

# Meanings of Care Work in Familial and Non-Familial Settings: Revisiting Men's Roles with Children to Build Capacity.

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**This project focused on men's care practices and roles in familial and non-familial contexts, their identities, as well as potential facilitators and barriers to male caring and care work in relation to other people's children.**



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## Methodology

Studies for the secondary analysis were identified from the TCRU archives and relevant literature was found using key word searches of online journal databases and the UCL library database. Framework analysis was used to identify and analyse key themes from the data and literature.

The online survey was created by the project supervisor using survey monkey and was run with the assistance of the Fostering Network, a leading UK charity for foster carers, who helped to promote participation of the survey amongst its members. The survey was analysed using SPSS.

## Survey Respondents

• There were a total of 77 responses to the survey of which 62 were from male foster carers and 15 from female carers.

- 8 of the male respondents were single carers, the remaining 54 were in a two couple household.
- 3 of the 15 female respondents were single carers, their responses have not been included in the data analysis, therefore the total number of responses analysed was 74.

• The ages of the 12 female respondents included in the analysis ranged from 35-64, for males their ages ranged from 25-74, with half (50.2%) aged 45-64 years.

• Nearly all respondents who recorded their ethnicity were White British, only one of the 74 foster carers was from a minority ethnic background (1 male Asian/Asian British carer).

• Respondents varied in the types of foster care they provided, most respondents provided more than one type of care: 66% long term, 48% emergency, 39% short break, 43% respite and 1% kinship. Analysis of data from the single male carers showed that 4 out of 8 provided long term care, 5 emergency care, 3 short break and 5 foster respite.

## TCRU secondary analysis projects

- Brannen, Statham, Mooney and Brockmann (2007) Coming to Care: The work and family lives of workers caring for vulnerable children.
- Brannen, Mooney, Wigfall and Parutis (2012) Fatherhood across Generations in Polish, Irish and White British Families.
- Cameron, Moss and Owen (1999) Men in the nursery.
- Cameron (2001) Promise or Problem? A review of the literature on men working in Early Childhood Services.
- Hauari and Hollingsworth (2008) Understanding Fathering: Masculinity, diversity and change
- Monck and Wigfall (2004) Concurrent care and adoption study

**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 evident in relation to men in the nursery, men often reported being **assigned tasks** that would traditionally be described as masculine. Conversely there were examples of **discouragement** for them taking on roles such as physical care giving and comforting the children.
- However, in other male caring 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 physical care giving, this was particularly apparent when men were caring for their own biological children or young adopted children.
- From the foster carer survey responses we found that some men were **subverting the traditional gendered discourse around men's care** (see table). Overall there appears to be significant equality with many **men reporting taking the lead in a lot of the different types of roles and responsibilities**.

### Male Involvement in different care activities

Male respondents in two carer households (n54)	Lead	Shared
Physical care giving	14.8%	16.6%
Looking after child when sick	11.1%	37%
Leisure/play with child outside home	22.2%	40.7%
Teaching social/personal/life skills	9.2%	50%
Transporting	42.6%	16.6%
Discipline/monitoring	11.1%	51.9%
Emotional support/responsiveness	14.8%	46.3%

## Facilitators to Men's Caring

### Employment Factors

- Men in the nursery typically decided that childcare could be a second chance career for them, after a period of unemployment or redundancy. The professional training required for them to become nursery workers appealed to them, qualifications gave them more opportunities to advance in their career or gain a higher status role outside of care work.
- For male foster carers and adopters to be the primary carer if their workplace was supportive, for instance offering parental leave that allows the man to be a primary carer while having an income.

### Support

- For men in childcare the ethos of the centre and managerial style combined with encouragement from parents that use the centre, made the men feel more confident in their position as a carer.
- For fosterers and adopters, support came in a variety of forms but there could be a divide in the kind of support male carers gained from specific types of people. Some male adopters described gaining "emotional support" from friends and family while gaining "advice" from fellow fosterers or adopters.
- Some of these men described how social outings and 'men who foster' support groups were especially helpful and that talking to other men in similar positions to them in a casual setting was beneficial for developing their role as a carer.

### Experience

- Another facilitator to men's caring was previous experience of caring for children, this could be in a personal, voluntary or professional capacity.

### Training

- Tailored training specifically for male carers and social pedagogical training was cited by some male foster carers in the survey as very important in facilitating their role and confidence as a carer.

## 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.

## Men's Personal Identities, Emotions, Attitudes To Care Practice/Roles

- From analysing a wide variety of data on men's caring practices, it is difficult to generalise the identities, emotions and attitudes to all men that care, nevertheless there were themes that were common within the data.
- There are many reasons why men decide to become carers for children, often **personal circumstances** were significant in the motivation and decision to adopt, foster, or work in a nursery. Brannen et al (2007) found that care workers' own childhoods were highly influential e.g. being carers during childhood or positive/negative experiences of being cared for. Additionally, turning points and/or transitions were important in both motivating and prompting entry into care for non-familial children.
- Men working in the nursery often described **choosing the career after a period of unemployment** and knowing that they enjoyed spending time with children.

### Experience

• In the secondary data analysis of the concurrent care and adoption study, we found that men who adopted **described experiences of unsuccessful attempts to have biological children with a long-term partner**, before deciding to adopt (Monck and Wigfall, 2004).

• Men who fostered typically had **experience of raising their own children** 'successfully' and wanting to give children the opportunity to be cared for in a 'stable' home.

### Making a difference

• The foster carer survey asked qualitative questions about motivations to foster. Analysis of the male carers responses, **by far the most common reason given was the desire for a more meaningful career and to make a difference in the lives of disadvantaged children and young people, helping and supporting them to reach their potential.**

## Barriers to Men's Caring

### 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 look after children that are not biologically their own. This stereotype and perception of stigma is becoming increasingly outdated it does still influence men's care practices and roles.

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

- 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 of abuse.

**Financial Constraints:** Many men are expected to be the breadwinner for a household and childcare is not well paid nor given high status as a type of employment.

- Men in the nursery discussed low pay as a negative to their work and many sought to gain promotions or leave nursery work for higher paid positions.
- 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 fostering allowance, fees and expenses that can be claimed do not meet the full costs of fostering and that they have to top up from other sources of income.