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# Fatherhood Research Bulletin

Bulletin 19

July 2013

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## NEWS from the Australian Fatherhood Research Network

### Update on paternity leave

As reported in previous Bulletins the research component of the Paid parental Leave Scheme used the 'primary carer' model which assumes that mothers are the key informant on families and so fathers were not included. Nevertheless Jenifer Baxter at AIFS has drawn out some useful findings: According to the 2,587 mothers who had babies in October or November 2009 and who were asked about their partner's use of paternity leave was as follows:

- 31% of their partners were employed and had access to employer-paid parental leave at the time of the birth: 92% of these fathers used employer-paid parental leave after the birth;
- Most fathers took 1–2 weeks' leave (35%) or 2–4 weeks' leave (31%);
- A majority of the employed fathers had access to paid holiday or annual leave (62%) and, of these fathers, most (80%) used some of this leave at the time of the birth; and
- 45% of the employed fathers used unpaid paternity leave provisions, compared with 81% of the mothers

See <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/factsheets/2013/familytrends/aft1/aft1.pdf>  
for further information

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## RESOURCES ON THE WEB

### Australia leading the world

In September this year the first ever postgraduate course examining father-infant relationships will be launched at the University of Newcastle. The course is only available online.

The online postgraduate course **HLSC6112 Father-Infant Attachment and Co-Parenting: Theory and Intervention** will commence September 9th. How fathers can be supported to form a secure attachment with their infants while optimising the co-parenting relationship is the focus of this course. It is suitable for anyone working with infants or young children and their families.



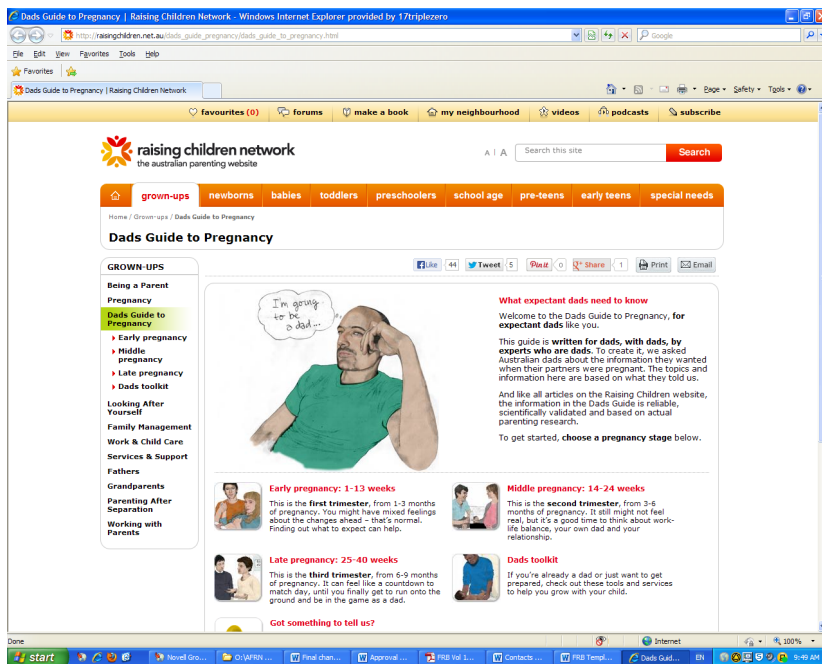
For information and enrolment inquiries go to [www.GradSchool.com.au](http://www.GradSchool.com.au) and Search for 'fathers' .

For further information about the course contact [Richard.fletcher@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Richard.fletcher@newcastle.edu.au)

## RESOURCES ON THE WEB

### A web-based guide for new fathers

**FRB comment:** More than 80% of Australian households (75% in rural areas) have internet access, and almost everyone (94% rural, 96% metropolitan) has a mobile phone. So the web and smartphones can allow time-strapped new fathers to get information and support.



The Raising Children Network website has added resources for fathers written from a fathers perspective on pregnancy and birth. As the notice from the RCN production team put it I'm proud and excited to announce that Raising Children Network has given birth to a bouncing bundle called 'Dads Guide to Pregnancy'! The new material is now live on the website – click on the link below. The pages can also be downloaded to your phone.

[http://raisingchildren.net.au/dads\\_guide\\_pregnancy/dads\\_guide\\_to\\_pregnancy.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/dads_guide_pregnancy/dads_guide_to_pregnancy.html)

### How is Dad Going? website soon to be launched for dads dealing with postnatal depression

New dads affected by postnatal depression will soon be able to access support and information designed specifically for new dads, with the launch of PANDA's, [howisdadgoing.org.au](http://www.howisdadgoing.org.au) website in the lead up to Father's Day 2013.

Depression affects tens of thousands of fathers annually in Australia, either with their own mental health or that of their partner. The 'How is Dad Going?' website will be for dads to know that looking after their mental health when becoming a dad is really important for them and their whole family.

Developed by PANDA (the Post and Antenatal Depression Association), [www.howisdadgoing.org.au](http://www.howisdadgoing.org.au) will be launched in time for Father's Day 2013.



## RESOURCES ON THE WEB

### A campaign to have African fathers registered on the birth certificates

**FRB comment:** *The Africa Fatherhood Initiative is a South African based group largely operating through the web. This campaign being linked to recognition of Father's Day which is a new idea across Africa. Many of the 'activities' linked to Father's Day through the media are alcohol-based "Dads love whiskey" while more socially relevant events involve HIV Aids education and fathers' role in safe childbirth and their children's sexuality.*

**A fatherhood revolution** (From the Africa Fatherhood Initiative website)

We view fatherlessness as one of the greatest social evils of our generation. Today's mass separation of African fathers from their children is historically unprecedented. Never before have so many children grown up without knowing what it means to have a father. Everyone, or at least almost everyone, now realizes that fathers matter. The question, then, is no longer whether we have a fatherhood problem. The question today is what, if anything, we are prepared to do about the problem.

*Fathers Day approaches fast on Sunday June 16th - but how many African children are without fathers in their lives? The answer is we simply don't know and a contributing factor is the low numbers of fathers who register their names on their children's birth certificates. One simple step can be taken as a start to raise the level of committed fathers and equip the child with the knowledge of its parentage. Get Dads to register their names on the Birth Certificates of their children!*

This year our Africa Fatherhood initiative says 'Don't be a question mark in your child's life!' Founded on a wider campaign for a much needed rapid re-orientation of children-and-family services towards a stronger expectation of the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children - through caring, providing financially and supporting their children's learning.

Research done by the HSRC South Africa shows that a whopping 42% of South African children are growing up without a father in their lives. In the early 1990s, of the 22 000 children born in Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital in Johannesburg, half had no male support. Linda Richter of the HSRC estimated in 2004 that only 20 per cent of fathers who were not married to the child's mother at the time of the child's birth, were in contact with their children by the time the children reached the age of 11. In 2002, children were more likely to be living apart from their biological father than they were to be living with him.



<http://www.africafatherhood.co.za/index.php/data-on-dads/43-actions/167-for-fathers-day-june-16th-2013>

## PROGRAMS AND FATHER INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

### THE MENTAL HEALTH OF NEW FATHERS

**FRB comment:** Mothers attending perinatal services across Australia are asked to complete the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EDS) to identify those who may need help with depression. Fathers also may suffer depression in this period. Although the EDS has been validated for fathers we have little clinical experience to assess its usefulness. Information on the best tools to use with fathers will be important to share if we are to develop more effective perinatal services for fathers.

#### Using the DASS 21 in an early intervention service

Tweddle Child & Family Health Service based in Victoria provides support to families for concerns ranging from sleep and settling, to challenging toddler behaviour, lactation support, mental illness and isolation. Approximately 280 dads a year admitted to the residential unit. While the Edinburgh scale is given to mothers staff find that the Depression Anxiety and Stress scale (DASS 21) provides more relevant information for fathers.

#### Responding to fathers' DASS 21 Scores

The DASS 21 refers to the past week asking respondents to indicate if statements such as "I felt that I had nothing to look forward to" and "I found it hard to wind down" applied 'not at all', 'some of the time', 'a good part of the time' or 'most of the time'. The Tweddle protocol for responding to fathers' scores on the DASS 21 states:

#### *All DASS scores in the normal or mild range*

Secondary consultation with the Psychology Service is available if clinical concerns are identified.

#### *Any DASS scores in the moderate range or above*

A psychologist will be available for a consultation with clients that score 14 or above on depression, 10 or above on anxiety OR 19 or above on stress. Note that there are different cut off scores for depression, anxiety and stress and that the client only has to be above the cut off on only one of these, not all three. If the client is discharged prior to their consultation with the psychologist, let them know that the psychologist will contact them by phone. The clients mobile number is to be written on the form so that the client can be contacted directly without going through the primary carer.

#### *Any client that endorses the self harm item*

A psychology consult will be offered to any client that endorses the self harm item regardless of their score on depression, anxiety or stress.

A study reporting on the profile of dads who completed the DASS was published this year See Giallo, R. Cooklin, A., Zerman, N & Vittorio, R (2013) Psychological distress of fathers attending an Australian early parenting service for early parenting difficulties *Clinical Psychologist* 17(2): 46-55

For more information contact Nikki Zerman [Nikki.Zerman@tweddle.org.au](mailto:Nikki.Zerman@tweddle.org.au)

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## PROGRAMS AND FATHER INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

### FATHER'S INVOLVEMENT WITH PERINATAL SERVICES

#### Changes in fathers' involvement as seen by Antenatal Educators at a busy urban hospital

Over time the antenatal classes held at an urban hospital have observed an increase in involvement at the reunions at an informal reunion about 6 weeks after the youngest baby is born

Sue (Childbirth & Early Parenting Education Team Leader)

The sessions are run by the male and female educators, where the male educator discusses birth and parenting from the male perspective with both mums and dad's before they separate. Including the mums in the initial discussion helps to increase the dads' involvement in the long run, as the communication between them can be enhanced so much by understanding how the other one is feeling.

We ask specifically about how they found the session with the male facilitator, "Was separating into the men's and women's groups helpful?", etc. Almost universally, the response from the dads is very positive about the chance to talk with other men on their own. The women have a similar response and especially comment on how the joint discussion opened their eyes to how their partners might be feeling.

Pete (Antenatal Educator)

I think that over the last 3 generations there has been a massive change in father's involvement with their children, probably due to men's presence at the birth. These days one man has replaced this group of support women, and so he must be prepared to understand labour, to actively provide for his partner's needs, and to be able to work effectively in the intensity of labour. It's a big ask, but doable for most men.

The other challenge for men is to catch up to the women after the baby comes home. The message for men is to step up to the plate and to get hands on, share the workload without being asked, to get involved....and also go to work to bring in the money. It is hard but the benefits far outweigh the costs as far as improving the roll of the fathering

Barb (Educator and Child & Family Nurse)

Doing Triple P I would say that dads are more involved now. Now with mums going back to work dads take on more responsibility in the day-to-day care of their children. I know dad's groups do exist but I still think they don't often go to groups after the birth. I do think dad's playgroups are a great idea, particularly on a Sat morning.

Contact [sspencer@nsccha.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:sspencer@nsccha.health.nsw.gov.au)

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## PROGRAMS AND FATHER INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

### **A counsellor explains his approach to antenatal classes focused on young fathers**

The Gold Coast Youth Health & Education Service (YHES House) provides a childbirth education course for young soon-to-be parents. The course involves a two hour session once a week, over a period of 8 weeks. Different guest speakers present each week and discuss topics such as diet and nutrition, relaxation, stages of labour and support services. The course includes a tour of the Gold Coast Hospital's birthing and maternity wards.

Midway during the course I facilitate a "bloke's session" looking at pregnancy and childbirth and the changes to relationships post-birth, from the fathers perspective. These sessions are an important part of the course and attract a high turnout of soon-to-be dads, many of whom are still in their teens. The session includes both parents and has several key objectives. Normalising what the young dads are experiencing, giving the young mothers an understanding of the fathers experience and providing information that helps the couple deal more effectively with difficulties in their relationship resulting from the pregnancy and birth of their child.

The sessions are run in a group format as my goal is not only to provide information but to facilitate a discussion amongst the young parents about their experiences. I do this by asking lots of questions and guiding the discussion. Issues we cover include:

- The different roles and expectations of fathers and mothers that society has, and that they have for themselves
- How the pregnancy has changed them both individually and as a couple
- The role of dads during the birthing process, and what may be going on for him
- The importance of father /baby bonding and how to facilitate this
- Post- natal depression in men and woman and the impacts of this on the relationship
- Different sexual needs and expectations of men and women during pregnancy and post-birth
- Negotiating childcare and house work arrangements post-birth
- Managing others expectations (mates and extended family) with family responsibilities
- The importance of communication and understanding the other partner's perspective.

Often this is the first time that the young couple have discussed these issues. Feedback over the last three years on the "bloke's session" has been extremely positive by fathers and mothers. It has also led to a greater uptake of counselling services by new parents both individually and as a couple.

**Contact** [simon@menandfamilycounselling.com.au](mailto:simon@menandfamilycounselling.com.au)

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## CONFERENCES

**FRB comment:** *The National Men's Health Gathering includes a sub-conference on Working with Men in Vulnerable Families so will have many presentations addressing fathering issues. However all of these conferences have some papers or workshops on fathers so check their websites for details.*

*UWS School of Nursing and Midwifery Mothering 2013 Conference. Parramatta NSW Friday 19 July*

[http://www.uws.edu.au/nursingandmidwifery/sonm/seminars\\_nursing\\_midwifery/mothering\\_conference\\_2013](http://www.uws.edu.au/nursingandmidwifery/sonm/seminars_nursing_midwifery/mothering_conference_2013)

In October the *2013 Men and Vulnerable Families Forum* will be held in Brisbane as part of the *National Men's Health Gathering*. This conference, which has an impressive line-up of International speakers, brings together practitioners working with men and fathers on family wellbeing.

<http://workingwithmen.org.au/>

At the end of October the *Infant and Early Childhood Social and Emotional Wellbeing Conference 2013* will be held in Canberra. This event is being jointly hosted by the Australian Infant Mental Health Association and ARACY. Participants will come from the health and welfare sector focusing on infants, young children and their parents.

<http://www.iecsewc2013.net.au/>

In November the Family Relationship Services Association conference *Investing in families and Communities* will also be held in Canberra. FRSA is the peak body for the support services assisting families.

<http://aifs.govspace.gov.au/2013/04/16/frsa-national-conference-2013-call-for-papers-now-open/>

Also in November Helen Mayo House in Adelaide will host a conference *Troubled Perinatal Families: Frameworks, Plans and Treatments* with a focus on fathers.

[Anne.SvedWilliams@health.sa.gov.au](mailto:Anne.SvedWilliams@health.sa.gov.au)

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## RESEARCH

### THE EFFECT OF OVERNIGHT CARE WITH FATHERS WHEN FAMILIES SEPARATE

**FRB comment:** *In Australia, as in other countries, there has been debate about the effect of overnight care with fathers in separated families with infants and toddlers. The science in this case has direct implications for public policy, and the issue is highly charged, so that the usual safeguards for judging research quality can be stretched. The decades of research on whether child care is harmful for young children is a good example. In the case of overnight care, there are few studies to utilize and the risk of overstating the evidence is high. In their paper described below, Tornello and colleagues carefully weigh up the results of their study into the effect of frequent overnight care (away from the primary carer, ie, away from the mother in most cases) in the first year on mother-infant attachment measured at 3 years of age. The study found that those staying overnight more than once a week had higher rates of mother-infant insecurity than in other separated families. They also found one area where frequent overnight stays was linked to better child adjustment.*

*As the authors acknowledge, this study had several limitations (although one not mentioned was the absence of any measure of father-infant attachment) and begin their discussion with the statement:*

*The present study certainly does not resolve debates about frequent overnights and the wellbeing of very young children, but it does underscore the importance of the topic and the need for more attention to it.*

*In discussing the limitations of their study and the surprising finding (although on only one measure) of a beneficial effect of overnight stays the authors also make this important point:*

*This consideration leads us to a more general issue, one that applies to the frequent overnights-and-attachment controversy and to many other social science controversies: What is the null hypothesis—or, to state the issue differently, who assumes the burden of proof? There is no neutral null hypothesis in the present debate. Do we assume that frequent overnights are harmful until proven otherwise, or do we assume that frequent overnights are beneficial until proven otherwise?*

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#### Overnight custody arrangements, attachment, and adjustment among very young children

Large numbers of infants and toddlers have parents who live apart due to separation, divorce, or nonmarital/noncohabiting childbearing, yet this important topic, especially the controversial issue of frequent overnights with nonresidential parents, is understudied. The authors analyzed data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a longitudinal investigation of children born to primarily low-income, racial/ethnic minority parents that is representative of 20 U.S. cities with populations over 200,000. Among young children whose parents lived apart, 6.9% of infants (birth to age 1) and 5.3% of toddlers (ages 1 to 3) spent an average of at least 1 overnight per week with their nonresident parent. An additional 6.8% of toddlers spent 35% – 70% of overnights with nonresident parents. Frequent overnights were significantly associated with attachment insecurity among infants, but the relationship was less clear for toddlers. Attachment insecurity predicted adjustment problems at ages 3 and 5, but frequent overnights were not directly linked with adjustment problems at older ages.

Tornello, S. L., Emery, R., Rowen, J., Potter, D., Ocker, B. & Xu, Y. (2013). Overnight custody arrangements, attachment, and adjustment among very young children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75, 871 – 885.

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## RESEARCH

### THE ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INFANTS AND THEIR FATHERS

**FRB Comment:** *One of the most significant changes in the science of fathering is the recognition that father-infant relationships can have a positive impact on how infants develop. The idea that an infant's attachment with their father is fundamental to how their brain and behaviour develop represents a major shift in how we view parents. The following abstracts illustrate the diverging evidence of fathers' importance; some studies find that infant-father attachment is as important as infant–mother attachment. The results reported by Kochanska and Kim for are an example. Infants with insecure attachment to either fathers or mothers developed poor behaviour and the effect of two insecure relationships was worse. Importantly, the study used the 'gold standard' test for attachment, the Strange Situation procedure (SS) which puts the infant into a situation without the parent present and then examines the reunion when the parent returns. The second paper by Dumont and Paquette also underlines the importance of the father-infant relationship but from a completely different perspective. In this study with fathers and infants the SS was compared with a new attachment measure, the Risky Situation (RS) procedure, which emphasises exploration rather than comforting (an idea found in Bowlby's original formulation of attachment). These researchers found that the RS measure of the father-infant relationship better predicted later behaviour problems than did the SS procedure.*

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#### **Early attachment organisation with both parents and future behaviour problems: From infancy to middle childhood**

Links between children's attachment security with mothers and fathers, assessed in Strange Situation with each parent at 15 months (N = 101), and their future behavior problems were examined. Mothers and fathers rated children's behavior problems, and children reported their own behavior problems at age 8 (N = 86). Teachers rated behavior problems at age 6½ (N = 86). Insecurity with both parents had a robust effect: "Double- insecure" children reported more overall problems, and were rated by teachers as having more externalizing problems than those secure with at least 1 parent. Security with either parent could offset such risks, and security with both conferred no additional benefits. High resistance toward both parents in Strange Situation may confer "dual risk" for future externalizing behavior.

Kochanska, G. & Kim, S. (2013). Early attachment organisation with both parents and future behaviour problems: From infancy to middle childhood. *Child Development*, 84(1), 283 – 296.

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## RESEARCH

### **What about the child's tie to the father? A new insight into fathering, father–child attachment, children's socio-emotional development and the activation relationship theory**

The broad aim of this study on father–child attachment was to verify whether the Risky Situation (RS) procedure is a more valid means than the Strange Situation (SS) procedure of predicting children's socio-emotional development, and to evaluate the moderator effect of day-to-day involvement on attachment and activation. Participants were 53 father–child dyads. The RS and the SS were conducted when children were 12–18 months old to measure attachment and activation, and a questionnaire on fathering was administered at the same time. Childcare workers rated children's socio-emotional development at 30–36 months. Regression analyses revealed that the RS predicted children's socio-emotional development, while the SS did not, even when controlling for paternal involvement. This study advances the field by empirically testing the predictive relationships from attachment and activation to social emotional outcomes, and the moderator effect of fathering. The results underscore the value of the activation relationship theory and the RS procedure as a means for comprehending and capturing the essence of father–child attachment.

Dumont, C. & Paquette, D. (2013). What about the child's tie to the father? A new insight into fathering, father–child attachment, children's socio-emotional development and the activation relationship theory. *Early Child Development and Care*, 183(3 – 4), 430 – 446.

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### **HOW IMPORTANT IS A FATHER IN EARLY INFANCY?**

**FRB comment:** *An underlying question for fathers with newborns is, "How important am I?" Fathers' importance to in the families' financial security is not usually in question; fathers return to work soon after the birth. But in terms of their interaction, a common framework seems to 'helping mum' as if the father-infant relationship is incidental to infant development. Studies such as the one reported by Ramchandani and colleagues should at least provoke questions about this assumption.*

*(continued on p. 12)*

## RESEARCH

### **Do early father-infant interactions predict the onset of externalising behaviours in young children? Findings from a longitudinal cohort study**

Factors related to parents and parenting capacities are important predictors of the development of behavioural problems in children. Recently, there has been an increasing research focus in this field on the earliest years of life, however, relatively few studies have addressed the role of fathers, despite this appearing to be particularly pertinent to child behavioural development. This study aimed to examine whether father–infant interactions at age 3 months independently predicted child behavioural problems at 1 year of age. Method: A sample of 192 families was recruited from two maternity units in the United Kingdom. Father–infant interactions were assessed in the family home and coded using the Global Rating Scales. Child behaviour problems were assessed by maternal report. Hierarchical and logistic regression analyses were used to examine associations between father–infant interaction and the development of behavioural problems. Results: Disengaged and remote interactions between fathers and their infants were found to predict externalising behavioural problems at the age of 1 year. The children of the most disengaged fathers had an increased risk of developing early externalising behavioural problems [disengaged (nonintrusive) interactions – adjusted Odds Ratio 5.33 (95% Confidence Interval; 1.39, 20.40): remote interactions adj. OR 3.32 (0.92, 12.05)] Conclusions: Disengaged interactions of fathers with their infants, as early as the third month of life, predict early behavioural problems in children. These interactions may be critical factors to address, from a very early age in the child’s life, and offer a potential opportunity for preventive intervention.

Ramchandani, P. G., Domoney, J., Sethna, V., Lamprini, P., Vlachos, H. & Murray, L. (2013). Do early father-infant interactions predict the onset of externalising behaviours in young children? Findings from a longitudinal cohort study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(1), 56 – 64.

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### **Don't worry**

Now that you have read this entire Bulletin you still have something to look forward to:  
The next Bulletin will focus on ***Working with Fathers in Vulnerable Families***.

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