

# Developing dynamic perspectives on the lives of young fathers and their support needs

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Website: [followingfathers.leeds.ac.uk/](http://followingfathers.leeds.ac.uk/)

# ESRC Following Young Fathers Study

- **Aims:** To explore the lived experiences and support needs of young fathers
- **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
- **Background:** Baseline study (2010-12) and subsequent follow up (2012-15)
- **Design:** Qualitative Longitudinal Research and Co-production of knowledge
- **Sample:** 31 young fathers (under 25), diverse backgrounds, experiences and trajectories
- **Team:** Carmen Lau Clayton, Bren Neale and Laura Davies

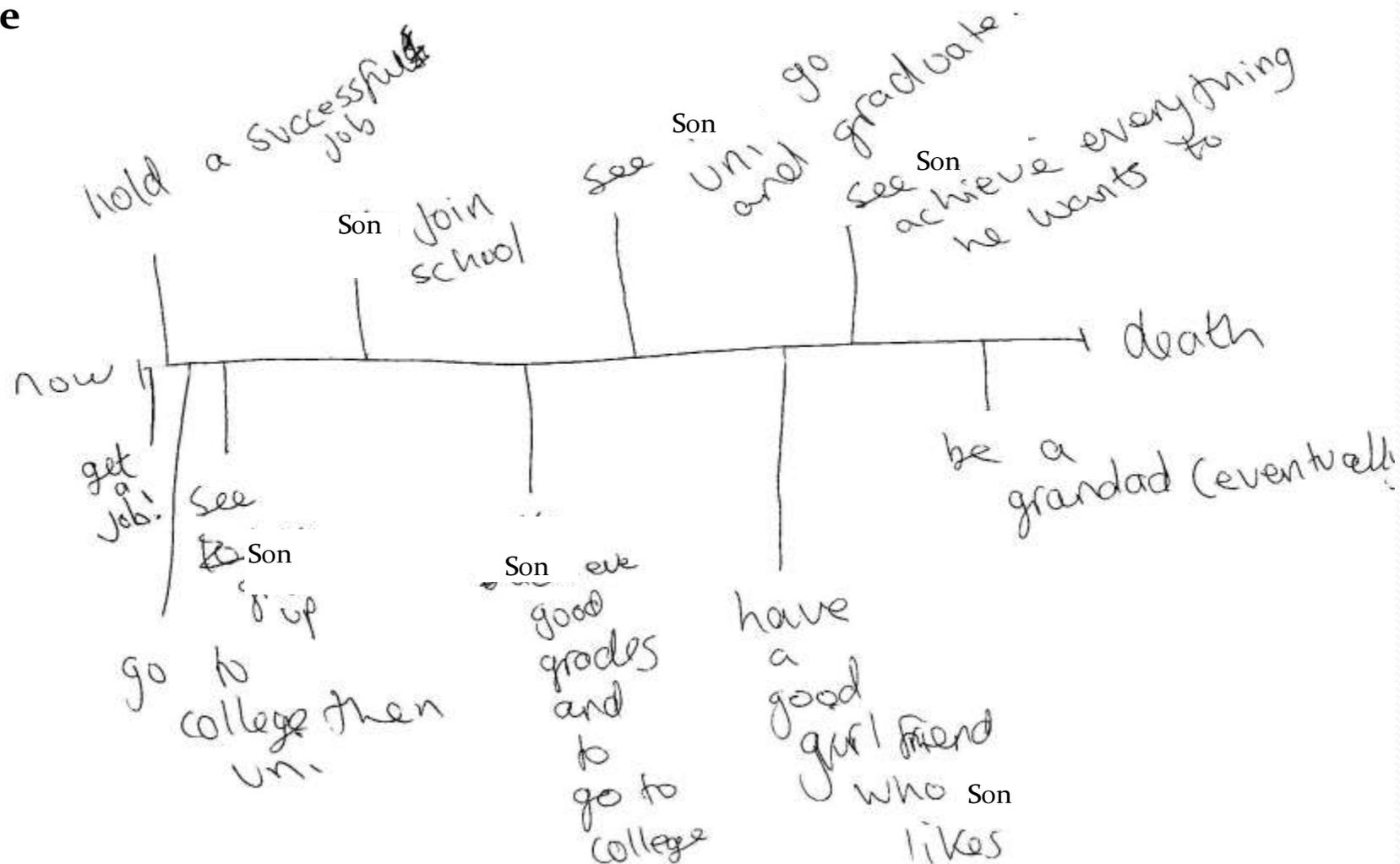
# Methodology

- **Qualitative Longitudinal (QL) Enquiry: Repeat interviews and temporal activities to track young lives**
  - discern life course dynamics, transitions, processes of change – looking back and forward in time through recursive interviewing
  - uncover pathways through varied policy landscapes
  - understanding life course trajectories and how life chances are forged, enabled or constrained
- **Knowledge to Action: Innovative evidence-based policy and practice**
  - based on active collaboration with practitioners in the conduct of the research
  - vital for recruiting and maintaining sample
  - practitioner-engaged research, research-informed practice develops as a part of the longitudinal process

# Generating Temporal Data

- **Life history interviews** for past lives
- Engage with **turning points** and **transitions**
- **Time-line** for mapping life journeys
- **Future Time-Line-** projected future and aspirations
- **Recursive interviewing** – revisiting the past and future at each research encounter to discern how the past may be over written and reinterpreted, how the future is re-imagined over time in relation to a changing landscape of opportunities and constraints

# Future Timeline Example: Fatherhood identity and projected future



# Themes from the data

- NEET/EET trajectories and experiences
- Relationships with the child
- Relationships with the mother of the child
- Relationships with grandparent
- Professional support

# Data management and analysis

- Large amount of data collected
- Analysis in three dimensions:
  1. **thematic**
  2. **case data**
  3. **temporal data**
- Tools to condense data=
  - **Case history** files for each case that are built up over time: descriptive analysis
  - **Framework** for capturing transitions and trajectories over the life course

# Framework Grids: Housing

Participant	Pre-interview	Wave one	Wave two	Wave three
Jimmy	Living with his mum and brother	Lived with partner at her mum's house for a while, now returned to live at his mum's house.	Jimmy, his partner and their child are now living between his mum's house and his partner's mum's house.	Now lives with a friend from college after a fall out with his mum.
Tarrell	Living with his mum (father is deceased)	Still living with mum	Unable to contact participant	Now living with partner and two of his four children at partner's house
Jason	Living alone after moving out of foster care	Still living alone	In prison	Unable to contact participant

# Framework Grids: Jimmy Case data

Theme	Pre-interview	Wave one	Wave two	Wave three
Housing	Living with his mum and brother	Lived with partner at her mum's house for a while, now returned to live at his mum's house.	Jimmy, his partner and their child are now living between his mum's house and his partner's mum's house.	Now lives with a friend from college after a fall out with his mum.
School employment	In school when became an expectant dad	Had left school and without a job	Temporary job but was sacked. Looking at training schemes.	Joined a college course
Relationships	In relationship with mother at age of 15	Volatile but still in relationship during pregnancy	Now living across households with partner and child	Relationship with partner highly volatile

# What are the challenges for young fathers?

- a rapid shift from childhood to adulthood means extra difficulties can arise from a lack of resources and support, especially for those who are already disadvantaged (Reeves, 2006)
- poverty and lack of access to secure housing and employment are significant problems across the sample
- high quality support can make a huge difference to the lives of young parents and their children, both now and in terms of supporting their future aspirations

# Socio-economic context

- Low levels of welfare benefits for young people
- Vulnerable groups disproportionately affected by attempts to 'solve' the financial crisis (Hall et al, 2013)
- Pathways to adulthood disrupted by these challenges (Maxwell, 2015)
- Young people three times more likely than those of retirement age to be living under minimum income standards (Padley and Hirsch, 2014)
- Men in the study generally have low qualifications and limited work experience
- Difficulties accessing housing and employment

# Development of services for fathers

- Shift towards broad policy developments aimed at supporting improvements in fathering 'quality' (Collier, 2011)
- Research suggests that fathers tend to perceive that support services are targeted towards mothers, and interpret the work 'parent' on advertising literature as meaning 'mother' (Bayley et al., 2009).
- Young fathers continue to feel excluded by services and believe that they are aimed primarily at mothers (DoH and DCSF, 2007; Barnardo's, 2012)

# Fathers as risk

- Fathers have tended to be addressed through a lens of the potential risk they may represent to their children rather than as a resource (Maxwell et al., 2012).
- the use of language in social work literature tends to present men as either absent or dangerous (Clapton, 2009).

# Strand 3: sampling and recruitment

- three focus groups with 10 practitioners and service managers from 8 organisations
- semi structured interviews with 20 practitioners, service managers and those working at the commissioning and strategic policy level from 15 different organisations
- two case studies: a phase one children's centre in a disadvantaged area of a Northern city, and the work of a Specialist Learning Mentor for School Age Fathers.
- bi-annual strategy group meetings: 14 organisations represented. All engaged in front line and campaigning work to support young fathers

# Findings: professional support

**Specialist support is crucial for some young dads**

*“I don’t know where I would be without him. Yeah and he taught me a lot as well.” Callum*

**But this kind of support is often not available/accessible**

*“It’s all mums and babies.” Jack*

*“It’s more of support with welfare issues [ that is needed]. Having someone to, if you run into problems, you know, saying ‘I need help’.” Dominic*

# Early engagement

*“It’s right from midwifery making, at the first appointment, if there’s a young man there, making him feel he’s part of the process by letting him know he’s part of the process. By telling him, ‘you are really important to this pregnancy. I would like to see you at the next appointment cause you will want, you will want to know what’s going on’. And it’s just that communication. Likewise with health visiting, ‘Your role is key in this because of the outcomes for your child when you grow up’. And then feeding into centres that already work on the family approach as well.”*

Tim – Specialist learning mentor

# Mother focussed health services:

*“during the pregnancy, services are provided to the woman and so it can sometimes feel to men as though they are an add-on or an addition to... I think a lot of the dads I’ve worked with have said that the reality of being a parent didn’t really hit home until they saw their baby and then it’s a bit of a shock to the system really.”*

Family Nurse Partnership Nurse

# Supporting both mothers and fathers:

- This can be challenging, and many practitioners commented on the difficulties that could arise, especially when relationships were difficult or there was DV

*“I think that sometimes is down to how expert a practitioner you are as well and being able to pick up all those subtle cues isn’t it and around what’s going on. And a lot of that does boil down to experience doesn’t it and working with families and really being able to pick that up.”*

Pamela – Health Visiting manager

# Understanding service user perspectives: building relationships

*“It all depends on the situation and the circumstance and where they’re coming from. And even their perception of people in professional roles or whatever, for want of a better term, doesn’t it depend on what their life circumstances as well isn’t it. And how they feel about their own self esteem and everything else. It’s a whole massive package”*

Pamela – Health Visiting manager

# Meeting the needs of a diverse range of young dads

*“And also we, we found time and time again we’ve got lots of dads who don’t have, who are non resident fathers who get their children maybe at weekends or every other weekend. And they’re, they’re well they’re attempting and they have attempted to access children’s centre services. And because they don’t have the child present with them, there’s a real distrust of who they are. And they’re told, you know, ‘well now you have to take your child with you’.”*

Stuart – Young fathers practitioner

# Supporting young dads in custody

*“I found other issues in terms of their, their identity as well. Huge issues around masculinity. And real distorted views, particularly being inside and that really over masculinised environment. And then they come out and they’re expected to push the buggy. It’s, that transition is very difficult for them to comprehend sometimes. And which I understand.”*

Stuart – Young fathers practitioner

# Recognising the importance of fathers

*“for young fathers and fathers in general I think there is still a...a number of structural and cultural issues around how society organises itself around early years and the first experiences of being a father. And, and it still struggles between the, you know, intrinsic biological role of mum.”*

*“The stuff we done with young fathers, you know, says, and that, there’s benign neglect. But it also tips into exclusion and rudeness.”*

Peter – Head of Commissioning, Children’s Services

# Engaging fathers

*“Some are really keen. They really appreciate it and particularly if there’s social care involved. They feel they’re not being listened to and there’s someone who’s able to advocate for them in all that and make sense of it all for them and progress it. Others...are very reluctant to have any, any kind of support with their parenting. I don’t know if it’s a fear of what services might do. It’s, I don’t know if it’s just that they don’t feel they need any help. But quite often people are very reluctant to engage in any parenting work. People can be quite, well not just young fathers and not just people who’ve been in trouble. People are, I think they feel quite exposed when they’re asked, you know, what’s wrong and what’s right with their parenting and expected to explain that to a professional they don’t know too well.”*

Gary – seconded probation officer

# Young dads as a resource

*“But whilst there’s still the notion that young fathers are a problem, when they could be daily resourced, and they could be the, the key to enabling a young mum to cope via shared care, you know, if they’re no longer in a relationship. These are always when they’re no longer in a relationship, but the notion of shared care between parents, which is obviously what we’re encouraging older separated families to, to achieve. It’s just as important, I think, in young relationships because, you know, the chances are because they’re so, they’re so young when those relationships were formed, that they may well not stand the test of time, but that still being able to have a relationship, a positive relationship with your child’s really important. And that means that all services have got to be alive to involving fathers.”*

Sadie – Director Young people’s support organisation

# Seeing fathers as a solution:

*“But if you use, if you bring the dad in and you work with him and he, he is, you know, instead of seeing him as a problem, he can be a solution.... You know, they’re working with families and children but the dad, he’s part of the reason the child is there and why you’re working with the family in the first place.”*

Stuart - Young fathers practitioner

# Safeguarding

*“I think the message from serious case reviews and the like have brought the involvement of fathers or males in the family much more to the, you know, much more to kind of the kind of head around children’s safety. ...And therefore can be a protective factor for children as well as the, the reverse of that in terms of there is that oppose by not knowing, you know, who they are in the family and everything else. So I think that’s been kind of crystallised in people’s heads again”*

Valerie – manager of joint health visiting and children’s centre team

# Safeguarding

*“Cause a lot of the kind of serious case reviews that come out, often there’s other adults in that house that nobody ever knew who they were and actually we should have known because there was something maybe a bit dubious about them [laughs] or not as the case may be.”*

Pamela – Health Visiting manager

# What kinds of support have young fathers told us that they need?

- inclusiveness – both of fathers, and of their youth
- responsiveness to individual needs/circumstances
- flexible and personalized support
- accessibility – geographically, phone/email as well as in terms of language used
- good relationship with a key practitioner – feeling welcome when accessing services
- ability to signpost to other services when needed
- consistency – fathers prefer to tell their story once, and frequent staff changes can be a problem
- being welcoming and non-judgemental

# The value of specialist support

*“[Connexions] Kind of put my faith back in the world cause I had just kind of given up. Cause I’d tried for that long. Yeah. It’s just made me show I can do it. I’ll just prove I can do it.”*  
James

*“If you ever needed anything he was only a phone call away.”*  
Richard

*“he put himself out there if he knew that you needed emotional support, support with practical things, things like that. So you know, that’s perhaps not in his job role, but that’s what he did.”* Dominic

# But a specialist dads' worker isn't always the right approach:

*“if you have a dedicated fathers worker, which is great, but then that dedicated father's worker is not around when the father walks in [and they're told] ‘well the person who works with fathers isn't here, can you come back please cause I can't talk to you cause I don't work with fathers’... for me if a father walks through our, our door, everybody's there for him. He's not, it's not a case of, ‘I'll get [fathers worker]”*

David – Senior Family Outreach Worker

# Key messages

- Support needs to be flexible and responsive to individual needs: there is a place for specialist provision, but support for fathers also needs to be mainstreamed into general service provision
- Young fathers face many challenges and may require support across several areas of their lives (education, health, housing, welfare, employment)
- Young fathers respond well when they are treated as valued individuals who have a lot to offer to their children
- Effective services = understanding service users needs

# Selected outputs

- Davies, L. and Neale, B. (2015 – forthcoming) ‘The promise, potential and perils of statutory service provision in a Northern Local Authority’ in *Families, Relationships and Societies: Open Space*
- Ladlow, L. and Neale, B. (2015 – forthcoming) ‘Risk? Resource? Redemption? Conceptualising and responding to young offender fathers’ in *Social Policy and Society: themed section on young fatherhood*
- Lau Clayton (forthcoming). Supporting Young Fathers: Lived Experiences and Policy Challenges. *Journal of Social Policy and Society*.
- Neale, B. and Lau-Clayton, C. (2014) ‘Following Fathers; Young Fatherhood and Cross Generational Relationships’ in Holland, J. and Edwards, R. (Eds). *Understanding Families over Time: Research and Policy* Palgrave Macmillan
- Neale, B. and Lau-Clayton, C. (2015- forthcoming) Themed Issue: Supporting Young Fathers: Lived Experiences and Policy Challenges. *Social Policy and Society*.
- Neale, B. and Lau-Clayton, C. (2011). *Following Fathers: The Lived Experience of Teenage Parenting over Time*. Timescapes Policy Briefing Paper Series. University of Leeds.
- Neale, B. and Davies, L. (2015 – forthcoming) ‘Becoming a young breadwinner? The education, employment and training trajectories of young fathers’ in *Social Policy and Society: themed section on young fatherhood*

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