

Becoming a Young Father

Sex and Relationship Practices and Values

Bren Neale and Carmen Lau Clayton

Following Young Fathers Research Team:
Carmen Lau Clayton, Bren Neale, Laura Davies

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Following Young Fathers: Baseline study: ESRC Timescapes 2010-12

- **Aims:** to explore the lived experiences and support needs of young fathers (under the age of 25, a quarter of whom are in their teens).
- **Rationale:** High rates of teen parenthood in the UK; Gaps in evidence/provision, with policy focus on young mothers. Lack of dynamic research that can discern life course processes
- **Design:** Qualitative Longitudinal Research and Co-production of knowledge
 - 12 disadvantaged young men
 - Recruitment: Referrals from LEA Learning mentor scheme
 - Focus groups, time maps, three waves of in depth interviews over 18 months
 - Analysis by case and wave: Construction of detailed life histories, comparison of varied pathways over time
- **Key Finding:** Committed to their children, but lacking economic, environmental and social resources for parenthood

Following Fathers Extension Study

ESRC Nov 2012-Sept 2015

- Expanded sample: Following the pathways of original sample, plus sample boosting to 30 young men, varied backgrounds, recruited through different routes, increasing longitudinal reach and value.
- Exploring varied journeys: e.g. relationship with mother, child, grandparents; housing, schooling, employment
- Synthesis and Secondary Analysis of existing evidence
- Mapping and evaluating selected service provision
 - Early Start local authority scheme
 - Evaluation of parenthood course in custodial settings

Sex and Relationship Practices

- Why do young men enter into parenthood at a young age? – what are the social mechanisms?
- What are their values around sex and relationships?
- How do they view contraception and abortion?
- What impact does sex and relationship education have on their values or practices?
- What are the policy implications of these findings?

Findings

1. The role of sex education
2. Sexual practices
3. Values around sex
4. Abortion beliefs
5. Repeat pregnancies
6. Relationship values

1. The role of sex education

- **Lack of sex education from parents:** “No I wouldn’t talk to my mum about sex. I couldn’t do that” (Tarrell, aged 20)
- **Ineffective sex education from schools:** “They didn’t show us anything. It was just like a mess-about lesson” (Adam, aged 15)
- **Misconceptions about sexual activities:** “I was about fourteen. I didn’t really think if you know what I mean. I had no common sense...I didn’t think you could get pregnant the first time” (Darren, aged 21)

2. Sexual practices

- **Contraception use not important:** “Yeah I knew everything [where to get condoms] but I just didn’t bother. I couldn’t be bothered. I just wanted to go out all the time, I didn’t want to waste my day going all the way to the sexual health clinic” (Jimmy, aged 16)
- **Partner’s responsibility:** “I mean I think she was on the injection but I weren’t sure. I didn’t ask her. We didn’t use condoms so...” (Adam, aged 15)
- **Cases of failed contraceptive use:** “We used a condom at the point of conception but I don’t think we knew or realised it’d split” (Dominic, aged 18)

3. Values around sex

- **High emphasis on sex:** “I wouldn’t have a sexless relationship. If it were sexless we wouldn’t be together” (Jason, aged 22)
- **Recreational acts:** “I’ve got to have sex. And it’s usually on the first date . . .I really can’t do Johnny’s [condoms]. I don’t like them” (Callum, aged 19)
- **Sexual gratification prioritised over longevity of relationships:** “It could start affecting your views of commitment and things like that” (Dominic, aged 18)
- **Committed relationships are not a precursor of early entry into parenthood**

4. Abortion beliefs

- **Young man's decision:** “Don't believe in them. It's like killing summat that you created. I just said we're not having one. She goes 'alright then'” (Richard, aged 16)
- **Joint decision:** “From day one we had that agreement that it weren't gonna happen” (Darren, aged 21)
- **Woman's choice:** “She was told that she might never be able to have children. So when it turned out that she was pregnant, she was overjoyed. She didn't want to risk the chance that it might not happen again” (Ben, aged 20)
- **Lack of involvement:** “She said ‘I don't care what anyone says, I ain't getting rid of baby’. So I basically ain't got a say in it.” (Karl, aged 16)

5. Repeat pregnancies

- **Continued lack of contraceptive use:** “We don’t really use it [protection] still” (Adam, aged 15)
- **Continued lack of agency over sexual health :** “No I just try and think positive and not worry myself [STIs]” (Simon, aged 16)
- **Continued misconceptions around fertility:** “We literally just had our daughter [third child]. And then within god knows how long she were pregnant again. And genuinely I didn’t actually think you could get pregnant so quick after. I thought that it’d be like kind of messed up down there if you know what I mean” (Callum, aged 19)
- **2 Terminations** (abortion values changed over waves)

6. Relationship values

- Committed relationships are not a precursor to entry/re-entry into early parenthood
- Positive relationship with the mother of the child is recognised regardless of relationship status
- Relationships post separation ever-changing (often volatile) –
- limited agency for young men in relation to their intimate relationships, contraception, sexual health

Example: Callum

Wave number	Relationship status with the mother of the child and parenting
1	Separated from the mother of his twin boys. On going court case to see twins. Relationship with the mother of the twins highly negative.
2	Relationship with the mother of the twins increasingly difficult. No contact with twins. New partner is pregnant with his third child.
3	Difficulties with the mother of the twins continues. No contact with twins continues. Third child is born- a daughter. Temporary separation from the mother of his daughter. Fourth child conceived before the break up. Ambivalent relationship with the mother of his daughter reported.
4	Seeing the twins regularly. Communication with the mother of the twins via grandmothers (m & p) Fourth child is born (another daughter). Relationship with the mother of his daughters is highly positive. Joint parenting is possible.

Policy implications of Findings

- Limited agency of young men in sex and relationships
 - Limited knowledge of sexual health - increase in STI rates
 - Repeat pregnancies and arrival of more children leading to greater responsibilities for the young parents.
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- Findings reveal a mismatch between values and practices of young fathers and policies and interventions designed to reduce teenage conception and support young parents – (accords with previous research, e.g. Elley).
 - Need for more effective SRE prior to entry into parenthood, during pregnancy and early parenthood.
 - Need to broaden SRE remit to include preparation for parenthood.
 - Need for specialist provision to augment generic provision for disadvantaged young people

Followingfathers.leeds.ac.uk

@ESRC_FYF

- c.lau-clayton@leeds.ac.uk
- b.neale@leeds.ac.uk
- l.davies@leeds.ac.uk