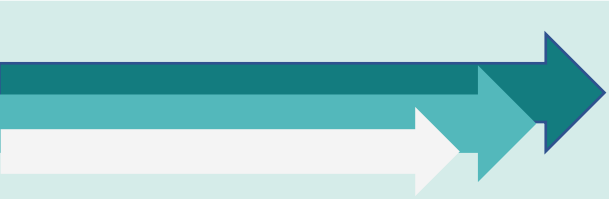


2. Why it is important to 'Think Dad!'

"LET'S START WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT TALKING POINT WHEN WE ARE ASKED THIS QUESTION - THE YOUNG FATHERS THEMSELVES. I THINK IT'S EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT THEIR INVOLVEMENT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING IS RECOGNISED AT ITS ABSOLUTE FULLEST FROM ALL ANGLES. WHEN IT COMES TO SUPPORTING THEM THROUGH PARENTHOOD YOU KNOW, AS THIS IS WITHOUT DOUBT ONE OF THE PROUDEST MOMENTS OF THEIR LIVES BUT CAN ALSO BE THE SCARIEST. AS YOU CAN IMAGINE SOME OF THE POTENTIAL THOUGHTS GOING THROUGH THEIR HEADS AT THAT MOMENT IN TIME. BECOMING A DAD, YOU KNOW. AM I GOING TO BE GOOD ENOUGH? WILL I BE ABLE TO PROVIDE FOR MY FAMILY? I HOPE I DON'T LET ANYONE DOWN!"

By Robert Oughton, a young dad





How do we change the narrative?



- Using co-creation methodology to bring together young fathers and other stakeholders to address their marginalisation and promote positive visions of young fatherhood,
- In our work, this involves young fathers and professionals who champion father-inclusion, and us as the academic team.
- Co-creation:
 - Sees young fathers as ‘experts by experience’, which involves them in processes of co-production,
 - A form of collaborative knowledge generation involving academics working alongside other stakeholders - increasingly popular approach to aligning research and service development (Greenhalgh et al. 2016),
 - It might involve researchers, practitioners and communities with lived experience working together to generate and promote new knowledge and/or to co-instantiate create new social interventions

New relational ecologies and dialogic modes



STUDY 1, Phase 1 (2010-15)
Co-production of knowledge

- QL interviews with 31 young fathers about their parenting journeys and gaps in support,
- 'Know how' practice-informed knowledge generated with young fathers about their support pathways and with professionals who champion young fathers.

STUDY 2, Phase 2 (2016-17)
Stakeholder engagement and co-design[©]

- Co-design of new support pathways for young fathers with national practice partners
- Piloting the implementation of those support pathways with key stakeholders; e.g. young fathers and multi-agency professionals,
- Generation of early evidence of the impacts of the process for key stakeholders
- Evidence of new relational ecologies established between stakeholders.

STUDY 3, Phase 3, 2020-ongoing
Co-creation

- Co-creating a new, replicable version of the [anon] social intervention in a different policy and practice context,
- Qualitative longitudinal evidence generated with key stakeholders throughout the process and used as part of an action research cycle to iteratively inform the design of the intervention as it is implemented.

- An empirically driven process,
- Since 2012, the studies have facilitated new relational ecologies, dialogic modes and evidence, comprising the contributions of:
 - young fathers,
 - Practice partners
 - Fatherhood champions/advocates,
 - Multi-agency professionals from family, health, youth and education services,
 - Policy makers



Young Dads Collective approach



- Model established by Coram Family and Childcare and partnership developed originally with the Following Young Fathers team (Neale et al. 2015),
- Two iterations of this existing model of good practice:
 - Young Dads Collective North (Tarrant and Neale, 2017)
 - Grimsby Dads Collective (Tarrant et al. 2022)
- A model that involves young fathers in training an audience of multi-agency professionals who are encouraged to adapt their practice having heard the young men's accounts,
- Affecting social transformation at various levels of the system:
 - **Professional education and CPD** – professionals encouraged to 'think dad' and make pledges for practice change,
 - **Individual development**: Young fathers can gain accreditation, confidence and skills building, 3 dads went onto secure employment
 - **Peer support** – young men come together as part of a community with a shared identity,
 - **Policy change** – speaking at policy events, changing policies, encouraging services to consider dads.



Young Dads Collective approach



".. .mostly I see the aim as service change but...there are huge other outcomes associated with that...all the benefits that come with dads being more involved in their children's lives equate to benefits for families more broadly. I think any sort of project that promotes like a level of equality for particular groups is beneficial to everyone, not just the group that it's supporting"

Coram Family and Childcare, YDC model manager



Buzzing, love being listened to. It's not just the work with the professionals, it's about meeting up with other dads when we do the planning. We all want other dads to have a better experience.

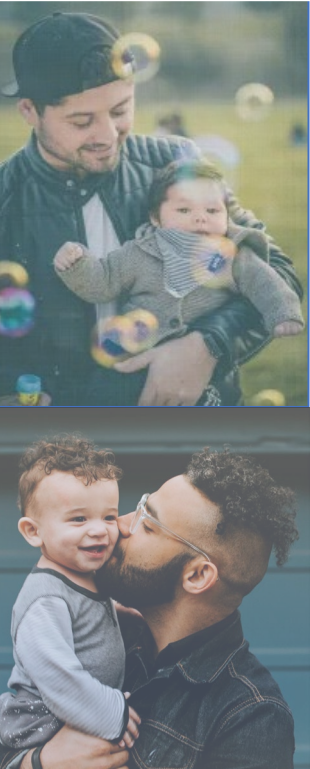
YDC North, young father



I'll think more about how to help young fathers. I will think beyond mums.

Professional feedback from events

DigiDAD/Think Dad!

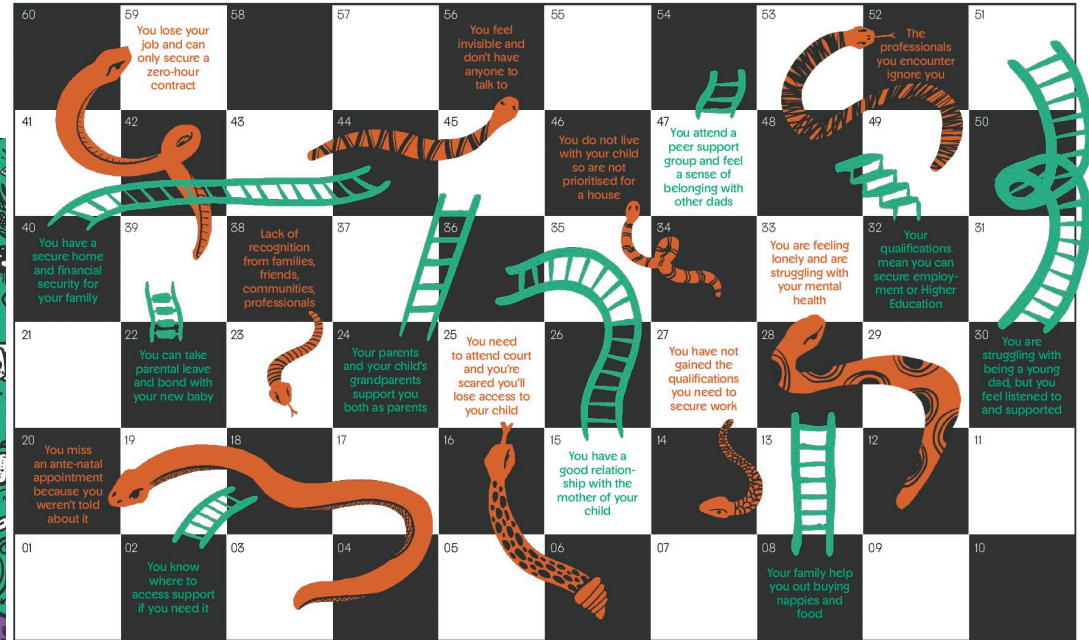


Think Dad!

A father-inclusive toolkit for professionals



Made by young fathers for professionals



to 'Think Dad!'

"LET'S START WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT TALKING POINT WHEN WE ARE ASKED THIS QUESTION – THE YOUNG FATHERS THEMSELVES. I THINK IT'S EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT THEIR INVOLVEMENT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING IS RECOGNISED AT ITS ABSOLUTE FULLEST FROM ALL ANGLES. WHEN IT COMES TO SUPPORTING THEM THROUGH PARENTHOOD YOU KNOW, AS THIS IS WITHOUT DOUBT ONE OF THE PROUDEST MOMENTS OF THEIR LIVES BUT CAN ALSO BE THE SCARIEST. AS YOU CAN IMAGINE SOME OF THE POTENTIAL THOUGHTS GOING THROUGH THEIR HEADS AT THAT MOMENT IN TIME. BECOMING A DAD, YOU KNOW, AM I GOING TO BE GOOD ENOUGH? WILL I BE ABLE TO PROVIDE FOR MY FAMILY? I HOPE I DON'T LET ANYONE DOWN!"

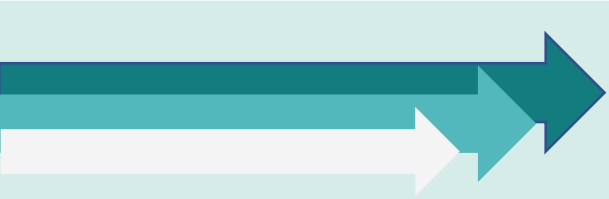
By Robert Oughton, a young dad



https://www.digidad.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/NEYDL_ThinkDad_Toolkit_v9.pdf



Hear more from



The value of co-production with young dads



- Investments in the citizenship of young fathers,
- Dads as ‘experts by experience’; authenticity, listening and responding from a place of understanding is key to a strengths-based father-inclusion,
- To understand *what works*, we need to know what dads need as a starting point for what needs to happen to support them,
- Dads can (and should) be fruitfully involved in service creation and/or evolution either as peers and/or as champions,
- Professionals also galvanised to identify and address barriers to father-inclusion in their own services.



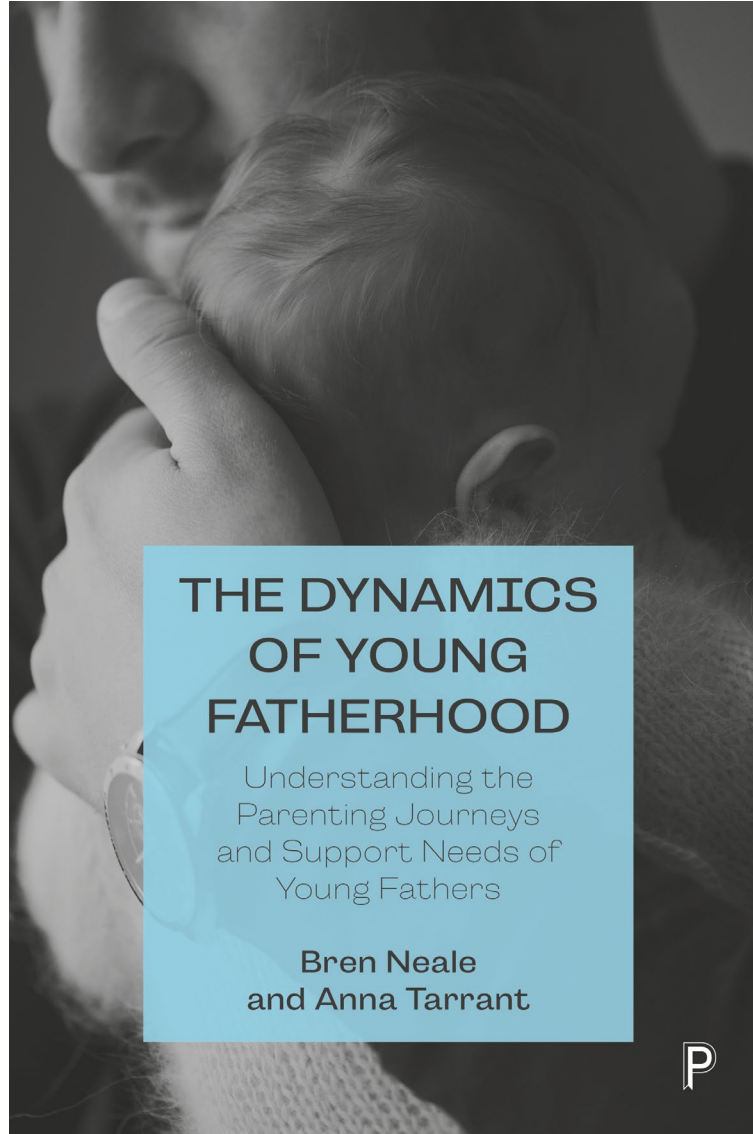
Concluding comments



- Encouraging evidence of an ethos of engaged fatherhood among young fathers that is sustained over time,
 - albeit challenged in difficult socio-economic circumstances and increasingly conditional welfare systems,
- The current support landscape in the UK prioritises a problem focused, rather than support or strengths-based approach,
- Gap between what is known, what supports young fathers and their families, and what happens in practice,
- When acknowledged as ‘experts by experience’ young fathers demonstrate their great capacity to influence change within existing systems through the promotion of father-inclusion,
- Co-production and partnership working between researchers, professionals and fathers are vital methodologies for affecting change and for brokering the dialogues required to translate and embed evidence-based practice.



Forthcoming Jan 2024



THE DYNAMICS OF YOUNG FATHERHOOD

Understanding the
Parenting Journeys
and Support Needs of
Young Fathers

**Bren Neale
and Anna Tarrant**

P

@Profatarrant
@FollowingYFF