

A Study of the Lived Experience of First-Time Fathers in the First Six Months following the Birth of their Baby

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Master of Nursing

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Certification

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other University or Institution.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the five fathers that allowed me the privilege and honour of spending such precious time with them in order to expose their experiences and feelings in relation to first-time fathering and in so doing led me to understand my feelings about my own father.

*I attempt to understand myself
and I attempt to understand you and I search for the meanings
of what is presented or concealed in all of this.*

(Munhall, 1993, p.31)

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Key to Transcripts

The following abbreviations and conventions have been used throughout the transcripts as per APA 5th style.

... : Three ellipsis points indicate an omission within a sentence.

.... : Four ellipsis points indicate an omission between two sentences.

[letters in brackets] : when enclosing material inserted in a quotation by a person other than the original writer as an explanation of context to improve clarity.

[sic] : used after a word in writing to show that it has been quoted even though it is a mistake or grammatically incorrect.

[italics added] : when a word is italicized to add emphasis for the reader but has been added by the researcher the bracket with 'italics added' follows.

Names: all names used are pseudonyms and are used when discussing the different fathers in the text and used in parenthesis at the end of each participant quote.

Glossary of Terms

The following terms have been frequently used in this study and are defined in the following way:

- **Child and Family Health Nurse (CFHN):** a Child and Family Health Nurse is a registered nurse with qualifications often in Midwifery and then Child and Family Health Nursing and most frequently cares for parents and their children from 0-5 years by home visiting, clinic visits and groupwork.
- **Child and Family Health Nurses (CFHNs):** the plural of CFHN.
- **Child and Family Health Nursing Service (CFH Nursing Service):** this encompasses the collective nursing service that Child and Family Health Nurses work within.
- **Parents:** the use of the term “Parent” in this study assumes the discussion about mothers and fathers as the female (mother) and the male (father) and does not take into account homosexual parents due to there being only heterosexual parents in this study.
- **Father:** male heterosexual father
- **Mother:** female heterosexual mother
- **Edinburgh Depression Scale (EDS):** this is a 10 question scale devised by Cox, Holden and Sagovsky (1987) that takes approximately 5 minutes to administer. It has been used worldwide to screen mothers and recently fathers (with different score cut offs) for ante-natal depression and post-natal depression. The score gives an indication of possible depression or anxiety and needs to be used with a thorough clinical assessment and evaluation of the client.
- **Families First Strategy – now called Families NSW:** commencing in 1998, this whole of government strategy in NSW aims to increase early intervention to parents and children to ensure they achieve happy and healthy families

with well adjusted children. The aim is also to help and support parents in maximising their child's potential and to promote excellence in parenting.

- **Universal Health Home Visiting Program (UHHV):** this is the name of the first home visit offered by Child and Family Health Nurses to all families with a newborn so as to give early assistance and support with infant care, psychosocial issues and breastfeeding and prioritise families that need more help and support.
- **Integrated Perinatal and Infant Care (IPC) now called "Safe Start":** is a NSW Health Government policy regarding the use of psychosocial questions at the ante-natal booking in visit to assist with early identification of women in pregnancy with psychosocial issues that require extra support and early psychological help in order to intervene early and promote health in the mother and her unborn baby and family. This policy requires multidisciplinary services to work together to organise early intervention and support.
- **Family Partnership Model (FPM):** this is the underpinning model of working with parents in NSW Health. This model is usually five full days training program and is now used in many parts of the world to improve nurses and other health professional's ability to engage with parents by understanding how one works in partnership with parents, not in an expert model.
- **Parent Advisor Model:** the parent advisor model originated in England in 2002 and was introduced in 2003 as the FPM in NSW Health.
- **Clinical Supervision (CS):** this is the term used for a trained professional to help the staff undertake reflection, about staff and client attitudes, perceptions, and the impact of the work on the staff member. This encourages challenging the accepted care of clients and emotions that are involved and aims to improve client care by improving the way staff respond and manage client issues and manage their own emotional state.

Abbreviations

CFHN: Child and Family Health Nurse

CFHNs: Child and Family Health Nurses

CFHN Service: Child and Family Health Nursing Service

C&FH Services: Child and Family Health Services

EDS: Edinburgh Depression Scale

UHHV: Universal Health Home Visiting Program

IPC: Integrated Perinatal and Infant Care Program

FPM: Family Partnership Model

CS: Clinical Supervision

ECHS: Early Childhood Health Services

UK: United Kingdom

HNEHHREC: Hunter New England Health Human Research Ethics

Committee

TUNHREC: The University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee

Abstract

This phenomenological study describes the experiences of five first time fathers in the six months following the birth of their baby. The study, based in a regional city of New South Wales (NSW), Australia used a hermeneutic phenomenological framework to expose the underlying meaning of the fathers' experience. The five fathers who participated in the study were aged between 30 and 36 years of age. Each participated in two unstructured interviews, during the six months following their baby's birth.

Data analysis revealed a common journey which fathers experienced over the first six months of their baby's life, however at times the journey differed for each participant or encompassed a different perspective of a shared theme. A descriptive model and statement of the essence of first-time fatherhood emerged from the study which captured these fathers' expression of their journey of transition. Four of the fathers revealed that for them the experience of fatherhood commenced at the baby's birth, and, one that this commenced before the birth. The fathers also revealed that although some wanted to be the same and others different from their own father they all wanted to be good fathers and tried valiantly to meet this aim. While they expressed their journey as often tumultuous and uncertain, by six months they all revealed that they had reached a time of harmony within themselves and their family. The findings that emerged from the interview data illuminated six main themes: The Dawning of Responsibility, Seeking and Finding Connection, Absolute

Joy, Wonder, Delight and Unconditional Love, Struggling towards being a Father, Moving towards Cohesion, and Arriving at Harmony – reflection on the journey.

The overall implication emerging from the study is that fathers, like mothers, need support during the early months of their baby's life and their inclusion in health care services, particularly Child and Family Health Nursing (CFH Nursing) Services is essential.