Following Young Fathers: a consideration of policy and practice

Dr Laura Davies
l.davies@leeds.ac.uk
@ESRC_FYF
Presentation outline

- Introduction to the Following Fathers project
- Our strands of work

- Who are young fathers?
- The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (1999)
- Developing policy interventions
The FF project

- Baseline study 2010-12 (www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk)
- ESRC funded FF follow up study (Nov 2012-Sept 2015)
- Lack of knowledge regarding experiences and support needs of young fathers
- 4 strands of work
Who are young fathers?

- defined as those who enter parenthood under the age of twenty five with a quarter estimated to be in their teens (Fatherhood Institute 2010; Swann et al 2003)
- young fathers remain neglected in both research and policy making with young fathers reporting feeling excluded by professionals (Paranjothy et al 2009)
- Although pregnancy was often unexpected, this did not mean that children were unwanted
Perceptions of young parenthood

- Young parenthood as a social problem?
- Or a social threat?
- Policy concerns often focussed on how young parenthood disrupts expected patterns of education and employment (Alexander et al, 2007)
- Fathers as ‘resource’ or ‘risk’ (Featherstone, 2004)
- Policy development has tended to focus on supporting young people back into education or work, rather than supporting them in their parenting
Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (1999)

- 90,000 teenagers were becoming pregnant each year
- 7,700 of these to under 16s
- 2,200 to girls under the age of 14
- 56,000 of these pregnancies were resulting in live births (SEU, 1999: 6)
Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (1999)

2 key aims:

- reduce number of conceptions (halving by 2010)
- increase rates of engagement with education and paid work for teenage parents

- The correlation between early parenthood and indices of deprivation has continued to have a powerful influence on public and policy perceptions (Swann et al 2003; Ingham 2005).
What about fathers?

- “it was an invisibility to professionals, as well as housing problems, which often excluded them from the parenting they desired” (Duncan et al, 2010)

- Fathers reported feeling excluded by maternity and health services (DCSF, 2007)

- This continues to be the case for the young fathers in our research.
Initial findings

- there are a wide range of services in existence
- young fathers tell us that this support is needed and valued
- however, service provision remains fragmented and can be difficult to find
- young fathers continue to perceive that services are targeted towards mothers
Targeted services for young fathers

- St Michael’s Fellowship
- Working with Men
- Leeds City Council Health Initiatives School Age Fathers Mentor
- Ed Hart Boys and Young Men’s Worker, Brook
- Young Dad’s TV
Early intervention

- based on the principle that providing support and guidance early, can prevent the escalation of problems and difficulties later (eg: Allen, 2011; Field, 2010; Tickell, 2011)
- based on knowledge that inequalities interact with each other: poor health in early childhood can lead to poor educational outcomes which reduce chances in labour market and workless adults more likely to suffer ill health (Eisenstadt, 2011).
Family Nurse Partnership

Research indicates that this early intervention can:

- Reduce smoking in pregnancy
- Lead to larger intervals between and fewer subsequent births
- Fewer accidents
- A reduction in child abuse and neglect
- Better language development in children
- Increases in employment
- Greater involvement of fathers
Preparation for Birth and Beyond

- developed in response to research that highlighted variability in ante-natal provision (McMillan et al 2009):
  - ante-natal provision has tended to take a medicalised approach heavily focussed on the birth (and thus the mother)
  - often fails to engage men
  - some at risk families find ante-natal classes difficult to access
The outlook for young fathers

- fathers still do not generally feature as a specific policy area or concern in their own right (Barnardo’s, 2012).
- DCSF review (2008) noted that explicit recognition of fathers in legislation, financial framework documents or monitoring and evaluation was scarce.
- Where parenting interventions do engage with fathers, generally data is not collected that shows the impact of the programme on fathers in comparison with mothers (McAllister and Burgess, 2012: 6).
Thank you

- Director Dr Carmen Lau Clayton c.lau@leeds.ac.uk
- Co-director Professor Bren Neale b.neale@leeds.ac.uk
- Research Fellow Dr Laura Davies l.davies@leeds.ac.uk

http://followingfathers.leeds.ac.uk/