



Fathers experience of perinatal loss and support needs

Faculty of Wellbeing Education
and Language Studies (WELS)

Call for doctoral projects starting in October 2025

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Project description

School

Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

Members

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Aim

This project aims to explore the experiences of fathers who have experienced perinatal loss, that is, a miscarriage, stillbirth, or neonatal death of their child and to identify their coping responses and support needs.

Perinatal loss as a result of miscarriage, foetal abnormality, stillbirth and neonatal death is common, and women and partners who experience it often suffer adverse psychological outcomes. These effects are significantly compounded by a lack of support and acknowledgement of this “unseen” loss in both healthcare and social settings, leaving people alone and isolated in their grief. While emotional distress following perinatal death is common for many parents, little is known about men’s grief, since the majority of research, and subsequent bereavement care guidelines have focused on women (Jones, 2019). This project will draw on a scoping review by Jones, Ro and Davies (2019) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31493675/> and research conducted by Jones,

Murphy and Robb as outlined in a forthcoming book edited by Jones and Robb
<https://www.routledge.com/Men-and-Loss-New-Perspectives-on-Bereavement-Grief-and-Masculinity/Jones-Robb/p/book/9781032368238>

Specifically, the objectives of the project are to:

1. Elicit insight into father's lived experience following perinatal loss including disenfranchising grief.
2. Explore the myriad ways in which fathers respond to and cope with their grief including avoidant behaviours and engagement in physical activity.
3. Identify bereavement support needs of those affected including those with limited representation including South Asian father's.

Methodology

A qualitative study guided by Heideggerian (hermeneutic) phenomenology is proposed since it is concerned with understanding and interpreting experience (Heidegger, 1962). Moreover, given the personal and variable experience of perinatal loss, our methodological framework was pivotal to understanding the nature of fathers' experiences and the meaning they ascribe to them. From this perspective our project has provided a unique and original contribution to the phenomena being researched.

Interview data will be analysed thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2006) following the six steps for thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) data familiarisation through transcribing, reading and re-reading the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) generating themes by collating related codes; (4)

reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) writing up the final results.

Contribution

The project will address a lack of accounts of loss and research pertaining to fathers' experience of perinatal loss and contribute to the re-framing of lived experience and responses to loss which have been typically viewed through a socio-cultural lens. That is that men are stoic, protective, care-givers who do not want to or need to express and or share their grief.

Of the few studies (Obst et al, 2020; Williams et al, 2020) that have explored the impact of perinatal loss on men, reveal they are also more likely to engage in avoidant coping behaviours such as increased substance abuse and are less likely to access support services. Fathers affected by perinatal loss want and need improved support following the death of a baby, but the question remains: in what way and how? Clearly, supportive care must be improved, but we lack crucial research about what support fathers need and where practice priorities should be directed to improve support and care.

The proposed project directly addresses this knowledge translation gap. It draws on pilot research undertaken to date and led by Project lead Jones, Robb & Murphy (forthcoming 2024) in the UK. This project will bring the lived experiences of fathers' especially groups with limited representation, such as people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds together to inform and transform supportive care. Ultimately, this project represents an essential

first step towards improved support for the 500 fathers impacted by the loss in the UK each year.

Website

<https://martinrobb.wordpress.com/2024/05/23/about-the-boys/>

PhD project

The PhD would build on a candidate's interest, expertise, and practice in the field of grief, bereavement, and masculinities. It will draw on and engage with multiple disciplines related to health and social care including but not limited to social work, counselling, psychology, medical sociology, and social sciences.

The PhD offers comprehensive well-rounded learning, skills development and professional networking opportunities throughout the project, including those that directly benefit employability, career development, and lifelong learning. The successful candidate will access a range of professional expertise and training opportunities throughout their doctoral research. As an integral member of the Faculty they will have opportunities to draw on the breadth and depth of expertise of the faculty's research groups as well as in other faculties and be able to draw on a network of support throughout their studentships.



Image: <https://pixabay.com/photos/baby-feet-hands-father-family-2607296/>

