

Institution: Bournemouth University		
Unit of Assessment: 4		
Title of case study: Mental health in early fatherhood: evidence-based development of the first NHS screening programme		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016 – current		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Andrew Mayers	Principal Academic in Psychology	August 2009-current
Dr Sarah Hambidge	Post-doctoral Researcher in Psychology	January 2014-current
Dr Emily Arden-Close	Senior Lecturer in Psychology	September 2014-current
Period when the claimed impact occurred: November 2018 – March 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Although longstanding concerns about the perinatal mental health of mothers have resulted in specialist service provision, virtually no attention had been given to the wellbeing of fathers. Bournemouth University (BU) research revealed a significant need for support in helping men to adjust to aspects of fatherhood, particularly in terms of the impact of a birth on their partner's mental and physical health. The findings have played a key role in informing the NHS's (2018) decision to introduce screening for new and expectant fathers, and subsequent educational interventions for health professionals, including obstetricians and health visitors.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>It is widely accepted that 10% of mothers experience postnatal depression, but there is reliable evidence to suggest that approximately 5% of fathers also endure significant depressive symptoms (Ramchandani et al., 2005). Moreover, poor paternal mental health is known to have a negative impact on mothers' postnatal mental health and vice versa. Despite this, while the NHS has routinely offered mental health screening for new mothers, no such service has been available for fathers.</p> <p>This issue led Mayers, in 2016, to develop research designed to achieve better understanding of fathers' psychological adjustment in the perinatal period. Working with Arden-Close and Hambidge, he carried out two large-scale qualitative research studies based on in-depth semi-structured interviews, using thematic analysis of transcripts to reveal critical concerns.</p> <p>The first study [R1] was designed to pinpoint the resources that fathers need to support their partners, should they develop postnatal mental health problems. The data from the 25 men interviewed revealed that they believed perinatal health professionals failed to recognise their potential for providing care for their partner, and thus that they were not given the advice they needed to do so. Additionally, fathers often failed to anticipate potential threats to their own post-natal mental health and were, in consequence, unprepared to combat them. In the face of these</p>		

problems, fathers described a need for healthcare professionals to equip them with both emotional support and practical help. Specifically, they identified the value of developing coping strategies that would enable them to support both their partner and their baby. In summary, fathers indicated that health professionals in perinatal mental health services needed a better understanding of the resources they required to support their own mental health and that of their family.

Pursuing these issues, Mayers et al. conducted further research [R2], sharpening the focus of the enquiry to birthing experiences in which the probability of psychological difficulties increased. 61 fathers who had witnessed their partner's traumatic childbirth completed an anonymous online questionnaire regarding how these new circumstances impacted on them.

Thematic analyses showed that the respondents were significantly affected long into the post-natal period, both in terms of their personal adjustment and their relationships with mother and baby. The participants attributed the unavailability of nationally-recognised support for fathers to maternity service practitioners' generally low expectations of them. In particular, they felt that, compared to mothers, they were perceived as relatively unimportant in achieving successful post-natal outcomes.

These findings led Mayers to propose the development of more and better provision for both partners following a traumatic birth, and, specifically, additional staff training geared towards supporting the father's role. The success of his advocacy produced a marked and significant change in the NHS's support for new fathers.

2. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1 and R2 were both subject to rigorous peer review.

R1: Mayers, A., Hambidge, S., Bryant, O. and Arden-Close, E. (2020), "Supporting women who develop poor postnatal mental health: what support do fathers receive to support their partner and their own mental health?", *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 20, 359. DOI: [10.1186/s12884-020-03043-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-020-03043-2)

R2: Daniels, E., Arden-Close, E., and Mayers, A. (2020), "Be quiet and man up: a qualitative questionnaire study into men who experienced birth trauma", *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 20, 236. DOI: [10.1186/s12884-020-02902-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-020-02902-2)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Informing a change in NHS practice

Having identified a crucial gap in NHS provision through his BU research programme, Mayers was eager to raise public awareness of the matter. His efforts achieved national media attention both for the research itself and his consequent mental health campaigning (see below). As a result, in autumn 2018, he was contacted by NHS England to contribute evidence towards the provision of support for fathers' perinatal mental health.

Mayers' research achieved national reach and significance when the Chief Executive of NHS England announced in December 2018 that, for the first time, new and expectant fathers would be routinely offered mental health checks and treatment [E1a]. NHS England's perinatal mental health lead at the time confirmed: '[Mayers'] research provided unique insights into how new fathers felt about their experiences following childbirth', and '...helped make the NHS decision happen.' [E1b]

Reflecting Mayers' findings [R1, R2], the NHS plan focused on partners of pregnant women and new mothers who were themselves suffering from anxiety, depression or more severe disorders such as psychosis. New fathers facing these circumstances would now be offered a

comprehensive mental health assessment automatically and, if required, directed to additional professional support. The kinds of provision newly available under these circumstances included behavioural couples' therapy, other family/parenting interventions in specialist community perinatal mental health settings, and/or referral to a psychological talking therapy programme. Unfortunately, the delivery of these services has been very markedly curtailed by the impact of Covid-19 on NHS resources (see separate statement).

Following NHS England's announcement of fathers' perinatal mental health care provision, Mayers was approached for further advice relating to its implementation. For example, in recognition of his expertise in this field, he contributed to a 2019 consultation held to develop the NHS's longer-term plans for supporting perinatal mental health [E1].

Educating health professionals

Mayers' research clearly showed what forms of support fathers believed they required from health professionals to maintain their mental health more effectively in the early months of their children's lives. This has led directly to work with perinatal health professional bodies across the whole of the UK (e.g. Royal College of Midwives, Institute of Health Visiting, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, etc.), advising how best to train them to meet these needs. Mayers has also personally undertaken some of that training.

For example, in October 2019 Mayers presented his research and recommended professional training to the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists [E2], providing 'an enlightening viewpoint for [its] members'. In November the same year, The Institute of Health Visiting invited him to a forum (for the South West Perinatal Mental Health Visitor Champions) focusing on the development of professional practice and training [E3]: 'His insights were extremely well-received... and many said... they now felt more confident.' In January 2020, he offered training deriving from his research on fathers' mental health to health visitors studying on BU's own PG Diploma in Health Visiting. In February 2020, he reviewed Health Education England's training and educational resources for providers and users of perinatal mental health services nationwide.

Raising awareness of men's perinatal mental health

Following the involvement in the process of consultation with NHS England, and as a result of his research and professional reputation for fathers' mental health, Mayers frequently appears in national and international media, including television, radio and newspapers, bringing this issue to a wide and varied audience in the UK and abroad. Media appearances have included *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *Sky News*, *Channel 5 News*, *BBC Stories*, and *BBC Radio 5 Live*. Mayers also worked with *BBC Radio 4* on a documentary on fathers' mental health, broadcast in December 2019, advising on content and focus [E4a-g].

In recent months, the Covid-19 pandemic has further underlined the significance of Mayers' research showing that excluding fathers from the birth process can cause harm to their mental health, as well as to mothers and babies. Mayers has provided evidence to support a more flexible approach for hospital-based births than was typically permitted early in the pandemic [E5].

Further underlining the international reach of his research, the Movember Foundation – often regarded as the leading movement for men's health globally – contacted Mayers [E6] after becoming aware of his work online. They were 'particularly interested in [Mayers' finding] that fathers with perinatal mental health problems are up to 47 times more likely to be rated a suicide risk than those fathers who do not have those symptoms'.

Subsequently, throughout 2019, Mayers provided consultation for Movember in relation to fathers' mental health. The organisation stated that Mayers' research was used 'to support the Movember Fathers Mental Health Business Plan rationale that fathers need support in the

perinatal period and that there are gaps in that support, i.e. a lack of services relevant and accessible to men for that time'. The business plan and associated funding request has subsequently been approved by the Movember Board and is expected to launch towards the end of 2021.

Finally, Mayers' web page for fathers' mental health (<https://andrewmayers.uk/fathers-mental-health>) appears on the first page of most internet search engines, e.g., on 8 February 2021, a Google search returned 59,500,000 hits for 'fathers' mental health' – with Mayers' page appearing fourth in the results [E7a]. Visits to the website peaked at the time of the screening announcement by NHS England in early December 2018 and again in January 2019 when the NHS Long Term Plan was announced, mentioning fathers' mental health for the first time [E7b].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

E1:

E1a: England, N., (2021). *NHS England » Partners of new mums with mental illness set to get targeted support on the NHS*. [online] England.nhs.uk. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2018/12/partners-of-new-mums-with-mental-illness-set-to-get-targeted-support-on-the-nhs/> [Accessed 8 February 2021].

E1b: NHS England. (2020). Testimonial letter, 14 December.

E2: Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. (2021). Testimonial letter, 8 January.

E3: Institute of Health Visiting. (2020). Testimonial letter, 18 December 2020.

E4:

E4a: BBC Radio 4. (2019). Email, 23 November.

E4b: Randall, B., (2019). When postpartum depression stole my husband. *The Washington Post*.

E4c: *5 News Special*, (2019). [TV programme] Channel 5.

E4d: *BBC Stories*, (2019). [TV programme] News: BBC.

E4e: Davis, N., (2018). Postnatal depression: fathers can suffer similar issues to women, say experts. *The Guardian*, [online] Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/aug/09/new-fathers-suffer-similar-rates-of-depression-as-mothers-experts-warn> [Accessed 11 February 2021].

E4f: Moss, R., (2018). Why these dads are revealing (nearly) all for mental health awareness. *Huff Post*, [online] Available at: <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/father-figures-why-these-dads-are-revealing-nearly-all-for-mental-health-awareness> [Accessed 11 February 2021].

E4g: *News*, (2018). [Radio programme] Radio 5 Live: BBC.

E4h: Mayers, A., (2017). Why postnatal depression isn't just a mum thing. *Metro*, [online] Available at: <https://www.metro.news/why-postnatal-depression-isnt-just-a-mum-thing> [Accessed 11 February 2021].

E5: University of Surrey. (2020). *Becoming a parent in a pandemic*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKlnBPIP7k&feature=youtu.be>. [Accessed 2 February 2021.]

E6: Movember Foundation. (2021). Testimonial letter, 7 February.

E7:

E7a: PDF of results from Google search, 8 February 2021.

E7b: Data analytics from Mayers' website, showing spike in interest after media coverage and website traffic.