

<b>Institution: Leeds Trinity University</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: Education</b>		
<b>Title of case study: Improving Young Fathers' Experiences in Higher Education</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2018 - 2020</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s): Carmen Lau Clayton</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title): Reader in Family and Cultural Dynamics</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1 September 2010 - present</b>
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: March 2018 – November 2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>This case study demonstrates the impact of creating a more inclusive and sympathetic approach to policy and professional practice amongst local and national practitioners for young fathers in relation to Higher Education/HE experiences. It draws upon three complementary research projects on young fatherhood conducted from 2018 to 2020. Examples of the reach and significance of current impact are presented and described.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p><b>'Young Fathers: Higher Education Experiences'/HEE (2018):</b> This was a collaborative project with the Young Dads Collective/YDC (North), funded by Leeds Acts. The study investigated young fathers' HE experiences and aspirations, whilst exploring the role of local practitioners and universities in providing better access, information, and support for young fathers who either aspire to enter HE or those who are in HE already. HEE conducted nine qualitative, semi-structured interviews with young fathers (face-to-face or over the telephone). Five former participants from Lau Clayton's previous research on the ESRC-funded <i>Following Young Fathers</i> study (2012-15) were included to build and expand upon the existing empirical evidence on young fatherhood (R1-3). HEE also included two focus groups: one with university representatives and the other with local practitioners who supported young parents and/or young people. Twenty-seven professionals were involved in HEE. An online survey was then distributed to young fathers and professionals.</p> <p><b>'New Pathways for Young Fathers'/NPYF (2019):</b> Building on from the HEE study, Lau Clayton received Research England QR (Quality Related) Strategic Priorities funding to work in partnership with DaddiLife and Leeds City Council, to explore young fathers' education, employment, and training pathways. NPYF focused on young men's future aspirations and what barriers and enablers exist to improving their life chances, and potentially, the life chances of their children (R4). NPYF addressed gaps in knowledge and suggested policy and practice recommendations. NPYF conducted twenty face-to-face/telephone interviews with young fathers and two focus groups with ten young men. An expert round table discussion was organised to discuss the findings with key national representatives (details in section 4).</p> <p><b>'British Families in Lockdown'/BFiL (2020):</b> Investigated the day-to day experiences of British families during the first seven weeks of lockdown (i.e., March-April 2020). Sixty parents from a diverse set of socio-economic backgrounds, geographies, religions, and cultures participated in telephone or virtual semi-structured interviews. BFiL contained a young father's subgroup, which included six young fathers from NPYF and HEE. Parents shared their accounts regarding family life, employment, children's schooling, health, well-being, leisure time and technology use.</p>		

The methods utilised for the above studies were applied and collaborative from the onset, e.g., with partner organisations and other stakeholders, such as young fathers themselves. In this way, knowledge exchange, engagement, and pathways to impact were inherent to the research design and throughout the lifetime of the project and beyond. As young fathers are often known as an 'invisible', vulnerable, and marginalised group, heightened ethical considerations were evident throughout the research process (R3).

*Selected key findings from the three studies:*

1. Young fathers' have strong desires to be in education, employment or training/EET but several economic, social, and personal challenges were identified, which prevented EET status (R4).
2. A key barrier for young fathers' access to, and participation in, HE is the lack of explicit support at both the policy and practice level (R1-4).
3. Young fatherhood is often defined in policy terms as applying to men who father children when they are aged 25 or under, and dedicated support for young fathers is restricted by age as a result. However, the research has identified that young fathers (by definition) who are now older (e.g., in their mid-late twenties and early thirties) often have various support needs around EET which also needs addressing, such as difficulties with finances, parental rights, and housing (R1-4).
4. Young fathers often face, or are at a higher risk of several disadvantages relating to their socio-economic circumstances, and when this is coupled with a lack of professional support during the pandemic, this can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and create new challenges for young men in relation to HE (R5, R6).

### 3. References to the research

(R1) [Lau Clayton, C. \(2016\). The Lives of Young Fathers: A Review of Selected Evidence. \*Social Policy and Society\*, 15\(1\), 129-140.](#)

(R2) Lau Clayton, C. (2017). Young Fathers and their Perspective of Health and Well-Being, in Portier-Le Cocq, F. (Eds). *Fertility, Health and Lone Parenting: European Contexts*. Routledge: London, pp162-179.

(R3) Lau Clayton, C. (2018) Researching Young Fatherhood: Ethical Considerations for the Researcher-Participant Relationship in Dermott, E. and Gatrell, C. (Eds). *Fathers, Families and Relationships: Researching Everyday Lives*. Policy Press: Bristol, pp151-167.

(R4) Lau Clayton, C., and Lee, H.S. (2020). *New Pathways for Young Fathers Report*. Available at [New-Pathways-Young-Fathers-Report-NOVEMBER-FINAL-2.pdf \(daddilife.com\)](#)

(R5) Clayton, C., Clayton R. and Potter, M. (2020). *British Families in Lockdown Report*. Available at [british-families-in-lockdown-report.pdf \(leedstrinity.ac.uk\)](#)

(R6) [Clayton, C., Potter, M. & Clayton, R. \(2020\) 'Written Evidence Submitted to the Impact of Coronavirus on Business and Workers Inquiry' \(COVO151\)](#)

### 4. Details of the impact

Although widening participation agendas have been a policy focus for many years, young fathers have often been overlooked. By focusing on policy and practice gaps and shining a light on young fathers' experiences, issues relating to social justice, social inclusion, personal fulfilment, and the contributions in which young fathers can make to socio-economic life are addressed. This ICS traces the impact of the research on policy, practice, and public awareness below.

#### **Impact on Policy**

As a result of the Coronavirus outbreak and the first UK national lockdown (March 2020), there were several Parliamentary inquiries into the wider effects of Covid-19, which BFiL responded to. The pathway to impact was through accepted publications by the House of Commons

Education Committee (24 June and 6 October 2020), Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy Committee (9 June 2020) and Women and Equalities Committee (7 July 2020) (**S4-7**). Six BFIL reports were published by Parliament, including a co-produced article with the University of Glasgow. Given the unknown nature of the pandemic, the research helped to **shape the focus of inquiries, contributed to new understanding** for critical debate to benefit national public policy, services, and society, **highlighting issues of concerns** to parliamentarians. Direct citation of the research is seen within subsequent committee reports. For example, our research emphasised the difficulties that vulnerable parents can face in lockdown, including those from BAME/Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and these findings are cited within the [Women and Equalities Committee Report](#) which includes policy recommendations. Acknowledgement of the research is also found on Parliamentary webpages, committee minutes, briefings, and evidence submissions (**S4-7**).

Research findings and outputs have been shared with Public Health England (0-25 policy), NHS / National Health Service, the Department of Education, Department for Work and Pensions, and the Scottish Government (**R4, S4**) to help **raise awareness** of young fatherhood issues and to **inform national policy debate** to ensure that young fathers' support needs are **better understood**. Positive early responses to the findings led to active engagement with the research by the APPG/All-Party Parliamentary Group on Fatherhood, Public Health England and the Scottish Government's Pregnancy and Parenthood in Young People Strategy, leading to three invited presentations regarding the data (**S4**). Research activity within a 'web of influence' (British Academy, 2016) enables connections with users of research and stakeholders for knowledge exchange and pathways to impact.

### **Impact on Practice**

The pathway to impact on practice was greatly enhanced by working through a specially formed **steering group**, comprising of expert advisors at various stages of the research. The steering group included representatives from Department of Work and Pensions, Teenage Pregnancy Knowledge Exchange, Future Men (Secretariat to the APPG on Fatherhood), Family Nurse Partnership/FNP, Royal College of Midwives and Knowledge Change Action. Findings were shared with the steering group as part of the methodology, dissemination process and post-research activities. Enduring connectivity to appropriate organisations allowed for **research uptake and use**. For example, the FNP will be utilising the video outputs (**S2**) for **staff training** and **ongoing learning** for FNP practitioners (**S4**); other research outputs have been shared with the FNP National Unit and via their communications and engagement work to **create awareness** of young fatherhood issues (**S4**). Study reports and other outputs have been disseminated nationally via the Teenage Pregnancy Knowledge Exchange, through Local Authority Teenage Pregnancy Leads and voluntary sector organisations involved in teen pregnancy or young parenthood support to **stimulate and inform a change of thinking** about young fatherhood and HE issues (**S4**).

In collaboration with five young fathers, a **national online launch event** was held (20/11/20). Keynote speakers included Alison Hadley (OBE) Director of the Teenage Pregnancy Knowledge Exchange (University of Bedfordshire) and Councillor Fiona Venner, Executive Member for Children and Families. There were 40 attendees across local and national sectors present, such as the Department of Work and Pensions, representatives from the Scottish Government's Pregnancy and Parenthood in Young People Strategy, NHS, Royal College of Midwives; FNP; Barnardo's, Connexions, Leeds City Council, and others. Main findings were shared, and attendees were invited to partake in virtual break out groups. Group work generated in-depth discussions about the implications of the findings and important 'what next' questions in relation to practice and service delivery effectiveness at local and national level (**S3**). The opportunity to participate in break out groups also **enabled professional networking opportunities** and allowed **new connections** to form between local and national organisations to support young fathers and young parents better (e.g., Leeds Trinity University and Barnardo's with regards to young parents and care leavers in HE) (**S4**).

**Feedback** from the online launch was extremely positive: *"I am certainly taking their experiences away and will consider how to share this in order to think about how we recognise and work alongside young fathers in Children Social Workforce Services."* (S4). Other comments demonstrate that professional thinking has been directly influenced by the research (S3). This includes: 1) **better knowledge and understanding** of the lives of young fathers (e.g. *"Incredibly useful and I will share with colleagues"*), 2) **influencing day-to-day practice** with young fathers and young fathers-to-be (e.g. *"Yes in day to day work, engaging with fathers, ensuring voices of fathers are heard and capturing data on fathers more effectively"*), and 3) the consideration of young fathers within **organisation priorities, communications and events** (e.g. *"It will help us consider how we engage and work with young fathers and give us further understanding of factors that will get in the way of this"*). Through the online launch event, this has supported other pathways to impact, including a collaboration with the Royal College of Midwives regarding **training materials** for professionals.

At a local level, the HEE study report and leaflet were launched at Leeds City Council's 'Baby Week' in November 2019 (<https://www.babyweek.co.uk/>). There were over 1,250 attendees at this event. The outputs **increased practitioners' awareness** of young fathers' educational experiences and feedback received indicated that the leaflet would be used when supporting young men's EET pathways. Professionals also commented that they were likely to share the findings and outputs with other colleagues (or had already done so), leading to **wider reach** of the research (S4). The findings and outputs feed into and further support the local authority's priority of father-inclusive practice.

Professionals who were involved in the research as interviewees or collaborators, testified to **changing perceptions and attitudes** regarding young fathers or becoming **better informed** about young fatherhood issues to **deliver better support provision** (S3, S4). At the same time, professionals reflected on their own practice, leading to **changes in professional activities and behaviours** when supporting young fathers (S1, S3, S4): *"The study has helped me in my own work with the young men in question, not only in that it enabled me to see/hear different parts of their story, but also because it has sparked new and different conversations with them about their lives and what they want to do in the future."*

Through the research itself, organisations have been brought together to work in a collaborative manner where these links did not exist previously (e.g., Support and Prevention Team, Futures and DaddiLife). In doing so, it has enabled a structure for **co-operation, co-production, and sustained partnership** beyond the research itself. The research has also **provided opportunities** for the partner organisation to work more closely with other external stakeholders to improve practice (S1). For example, the Support and Prevention team have re-engaged with the APPG on Fatherhood and become better aligned with other sectors in the local authority as part of the research and dissemination process (e.g., with Social Care and Looked after Children teams) (S1). Our other partner organisation 'Futures,' is now incorporating group work with young fathers as part of their core service (S4). Previously young men were supported on a one-to-one basis. However, after witnessing the benefits of bringing the service users together for the focus group interviews (e.g., mutual support/understanding and positive feedback from the young men themselves), the organisation has now **embedded group-based provision** and are **more considerate** of the unique needs of young fathers (S4). In such ways, the research has enhanced the organisation's capacity to serve the needs of young fathers better which directly benefits the young men.

#### **Impact on Public Debate and Others**

Public availability of the findings can inform and enhance **public awareness and understanding** of research issues. Research findings are online and can be found on UK Parliament, DaddiLife and Leeds Trinity University websites. Impact on **public discourse** is further evidenced through **secondary reach** and use of the research findings, with coverage and/or citations within the following: [Go Higher West Yorkshire](#), [Work Times](#), [Insight](#), [DiversityQ](#), [Working Dads](#), [Nursery World](#), and Save the Children's '[Life under Lockdown](#)' report. The WILD young parent project, which is the largest young parent charity in the UK, invited the NPYP team to write a blog output



to highlight key research issues to a **wider audience**, and through public dissemination routes on a national level, we have received ongoing media interest including the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation).

Feedback from the young fathers themselves demonstrated the positive and significant impact that the research has had on their lives (**S2**). All the young fathers felt that the research allowed for a meaningful and safe opportunity to share their experiences with a trusted researcher, leading to **in-depth accounts** of young fatherhood (**R4, S1, S2, S4**). Young fathers were also motivated to use their narratives to **help others** in similar circumstances. As one young father stated: “I’m hoping to **make a difference**, I’m hoping to help people”.

Ten young fathers participated in two separate focus group discussions, and for some, this was the first time they had met with other young men who were fathers also. Participation and discussion in these focus groups provided a **sense of community, reassurance and support** (**S2**). Contact between the young fathers has continued since and was initiated by the young men themselves. The opportunity for seven of the young men to collaborate on joint outputs such as the HE leaflet, project videos, and the online launch event were similarly valued. Involving young fathers in such ways created a powerful and **thought-provoking response** from recipients: “I was very impressed to see how insightful, open and articulate the responses were from the young men” (**S4**). At the same time, the findings and outputs helped to **challenge and overturn negative perceptions** of young men (i.e., the prevailing existing ‘feckless’ father discourse), improving attitudes within society. Lastly, relationships between the researcher and the participants throughout each of the three studies has always been extremely positive and has fostered opportunities for **follow-up research**: “Any future projects give me a shout, I loved being a part of this” (young father). Findings have shown that opportunities to access and participate in education can have a significant impact upon the well-being and future outcomes of the young fathers’ and their families (**R1, R4**). Given the lack of policy focus and limited professional support that is available for young fathers in relation to HE, such continued research is vital.

This ICS has evidenced examples of research impact, significance, and reach. Findings have raised **much needed awareness** around young fathers’ experiences within policy, practice, and public domains. Research data has also informed **national policy debates; challenged negative stereotypes**; led to **more sympathetic and inclusive support provision**; whilst **enabling new forms of partnership working** to occur across different sectors, at both a local and national level. By collaborating with young fathers, it has allowed **end users to better consider and implement the necessary action** to support young fathers and address issues relating to **social inequality and social justice**. Young fathers themselves have **valued** being part of the research process and the **community of support** which has emerged.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

**S1:** Testimonies from ‘Support and Prevention’ Team, ‘Futures’, and ‘DaddiLife’.

**S2:** Project videos.

**S3:** Feedback from professionals based on webinar and online launch event feedback.

**S4:** Email Evidence from November 2019 - March 2021.

**S5:** [The impact of COVID-19 on education and children’s services - Committees - UK Parliament.](#)

**S6:** [Women and Equalities Committee - Publications - Committees - UK Parliament.](#)

**S7:** [Getting the grades they’ve earned: Covid-19: the cancellation of exams and ‘calculated’ grades - Education Committee - House of Commons \(parliament.uk\).](#)