INTRODUCTION

Becoming a father for the first time can be a life-changing experience. The men as fathers project seeks to explore these experiences, by drawing on and extending a previous Economic & Social Research Council-funded project (ESRC) carried out from 1999 to 2000.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Qualitative longitudinal (QLL) information, collected from the original group of men in 1999 (before and after the birth of their first child), has been revisited by the project team, to gain a more focused understanding of the experiences of fathers over a time of intensive change. A fourth interview with this group eight years later has allowed us to explore to what extent the fathers’ aspirations and ideas of risk have changed over the years due to fatherhood.

The sample has been extended to include a group of men from South Wales who were interviewed three times over an 18 month period covering the transition to first-time fatherhood.

The data – mainly but not exclusively collected through semi-structured interviews – are showing the unique potential of QLL study for the collection of temporal data. Development of our questioning strategy within the interviews has enabled us to bring further to the fore issues of biographical (dis)continuities and socio-cultural change, along with participants’ complex understandings of time.

Visual methods have also formed an important aspect of our project work, with different techniques used in each round of interviews (collage, visual narrative and self-generated images).

CURRENT WORK

The benefits of QLL for elucidating longer-term impacts of life transitions. This work is showing how men’s relationship to involvement changes over time in relation to lived experiences, with concepts of exclusion and redundancy emerging and receding at different points in the life course.

Different understandings of temporality, particularly with regards to imagined futures. By investigating unexpected events experienced by the men in the sample, and their ways of responding to them, we are highlighting the importance of their understandings of temporality.

Strategies for collecting temporal data. Reviewing these, especially our different visual methods strategies, has enabled us to modify our data collection and analysis strategies, and to reflect on their implications for future study.

The extended project explores ways in which men come to terms with becoming a first-time father and any effect this has on their identities, relationships and lives over time.

Transition to fatherhood as a change to a more emotional masculinity: 'Yeah just doting dad isn’t it? He dotes on him and the child obviously from the start is going to dote on his dad, he’s going to make time for him. That’s awesome … I’m even planning to have photos like that taken you know, just you can’t put that into words, there’s just a hundred percent love there you know'. (Joe)

Publications:


Henwood, K., Finn, M. and Shirani, F. (2008) Use of visual methods to explore paternal identities in historical time and social change: Reflections from the ‘Men as Fathers’ project. Qualitative Researcher. 33


Shirani, F. Adhering to the conventional sequence: Men’s accounts of first-time fatherhood. Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Working Paper Series (forthcoming)