Men as Role Models: A recurrent theme in the secondary data analysis and survey responses was that of men as ‘role models’. The task of being a role model came in a variety of different forms with men often performing multiple contradictory roles simultaneously.

- On the one hand, men were expected to behave in traditionally masculine ways to demonstrate to boys how a man ‘should’ behave and to girls how they ‘should’ expect men to behave towards them.
- On the other hand, men were expected to demonstrate emotional warmth and a ‘softer’ side, for children to develop alternative views on how men could behave.

“Extremely useful as role models for young males but also in enabling your girls to trust males and develop expectations of being treated with equanimity and respect” (Male foster carer).

Men’s Care Practices and Roles

Men are still carrying out traditionally masculine care roles, such as transportation, discipline and leisure/play activities. This was particularly relevant in relation to the nursery, men often reported being handed tasks that would traditionally be described as masculine. Conversely there were examples of discouragement for them taking on roles such as practical care giving and comforting the children.

However, in other male care contexts there was evidence of an increase in men sharing or taking on what would be viewed as traditionally feminine care roles such as emotional support and emotional care giving, this was particularly apparent when men were caring for their own biological children or young adopted children.

- From the foster care survey it emerged that men were subverting the traditional gendered discourse around men’s care (see table). Overall there appears to be significant equality with many male reporting taking the lead in a lot of the different types of roles and responsibilities.

Male involvement in different care activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male responsibility</th>
<th>Foster carer households (n=56)</th>
<th>Least</th>
<th>Mid</th>
<th>Most</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical care giving</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking after child when sick</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for children outside home</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transporting</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplining/monitoring</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facilitators to Men’s Caring

Employment Factors

Men in the nursery typically decided that childcare could be a second career for them, after seeing the benefits and opportunities it offered them. Qualifications gave them more opportunities to advance in their career or gain a higher status role in the world of work.

- For male foster carers and adopters to be the primary carer if their workplace was supportive, for instance offering parental leave that made the men feel more confident in their position as a carer.
- For men in childcare the ethos of the centre and managerial style encouraged them to challenge traditionalism and reduce gender roles.
- Men reporting taking the lead in a lot of the different types of roles and responsibilities.
- Men in the nursery discussed low pay as a negative to their work. Qualifications gave them more opportunities to advance in their career or gain a higher status role in the world of work.

Support

- For men in childcare the ethos of the centre and managerial style encouraged them to challenge traditionalism and reduce gender roles.
- Men reporting taking the lead in a lot of the different types of roles and responsibilities.
- Men in the nursery discussed low pay as a negative to their work. Qualifications gave them more opportunities to advance in their career or gain a higher status role in the world of work.

Gendered Stereotypes and Social Stigma

There are gendered stereotypes concerning men as being less able to care for children, women are seen as better and more natural carers to children.

- This stereotype comes along with a stigma that men that care for children are more likely to have ulterior motives making them a risk to children, this stigma is usually placed on men that took on caring that are not from a traditionally masculine background. This stereotype and perception of stigma is becoming increasingly outdated it does however remain prevalent to some extent.

Risk of Allegations: Men often described fears of abuse allegations being made against them, and how these allegations could permanently damage their careers.

- For male fosterers the fear of being accused tended to influence the age range and gender of children they fostered, for instance, men with strong fears of being accused mentioned they would not foster teenage girls for this reason.
- For men in the nursery, many described particular centre practices such as ‘witnessing schemes’ and close staff relations that had facilitated them to work with less fear of allegations against them.

Financial Constraints: Many men are expected to be the breadwinner for a household and childcare is not well paid nor given much recognition as part of employment.

- Men in the nursery discussed low pay as a negative to their work. Qualifications gave them more opportunities to advance in their career or gain a higher status role in the world of work.
- Many foster carers also state that fees and allowances are not enough to properly support the household, often the burden of increasing household income is placed on the ‘man’ of the household. For example, 39% of male survey respondents said that fees don’t cover the costs of fostering and men can be accused of not meeting the full costs of fostering and that they have to top up from other sources of income.

Conclusions

The initial findings of this research has captured a wide variety of perceptions, roles and practices of men who care for children. The next stages of the research seek to elaborate further on the broad themes that have been identified from the analysis conducted so far, particularly in relation to male foster care which is a relatively neglected area of research in the UK.

The work completed for this project will feed into the development of a larger scale research proposal on male foster care in the UK and two journal articles, one comparing key messages, experiences, barriers and facilitators across different types of male carer including male foster carers, male adopters and men working in early childhood care and education and the other based upon the findings of the survey conducted with foster carers.