

VOLUME ONE:

PART ONE:

LITERATURE REVIEW: TEENAGE FATHERS AS PART OF THE NEET  
POPULATION: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON  
ADOLESCENT FATHERS

PART TWO:

EMPIRICAL STUDY: THE EXPERIENCES OF BEING A TEENAGE  
FATHER: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

By

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Jack and my two children, Alfie and Holly for their constant understanding, patience and love throughout this doctorate.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the young men who gave up their time to take part in this piece of research; their contribution was invaluable.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis represents an assessed requirement of the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctoral course at the University of Birmingham.

Volume One explores the experiences of teenage fathers. Part one consists of a literature review, which considers teenage fathers as an identified category within the population that are not in education employment or training (NEET). The review explores; identified characteristics and factors associated with teenage fatherhood; identified psychological effects of fatherhood; service provision for teenage fathers; and the role of teenage fathers in research. The exploration of the views and experiences of fathers in United Kingdom was found to be a neglected area in the identified literature. Consequently, an empirical research study was designed to learn more about the views and experiences of teenage fathers in an area within the North West of England.

Part two presents the research study entitled; 'The experiences of being a teenage father: an interpretative phenomenological analysis.' The study explores the experiences of five men who had become fathers in their teenage years. Resultant themes were identified and explored using interpretative phenomenological analysis.



## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

During the second and third years of the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctoral course at the University of Birmingham I have been employed by a Metropolitan Borough Council in the North West of England. Volume one of the thesis, which is an assessed requirement of the course, consists of two papers which relate to research which was agreed by the Principal Educational Psychologist of the authority.

The Principal Educational Psychologist notified coordinators within the local authority about the opportunity to request research that they would like to be conducted. The manager of the Connexions service for young people aged 16-19 years highlighted the need for research to be undertaken with the NEET population. The issue of young people not in education, employment or training became a policy priority in the 14-19 White Paper, published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2005. A key target was 'to reduce the proportion of 16-18 year old NEET by 2 percent by 2010.' Consequently, I met with the Connexions Manager in November 2008, to discuss how my research could be useful to the service.

The DCFS published reports (Coles et al., 2002; Spielhofer et al., 2009) have presented the NEET population under categories and characteristics. Coles et al. (2002) divided the population into over-represented groups, which include teenage parents. The Connexions manager explained that a lot of services were focussing on the support of teenage mothers with the aim of increasing the participation of teenage mothers in education, training or employment. It was at this point that it became apparent that very little was known about the population of teenage fathers in the region. I was invited to attend the authority's monthly 'Better Support for Teenage Pregnancy' multidisciplinary

group. The group consisted of representatives from the health, education and social care sectors. The group agreed that it would be helpful in guiding their practice if I could explore the ways in which the authority could best support teenage fathers, investigate their experiences and how these may relate to becoming NEET.

My initial approach to this consisted of a detailed literature review; this is the first paper which is presented in this volume and is entitled 'Teenage fathers as part of the NEET population: A critical review of the literature on adolescent fathers.'

I initially explored the characteristics of young fathers as identified in the literature. In comparison to teenage mothers there has been considerably less investigation into the profiles of young fathers (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). The literature review then focused on the psychological effects of fatherhood. A study by Quinlivan and Condon (2005) reported that teenage fathers have 'unrecognised psychological symptomatology and require services along with teenage mothers' (p.915). Alongside this finding was the claim that fathers are 'left to cope and deal with their emotions at a very crude level, alone' (Daniel, 2004, p.208).

Two perspectives emerged from the literature that was focussed on fatherhood in general; the transformative perspective and the role occupancy perspective (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006). These perspectives focused on the transition to fatherhood, the impact this has on identity and the pressures and expectations to adopt the role of provider. These perspectives had not been explored with the population of adolescent fathers.

The literature review highlighted that the voice of the young father has mainly been neglected by existing research in the United Kingdom. I decided that a

qualitatively designed study, which represented the views and experiences of teenage fathers living in the UK sensitively and honestly would be an appropriate and beneficial method of enquiry.

This study is reported in the second paper in this volume, entitled 'The experience of being a teenage father: An interpretative phenomenological analysis.' As the title suggests, the research employed the interpretative phenomenological approach to gathering and analysing the experiences of five young men who had become fathers in adolescent years. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was considered to be an appropriate methodology as it provides a framework which acknowledges the limitations of a double hermeneutic, i.e. the researcher provides an interpretation of the participant's interpretation. Due to the vulnerable status of the population in terms of negative media representation I wanted to represent the young men's experiences as honestly as a methodology would allow. IPA acknowledges that this double hermeneutic means that the analysis involves a high degree of subjectivity and is shaped by the researcher's interpretative frameworks. In this study interpretations are illustrated by extracts from the transcripts in order that the reader can assess the persuasiveness of the analysis.

The two papers that are included in this volume have been written to journal specification and target the Journal of Youth Studies. The Journal of Youth Studies states that it is focussed upon young people within a range of contexts, such as education, the labour market and the family. I believe this to be an appropriate publication for my work as the submission of studies which highlight interconnections between the different spheres of young people's lives are particularly encouraged. My papers explore the transition to fatherhood for young men and the additional transitions that can occur as a direct result of becoming a teenage father. I feel that the use of IPA as a methodology

highlights the development and value of including young people's views and direct experiences when conducting research.

The Concluding Chapter contains reflections regarding the design of the study, the impact of the study and the role of the educational psychologist. These additional reflections are relevant to the piece of work in the context of being an assessed requirement of the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctoral Course, but would not be appropriate for journal publication.

The appendices of this volume contain two Public Domain Briefing papers. The first of these papers was written for the approval of the Principal Educational Psychologist and the manager of the Connexions Service. The second was designed as a power-point presentation to provide feedback and details of the key findings to the professionals who are a part of the Teenage Pregnancy Better Support Group. This is a multidisciplinary group that has representatives from the health sector, the education section and the social care sector.

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**ABSTRACT**  
**CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

This paper reviews the literature relating to adolescent fathers. As the population of teenage fathers have been identified as an over-represented group in the 16-18 year olds that are not in education, employment or training (NEET), the paper begins with a succinct overview of the policies and context surrounding this area. This leads to the review of literature that has explored the characteristics of teenage fathers; the psychological effects of fatherhood; service provision for young fathers; and the role of fathers in research.

The paper concludes that we know relatively little about teen fathers in the United Kingdom (UK) compared with young mothers (Reeves, 2009). Much of the available literature on the psychological effects of fatherhood, as identified in this review, has focused on older fathers (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006), and is largely based in countries other than the UK. The voice of the young father is largely absent from the research that has been conducted (O'Brian, 2004) and the paper suggests interpretative phenomenological analysis as an appropriate methodology which could be used to rectify this.

## **PART ONE**

### **Teenage Fathers as part of the NEET population: A critical review of the literature on adolescent fathers**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Social Exclusion Unit (1999) made disengagement from education, employment and training the subject of its 1999 report, 'Bridging the Gap' and it has received prominent attention since then. For the past decade the employment, education or training status (EET) of young people in the UK has been recognised by government in terms of outcome measures and interventions.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), now known as the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), paper 'The costs of being NEET' (Coles et al., 2002) highlighted the expense to the individual and society of young people not being in education, training or employment (NEET) and as a result numerous policies and interventions have been introduced.

The NEET population has been presented in the DCSF reports (Coles et al., 2002, Hutton et al., 2002; Spielhofer et al., 2009) under categories and characteristics of over-represented groups. Amongst these groups are teenage parents. As a result of the identification of teenage parents as potentially at risk of social exclusion the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy was established in 1999 with the aims of prevention and support.

The DCFS document 'Teenage Parents: who cares?' (2008) cites 39,000 conceptions to women under the age of 18 years in 2006. This rate is significantly higher than other European countries and led to a target to halve teenage conceptions in the UK by 2010. Where teenage pregnancies still exist

the secondary aim is to ensure that young mothers return to education, employment or training.

Literature which focuses on the preventative and supportive agendas tends to take the umbrella term of 'teenage parents' yet is concentrated on the population of teenage mothers rather than fathers. This paper will explore the literature available on teenage fathers, their experiences of support and perspectives of parenthood. As the population of teenage fathers has been identified under the category of 'teenage parents' in the NEET literature, this paper will commence with a succinct overview of the policies and context surrounding this area.

### **1.1 Literature Search Method**

#### Young people not in Education, Employment or Training

Using the University of Birmingham eLibrary service, research articles for the present review were identified using the databases 'Swetwise,' 'PsycOVID,' and ERIC. The keyword 'NEET' was used for the identification of articles written about young people not in education, employment or training. Government funded guidance and research were searched for using the DCSF website.

#### Teenage Fathers

Using the University of Birmingham eLibrary service, research articles for teenage fathers were identified using the databases, 'Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA),' 'Swetswise,' and 'Medline (OVID) 1996-2009.' Advanced searches were conducted using the keywords; 'teenage OR adolescent AND fathers OR dads.' A total of 14 articles were located. Another 11 articles were located using the terms 'fatherhood' AND 'psychological.'

Following these electronic searches the snowball technique was used to follow up references cited in the bibliographies of the articles.

A total of 41 articles were identified for inclusion in this review in January 2010.



## **2. Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)**

### **2.1 Policy Background**

Disengagement from education, employment and training received prominent attention in the late 1990s when the 1999 Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) made it the subject of its report.

#### **'Bridging the Gap' Report**

The SEU 'Bridging the Gap' report (1999) has had a major influence on the Labour Government policy towards socially excluded young people (Colley & Hodkinson, 2001). The forward to the report by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, (1999) highlighted the high policy profile the Labour Government have given to addressing and tackling social exclusion: 'The best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience.'

The report provided an agenda for change in a number of policy areas and an emphasis was placed on the 'NEET' and 'EET' status of young people. Four working groups were set up to address the report's 25 point 'action plan.' The Government's policy for raising achievement and learning focuses on four key areas: improved curriculum and range of qualifications; outreach and personal support; improved standards of delivery; and financial support for those who need it.

Colley and Hodkinson (2001; p.2) described the 'Bridging the Gap' report as containing 'a long overdue recognition of the negative and exclusionary impact of certain previous policies.' It highlighted some of the barriers faced by young people in their experiences of post-compulsory education and training; these

include a narrow National Curriculum, lack of financial support, inadequate childcare provision, and problems of access for ethnic minority groups.

The report aimed to address these problems, yet a closer examination of the resulting solutions highlights a negative discourse which, argue Colley and Hodgkinson (2001), could make things worse for some of those defined as socially excluded.

### The costs of being NEET

A DCFS report published in 2002 examined the costs of being NEET. 'Estimating the Cost of Being 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' at Age 16-18' (Godfry et al. 2002) highlighted that the total lifetime costs of being NEET at age 16-18 at 2000/01 prices were estimated as £7 billion resource costs and £8.1 billion public finance costs. This has resulted in the issue of NEETs becoming a policy priority in the 14-19 White Paper, published by the DCFS in 2005. A key target was 'to reduce the proportion of 16-18 year olds NEET by 2 percent by 2010.'

The DCFS published reports (Coles et al., 2002; Spielhofer et al., 2009) attempted to present the NEET population under categories and characteristics. An example of this is made in the Coles et al. (2002) report where the NEET population is divided into 'over-represented groups,' which included:

- Young people 'looked after';
- Teenage parents;
- Young carers;
- Young people with chronic illness, disabilities, and having accidents;
- Suicide by young people;
- Mental illness;
- Risk behaviours involving smoking, drinking alcohol and serious drug misuse;

- Young people involved in crime and criminal justice.

It can be recognised that some categorisation is required due to the large number of young people not in education, employment or training – 10.3 percent of 16-18 year olds (DCFS online report, 2009). Categorisation may help in the organisation of budgets, staff and resources in order to focus impact and support as many young people as possible. However, it has been observed that an emphasis on outcomes related to problem-focussed targeting can interfere with the process of participative engagement (Spence, 2004; Bessant, 2004). Yates and Payne (2006) proposed that pursuing targets, such as reducing NEET figures amongst the different categories, can result in those who require more resources and are more complex in their needs being given less attention than those who can more easily be placed in training or education. Therefore, it can be argued that such categorisation denies individuality and is discriminatory.

The next section will examine in more detail the literature about the needs and services for one of these categories of the NEET population that have been identified in this section; teenage parents and, more specifically, teenage fathers.

### **3. Teenage Parents**

The current Labour Government set up a Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS) (1999), which is overseen by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit (TPU). The strategy is centred on two key aims; the prevention agenda and the support agenda:

- To reduce the rate of teenage conceptions, with the specific aim of halving the rate of conception in under 18 year olds by 2010; and
- To increase the participation of teenage mothers in education, training or work to 60% by 2010 to reduce the risk of long term social exclusion.

It is interesting to note that there has been a recent amendment to the second aim, which until recently focussed on teenage *parents* rather than mothers (Kidger 2007). This detail will be examined further in this section which focuses on teenage fathers.

### **3.1 Teenage Fathers**

It is relevant here to examine the extent to which literature has explored the needs and experiences of young fathers and fathers-to-be. This section is divided into four:

- a. A critical review of identified characteristics and factors associated with teenage fatherhood
- b. A critical review of the identified psychological effects of fatherhood
- c. A critical review of service provision for teenage fathers
- d. A concluding section to examine the role of teenage fathers in research

#### **a. Characteristics and factors associated with teen-fatherhood**

A recent report from the UK (Reeves et al. 2009) suggested that we know relatively little about teenage fathers compared with young mothers. It reported that for babies born to teenage mothers, about a quarter of young fathers are aged under 20. However, these statistics do not reveal the full extent of adolescent men who father a child as they only include those who are named on the child's birth certificate.

Fathers under the age of 21 years are frequently characterised as 'sexually reckless youths who fail in their responsibilities to the children they father and the mothers of their children' (Jaffe, et al. 2001; p.803). Jaffe et al. (2001) evidenced this assertion with a study conducted in the United States by Lerman (1993; cited in Jaffe et al. 2001) who found that only 50% of adolescent fathers

lived with their child after the birth. This paper argues that this statistic does not reveal the characteristics of these fathers, nor how committed they are to their role as a father. The wider factors of their relationship with the mother and her family need to be considered. In support of this, Dudley (2007) argued that many young fathers report that they genuinely want to be actively involved in their role as parent and that a primary factor in the continued involvement of the father is 'the existence of a continuous romantic relationship between the biological parents' (p.173).

Jaffe et al.'s (2001) study aimed to explore whether young men who come from disadvantaged family backgrounds – and whose behaviour puts them at risk of a range of adverse outcomes in young adulthood – are more likely to become fathers at a young age.

The longitudinal study, which used participants from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, assessed a cohort of males born between April, 1972 and March 1973 in Dunedin, New Zealand. 980 participants were assessed at age 26 years using a battery of psychological, medical and sociological measures. Jaffe et al. (2001) found the following factors are related to an increased risk of becoming a young father:

- Being born to a teenage mother;
- Living with a single parent;
- Early initiation of sexual activity;
- Low interest in school;
- History of conduct disorder.

This study used the term 'young' father and this included participants with age ranges of 14 years to 26 years. This literature review argues that such a wide age range would benefit from being broken down into narrower age ranges in order to claim that the identified risk factors are contributing to particularly young fathering of children. The study is based on participants residing in the

South Island of New Zealand, therefore the findings can not claim generalisation to other countries or societies. There is no analysis of how many of the risk factors identified or what combination of risk factors could lead to a greater chance of becoming a 'young father.'

In comparison with teenage mothers there has been considerably less investigation into the profiles of young fathers (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). The data that is available, which concurs with Jaffe et al.'s (2001) findings, suggested that young fathers share the same problems as mothers in terms of low educational achievement and living in low income communities (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998, Fagot et al.1998). However, much of this data has come from the United States and therefore cannot be generalised to the UK. Table 1 provides examples of American research findings around factors associated with teenage fatherhood taken from Weinman et al. (2002).

Table 1 Examples of American Research findings around factors associated with teenage fatherhood (Weinman et al. 2002)

American based study	Main Findings
Guagliardo, Huang and D'Angelo (1999)	Young men who reported a pregnancy history were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14 times more likely to report multiple sex partners in the last year.</li> <li>• 5 times more likely to report a Sexually Transmitted Disease</li> <li>• 3 times more likely to test positive for drugs.</li> </ul>
Stouthamer-Loeber and Wei (1998) the Pittsburgh Youth Study	Young fathers were twice as likely to be classified as serious delinquents. Being a young father was related to early sexual experience, drug exposure, cruelty and antisocial behaviour.
Silverman et al. (1997) The Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, Massachusetts	High school males involved in a pregnancy had other problem behaviours such as substance use, violence, multiple sex partners, and fighting.
Nock (1998) National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Pirog-Good (1996) National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experience – Youth Cohort.	Teen fathers are more likely to live with single parents in impoverished backgrounds, more likely to become involved in drugs and crime at earlier ages, and experience school failure and low wages.
McLaughlin, Reiner, Reams and Joost (1999) Nesmith, Klerman, Oh and Feinstein (1997)	Over 20% of incarcerated offenders were teenage fathers.

Weinman et al. (2002) presented an overview of these American studies but do not provide a critical analysis of the findings.

A dated study by Ku et al. (1993) in the United States examined the effects of neighbourhood, family and individual characteristics on teenage males'

premarital sexual and contraceptive behaviours and their experiences of pregnancy and fatherhood. This study identified similar characteristics to the ones identified in Table 1, including the employment opportunities in the young men's communities and the wealth of their own families. The higher the rate of unemployment the higher the risk of teenage fatherhood, and the wealthier the young man's family the less likely they are to become a teenage father despite having more sexual partners than their less wealthy peers. Ku et al. (1993) hypothesised that this latter finding is due to the wealthier young men having more disposable income to pay for dates, yet the young women they are dating may be from higher socioeconomic status families who would be 'more upset if they became pregnant...more likely to have an abortion and/or not tell the male if he impregnates her' (Ku et al. 1993; p.497).

This review would argue that there is a need for more UK based research to be done in this area, with a focus not only on the male's characteristics but the combined characteristics of the young couple who are having sexual intercourse.

The lack of UK based research in this area may result in young British fathers being assumed to share the same characteristics as their American counterparts. As Swann et al. (2003) highlighted, research on young parents often looks at different aspects, focuses on different age groups, cultures and includes a number of different variables that make generalisations within the population problematic.

However, some research findings and methodology from the US may help to guide future research in the UK.

The existing UK literature focusing on family structure and teenage fatherhood has contrasting conclusions. Dearden et al. (1994) found that childhood family structure was not significantly associated with teenage fatherhood, whereas Sigle-Rushton (2004) found that British men born in 1970 were more likely to



become fathers before the age of 22 if their homes were disrupted by parental death or divorce. The samples used in the two studies may have differed in factors such as socioeconomic background, making comparisons difficult. Sigle-Rushton (2004) included young men up to the age of 22 in her research on young fatherhood, whereas for other studies the focus is on teenage years.

In addition to family structure, British research (Dearden et al. 1994; Kiernan, 1992) also suggested that familial financial hardship is associated with teenage fatherhood and a lower social class family of origin is also positively associated with young fatherhood.

Dennison and Lyon (2003, cited in Tyrer et al. 2005) found that teenage fathers are more likely to have engaged in youth offending, with some estimates that more than a quarter of young men in young offenders' institutions are already fathers or expectant fathers.

Caution must be taken when drawing conclusions from this limited research base as much of it is taken from findings over ten years ago and may not be representative of young fathers today.

The next section examines the psychological effects of becoming a father. The research located in this literature review is concerned with fatherhood in general due to a lack of identified research on adolescent fatherhood. The findings will be critically examined along with their relevance to teenage fatherhood and to what extent they can be generalised to this population.

## **b. Psychological effects of fatherhood**

The following section focuses on an area that Knoester and Eggebeen (2006; p.1533) claim has been 'lost in the burgeoning scholarly attention devoted to fathers,' the effects of fatherhood for men. Most of the research that focuses on

fathers emphasise the effects that fathers have on their children's outcomes (Marsiglio et al. 2000). Daniel (2004, p.208) reported, in an interview with a senior nurse practitioner from South Essex Partnership NHS Trust, that following the birth of a child men are 'left to cope and deal with their emotions at a very crude level, alone.' This demonstrates that, certainly in this cited NHS Trust, there is a need for further research in this area in order to provide the correct form of support that many new fathers need to ensure their well-being.

An Australian study (Quinlivan & Condon, 2005, p.915) found that teenage fathers have 'unrecognised psychological symptomatology and require services along with teenage mothers.' This conclusion was based on information taken from anxiety and depression scales as well as a general health questionnaire. It could, however, be argued that these teenage fathers had higher scores on these scales before they became fathers and that it is not due to their new role, but rather a characteristic of this population. Regardless of the 'cause' of elevated levels of anxiety and depression in teenage fathers, it could be argued that this population need additional support from formal services.

Two themes recurred throughout the literature reviewed and as a consequence the following part of this section is organised under two perspectives as identified by Knoester and Eggebeen (2006); the Transformative Perspective and the Role Occupancy Perspective.

### **b.1 Transformative Perspective**

Eggebeen and Knoester (2001) claimed that when compared to motherhood, fatherhood is not nearly so appreciated as a transforming event in the lives of adults. Knoester and Eggebeen (2006) highlighted research that asserts that parenthood presents important developmental challenges to adults and can lead to 'personal reorganisation and growth, openness to learning, new coping strategies, increased differentiation and integration, maturity, and a prime

generative encounter' (Palkovitz, 1996, 2002; Snarey, 1993; cited in Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006; p.1535). With these ideas in mind, Knoester and Eggebeen (2006) postulated that it is reasonable to suggest that the experience of fatherhood has a transforming effect on men.

A transformative perspective proposes that fatherhood experiences change men's feelings of well-being, connections with family, social interactions, and attachments to the labour force. Knoester and Eggebeen (2006) suggested that it is expected that fatherhood leads to:

- Altered feelings of well-being;
- Increased interactions with extended family;
- Involvement in more service-orientated activities;
- Greater attachment to the labour force.

In a study which consisted of 3,088 men in the United States, Knoester and Eggebeen (2006) found becoming a father decreased a man's social participation due to an increase in his hours of employment. This study concurred with past findings of negative effects of fatherhood on men's feelings of well-being (Cowan & Cowan, 1992, 1995, cited in Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006; p.1536). The results indicated that the arrival of a new child, either co-resident or non-resident is 'associated with men's feelings of depression' (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006; p.1546). The data for this study were taken from interviews from a nationally (United States) representative sample of households with participants aged between 19 and 65 years. The depression measure was drawn from responses to 12 questions that came from an abbreviated version of a depression scale. The study does not provide details of how the questions were selected and the validity of the abbreviated version given to participants, therefore caution must be taken when interpreting these results.

An earlier study by Eggebeen and Knoester (2001) which drew on the experiences of over 5,000 men aged 19-65, concluded that men with children

living elsewhere were especially likely to have lower life satisfaction scores and more depressive symptoms than were men living with biological or adopted children. The study did not take into account variables of marriage, separation and divorce, which could be factors that contribute to this finding. It could be hypothesised that this is a pertinent finding with regards to teenage fathers who, due to their age and financial resources, are often unable to cohabit with their child and may be more at risk to depressive symptoms.

The transformative perspective can be applied to provide a context for further studies that explore other areas of psychological effects of fatherhood. Strauss and Goldberg (1999) explored the notion of 'selves and possible selves' during and after the transition to fatherhood. They postulated that if there is a discrepancy between the real and ideal self as a father then a man's psychological wellbeing may be adversely affected. Feelings of failure or incompetence in the new role of parent can lead to a poor adjustment to fatherhood.

Tyrer et al. (2005) focussed on a piece of research that concurred with Strauss et al.'s (1999) findings. Tyrer et al. (2005) researched the experiences of young fathers in or leaving local authority care in the United Kingdom. They interviewed 16 young men between the ages of 15 and 23, 13 were already fathers and three were about to become fathers. Those in their early 20s had all become parents for the first time when they were teenagers. This study identified a number of themes or factors that, it is hypothesised, account for the discrepancy between the desire to live up to the contemporary ideals of fatherhood and the lived reality of the often poor or non-existent relationship with their children. These factors included:

- Social exclusion;
- Bureaucratic and inflexible services;
- Economic barriers;

- Poor relationship with the child's mother.

This research used a homogenous group of teenage fathers and findings can not be generalised to the population that have not been in the care system. However, it gives a rare opportunity for the voice of the young British father to be heard through detailed interviews.

An important element of Strauss et al.'s (1999) research, with relation to this paper's focus on teenage fathers, is the concept of 'possible selves' that represent an individual's idea of what they may become in the future and the fact that transition to parenthood is an impetus for change in self-concept. It could be argued that when an adolescent becomes a father the visions of his possible self may be abruptly altered. Strauss et al. (1999) cited Cowan's research (1991) that asserted that developmental transitions in adulthood are long-term processes that result in a reorganization of one's inner psychological sense of self. This may be more pronounced and more difficult for a male who becomes a father at such an early age, without intent. Developmental theory (Lee, 1994; cited in Johnson, 2001; p.517) supports this assertion as it suggests that fatherhood is best undertaken in adulthood when the developmental tasks of adolescence are completed.

Doherty et al. (2006, p.438) cited research by May (1982) that found that expectant fathers' perceived readiness for fatherhood was related to their view of whether they had accomplished their life goals in the childless period. Premature timing into fatherhood may certainly prevent this accomplishment and may have negative repercussions.

Stauss et al. (1999) used a sample of 56 first time married fathers in the United States to complete questionnaires during their wives' pregnancy and then 1 year after the birth. There are obvious limitations to the sample used in this study, the men were all married and from a middle class background, and the average age

was 30.61 years. However, I have included the general findings in this literature review as they highlight psychological effects of becoming a father that may be applied to future research on teenage fathers.

Stauss et al. (1999) found that the men's introspective evaluations of how close they were to meeting their ideal or possible selves seemed to be related to their adjustment to fatherhood and their psychological well-being. Results indicated that the notion of possible selves is useful in understanding how men's views of self change across transition to parenthood and a discrepancy in the ideal and real self may impact on psychological well-being.

It would be interesting to apply this research to a sample of teenage fathers whose possible selves have been abruptly altered by the early arrival of fatherhood. The concept of a change of identity is highlighted in Kaufman and Uhlenberg's (2000) research where they use 'Identity theory' (Stryker & Serpe, 1982, cited in Kaufman et al. 2000, p.932) as a framework to understand how new parents decide on the reallocation of their time to create a new role. The framework suggested that when an individual has multiple identities, such as spouse, parent, worker, they tend to order them hierarchically. Becoming a young father would create a new identity, which may have to go alongside the identity of school/college pupil, boyfriend, friend, son. Exploration of this framework and how it can be applied to an adolescent father would give a useful insight into the impact of fatherhood for a teenage male in terms of how their identity changes.

The concepts identified in the above research focused on the transition to fatherhood and the impact this has on identity. This transformative perspective has not been applied to teenage fathers, but the findings from studies done on more mature fathers give a perspective and an insight into the psychological effects of fatherhood that could be applied to the study of teenage fathers.

Eggebeen and Knoester (2001, p.392) concluded from their research into what it means for men's lives to be a father, that 'fatherhood can profoundly shape the lives of men.' The research in this section included fathers from the age of 19 years. According to this literature search and review the population of younger teenage fathers and the psychological effects for them remains relatively unexplored.

Another perspective that features throughout this literature review is the 'role occupancy perspective.' The next part of the paper looks at this perspective with reference to various studies on the identity assumed by fathers.

## **b.2 Role Occupancy Perspective**

The role occupancy perspective, as highlighted by Knoester and Eggebeen (2006) asserted that parenthood is a role or set of roles. This perspective stated that men assume fathering roles according to the cultural and societal expectations of them. Knoester and Eggebeen (2006, p.1538) highlighted that men are 'expected to provide emotional and physical care for their children and to support them financially.' This perspective postulated that men begin to behave differently due to new internal and external expectations of how they should behave when they become fathers. Knoester and Eggebeen (2006) found support for the role occupancy perspective; men feel obliged to increase their financial support for their family after they have had children.

A similar perspective was put forward by Kaufmann and Uhlenberg (2000) in their exploration of Bernard's (1981, cited in Kaufmann et al. 2000; p.933) 'good provider model.' This model suggested that work can assume a greater importance to men when they become fathers. Kaufmn et al. (2000) selected 1,667 married men under the age of 50 in the United States and, controlling for age, education and occupation, fathers were found to be employed more often and work more hours than their counterparts who did not have children. The

study did not highlight the differences in professions and type of employment held by fathers and non-fathers. An area of interest for further research may be within career progression and job satisfaction of fathers and non-fathers. It may be hypothesised that fathers take less risks in their employment and remain in secure but lower paid jobs. This may be especially relevant for young fathers who may feel the pressure to take on the role of provider and so leave education and/or training in order to provide financial support for their new family.

Doherty et al. (2006, p.439) asserted that there is an emphasis given to new fathers' economic provider role and that there is 'a socially constructed consensus that fathers should have a distinctive concern about the financial security of their families.' It could be hypothesised that this expectation brings with it a pressure on the father to conform to these expectations; this pressure in turn could lead to negative psychological effects. In a study conducted by Rhein et al. (1997), conclusions were drawn from interviews and focus groups with 173 teen fathers that a young father's financial insecurity was one of the two factors that was most likely to lead to disinterest in participating in the rearing of their child. Rhein et al. (1997) concluded that disinterest predicts uninvolvement, which can result in longer term negative effects for the mother and child (Dudley, 2007).

#### Boundary Ambiguity Theory

Leite (2007) conducted a study which explored young, unmarried men's movement into the father role using boundary ambiguity theory as a guide. Leite's (2007) findings also resonate with the role occupancy perspective. Researcher and family therapist Pauline Boss defined boundary ambiguity as a state, resulting from either nonnormative or normative stressor events, in which family members are uncertain about who is in the family and who is out, or about who is performing which roles and tasks within the family system (Boss 1977, 1987, 2002). From a family systems perspective, families and relationships



include boundaries, defined as the stated or unstated rules of a relationship. Family boundaries include both a physical and a psychological dimension (Boss, 1992). The physical dimension refers to the perceptions regarding the physical presence or absence of a member of a family. The psychological dimension represents the symbolic existence of an individual in the perceptions of family members in a way that influences thoughts, feelings, behaviour, identity or unity of remaining family members. Leite (2007) explained that definitions of an individual's membership and participation in families are associated with the degree to which the individual is physically present and psychologically participatory.

Boundary ambiguity exists when there is inconsistency between an individual's physical and psychological presence in a family. This can be when an individual is physically present but not perceived as a family member by others or themselves, or when an individual is physically absent but still psychologically viewed as a family member. Boss (2004) stated that high boundary ambiguity is a risk factor for individual and relational wellbeing.

Boss (1992) suggested that times of transition such as the move to fatherhood often reflect heightened levels of boundary ambiguity. Leite (2007) suggested that during the prenatal period there are two groups of men who are likely to experience higher levels of boundary ambiguity as reflected in inconsistencies between physical and psychological presence:

Group 1: men who may be physically absent from any activities and decision making associated with the pregnancy and yet who are psychologically viewed by themselves and the mother of their child, as holding the role of father during the pregnancy.

Group 2: men who may be more actively involved in activities and decision making associated with pregnancy and yet do not experience a psychological identification with the father role.

Leite (2007) explored factors that may contribute to boundary ambiguity during the first experience of a partner's pregnancy and the presence of boundary ambiguity in the relationships of these men and the mothers of their children. Using qualitative interviews with fathers to be and their reproductive partners, experiences of the prenatal period and the degree to which they were psychologically and physically present in both their relationship with their partner and their child were explored.

The 21 young American men who participated in the study were all living separately from their reproductive partners, were aged between 18 and 21 years and reported very low levels of annual income. The participants were sought through medical providers and pregnant women, which means that there are limitations to the sampling approach. The limitations include the probability that those couples with the most contentious relationships, or those fathers who have the lowest levels of prenatal involvement, or both, would be unlikely to participate. This affects the extent to which findings can be generalised.

The interviews focused on men's experiences during the prenatal period and possible sources of boundary ambiguity. The interview had a particular interest in exploring the extent to which the men felt that they were perceived or treated as secondary to the mothers of their children.

The interview transcripts were analysed and coded and the men's physical and psychological presence were rated on scales ranging from 10 = *present* to 1 = *absent*. The use of a scale adds another element of subjectivity to the analysis of the data, which is not acknowledged by Leite (2007). Young men's physical presence was assessed through indications of attendance at prenatal care appointments, contribution of financial support to pregnant partners, time spent with the pregnant partner, and participation in decision making concerning prenatal care and birth planning. A set of indicators described by Fravel et al.

(2000) in relation to child adoption were used to assess the level of psychological presence.

It could be argued that physical presence is a more tangible area to assess than psychological presence. The use of a tool that was developed for a different purpose affects the validity of the claims made. Favel's (2000) indicators were developed to assess adopted child psychological presence among birth mothers, and so is aimed at a different gender and intended for a different purpose to the one being explored in Leite's (2007) research.

Despite some limitations to the research, Leite's study offers a number of useful insights through the use of the voices of the men themselves. Eight of the men exhibited high levels of psychological and physical presence, three men had low physical and psychological presence and ten of the men reflected patterns of inconsistency between physical and psychological presence. These ten men are at risk of higher levels of boundary ambiguity.

Leite (2007) found that many of the men clearly perceived that they had a secondary role compared to the mothers of their children. The young men described the involvement of maternal grandparents as a discouragement to their own physical and psychological presence. Leite (2007) concluded that the medical model that typifies approaches to pregnancy influences men's perceptions of their role during the prenatal period. Leite (2007) suggested that this model may increase the redundancy and marginalization that these men perceive and the degree to which they may feel unnecessary to the process of pregnancy, especially when this is reinforced by behaviours of their partners, or extended family. Leite's (2007) research highlighted the importance of the prenatal period on the wellbeing of young fathers and that boundary ambiguity, as experienced by nearly a half of the participants, can be identified and supported.

This section has looked at some of the psychological effects that occur generally in the transition to fatherhood. Some of the factors identified are especially relevant for teenage fathers, yet have not been the focus of any research identified in this literature review. The next section gives a summary of research based on the life-course perspective, which has direct reference to teenage fathers and clear links with the role occupancy and transformative perspectives.

### **b.3 The life-course perspective**

From a life course perspective becoming a teenage parent can, as Elder (1994) highlighted, initiate several life-altering processes. Sigle-Rushton (2005) argued that these effects are more heterogeneous for men than women; she drew on Parke's (1996) accordance that a life course perspective of fatherhood considers both the assumption of the fatherhood role and the extent to which a man changes as a result. Whereas a young mother is more likely to live with and raise their children, young men's parental involvement is more varied (Sigle-Rushton, 2005). It could be argued that the resulting effects on a young man's life course will be dependent on their level of involvement as a parent. Some young men who father a child may never have a part in their care and upbringing. Another man may live with and take full responsibility for their child; there will be many other situations and circumstances in between these two extremes.

For young fathers who are involved with the pregnancy, birth and upbringing of their child, fatherhood has occurred 'off-time' according to 'a socially prescribed timetable for the ordering of life events' (Neugarten, 1976, p.16, as cited by Sigle-Rushton, 2005). In the UK the average age for becoming a first time father outside of marriage is 27 years ([www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase)).

Sigle-Rushton (2005, p.737) argued that this early assumption of parental responsibility 'interrupts investment in job skills or career development, there could be long term economic implications.'

As discussed in the previous section on the role occupancy perspective, financial insecurity and pressures have been cited among many of the stressors young men associate with fatherhood (Knoester et al. 2006; Johnson, 2001; Kaufman et al. 2006). Chase-Lansdale (1998) suggested that while adolescent fathers may work more hours and earn more money than non-parents in the first few years following the birth, lower educational achievement results in lower long-term labour market activity and lower earnings.

If this is the case and young fathers are leaving education or training in search of immediate economic support for their new family through lower paid and less stable jobs, then the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy's second aim of increasing the participation of teenage mothers in education, training or work to 60% by 2010 to reduce the risk of long term social exclusion needs to also apply to teenage fathers. The implications of this would be to provide the same level of support and availability of services to teenage fathers as are available to teenage mothers.

Sigle-Rushton (2005) argued that there is a heightened risk of social exclusion for those fathers who assume greater responsibility for their children at the time of birth. She also put forward another suggestion which draws on the life-course perspective; early fatherhood for some men may lead to a retreat from adult responsibilities in general, resulting in disinclination to assume adult roles. Sigle-Rushton (2005, p.738) highlighted that proponents of this hypothesis point to evidence that men who are disengaged from family life are 'vulnerable to disadvantage.' Evidence from dated studies (Card & Wise, 1978; Lerman, 1993; Nock, 1998; as cited in Sigle-Rushton, 2005) suggested that these young men earn less, work less, have poorer work attitudes and are more likely to take part in criminal behaviour.

Sigle-Rushton (2005) used data from the 1970 British Cohort Study, a longitudinal study that has attempted to follow the lives of over 16,000 people who were born in one week in 1970. 334 young fathers (fathers at the age of 22) were matched to a sample of 403 young men who did not father a child before the age of 22.

Sigle-Rushton's (2005) findings were:

- Young fathers' educational and career trajectories are interrupted by the early assumption of the parental role.
- Men who assume parental responsibility at an early age are more likely to experience relationship instability.
- There are persistent differences in well-being between young fathers and similar men who were not.
- Comparisons of young fathers with other men confirm that young fathers are at greater risk of social exclusion, malaise and low life satisfaction.

Sigle-Rushton's (2005) research has various limitations in that it was constructed using retrospective reports of both fatherhood and its timing, which can lead to the misreporting of both. Another important limitation to be aware of is the use of relationship status at time of birth as a measure for the assumption of parental responsibility. This paper would argue that a young man who was not cohabiting with or married to the mother of their child could still have a high level of involvement and responsibility for their child. Similarly a young man who is living with their partner may have assumed very little responsibility for their child.

Sigle-Rushton (2005) did not include any information on the characteristics of the mother, which could also be a factor in the wellbeing and involvement of the young man.

Conclusions suggested that consequences of young fatherhood need to be better understood in order to inform policies that can benefit the lives of young fathers and their children.

#### **b.4 Further stressors associated with fatherhood**

As well as financial stressors there are other stressors associated with young fatherhood that have been identified by research conducted here and in the USA (Miller, 1997; Rhein et al. 1997; Speak et al., 1997; Bunting & McAuley, 2004).

Amongst those identified in these studies by teenage fathers were:

- Lack of information about legal rights and child care;
- Difficulties accessing support services;
- Lack of involvement in decision making processes both during pregnancy and the birth;
- Conflict with the maternal grandparents.

These stressors can potentially lead to a lack of involvement despite research (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Speak et al. 1997) revealing a strong desire in many fathers to be involved in their child's upbringing.

Speak et al. (1997) also found that housing and housing policy could often make it more difficult for a father to visit his child or to become independent of his family and have his child visit him.

Caldwell and Antonucci's (1997, cited in Bunting & MaAuley, 2004) review of the literature with regard to the psychological wellbeing of adolescent fathers, discussed the variety of stressors that young fathers face. The authors found that these included:

- Inability to provide financially for their child;
- Problems in the relationships with the mother or her family;
- Difficulties seeing their child and worries about their health.

The implications of such stressors on young men are found by Caldwell and Antonucci (1997) to be lower self-esteem and higher rates of emotional distress. These dated findings are based on small convenience samples with inconsistency in the actual meaning of the term 'adolescent fatherhood,' as often the ages of the fathers involved exceeded the teenage years. The authors called for more research to be conducted in this area. Weinmann et al. (2005) found that although young fathers identified feelings of anger, sadness/depression, nervousness/tension, helplessness and aggression, few requested services to address these issues.

### **C. Service Provision for Young Fathers**

As the above research demonstrates, many of the issues and deficits identified in young mothers are also issues for young fathers along with a variety of different stressors. It is argued by research (Quinton et al. 2002, p.3) presented on service provision for young fathers, that while there is a wide range of services in place to support teenage mothers in their transition to parenthood, there is 'a striking lack of support from health services for young men preparing for fatherhood' and that 'men were mostly ignored, marginalised or made to feel uncomfortable by services, despite their desire for information, advice and inclusion.'

Bunting and McAuley (2004) supported the assertion that while the issue of teenage mothers has been given a lot of attention, investigations into the support available to young fathers is scarce. American research can be drawn on to give information on African American adolescent fathers' (Miller, 1994) perceptions of support. 32% of the 29 fathers involved in the study reported that they had received little or no assistance from family members or services in



learning to be a parent, suggesting that this may be a significant area of unmet need for these young men.

Speake et al. (1997) and Miller (1994) both highlighted the importance placed by young fathers on the value of support received from paternal grandparents. This was cited in the form of practical, financial and emotional support. It must be appreciated however, that this is a heterogeneous group with findings taken from small sample sizes. There is some evidence suggesting that a sizeable amount of young fathers have no support from family members and are treated with hostility, particularly by the adolescent mother's family (Bunting et al., 2004).

In an American study conducted by Fagan et al. (2007) the relationship between the adolescent father and his child was found to be fragile and support from family members is 'an important ingredient in reducing the risk to that relationship' (p.17) in terms of involvement. Using questionnaires with 50 adolescent fathers, Fagan et al. (2007) proposed that policy and programs aimed at teenage parents should target young fathers before the birth as the degree to which young fathers are involved prenatally influences the level of father involvement during the first months following the baby's birth. Fagan et al. (2007) also concluded that there is a need to address the father's stress associated with their new role of parent in order to increase the amount of father involvement.

Social supports from parents and others through support groups and parenting programmes have been found to decrease the parenting stress (Fagan et al. 2007). Fagan et al.'s (2007) non-representative sample limits the generalisability of their findings and relies on responses to questionnaires regarding relationships and parenting stressors. It could be argued that if a semi-structured interview

method had been used then the findings may have been more varied as answers would not have been limited to options given by the questionnaire.

In terms of formal support, there is indication in the literature that service providers are viewed by fathers as unsupportive (Quinton, Pollock & Anderson, 2002) and aimed at solely at mothers (Higginbottom et al. 2006).

Bunting and McAuley (2004) indicated that fathers view social institutions, such as schools, hospitals and social service agencies as barriers to potential involvement with their child. Young fathers reported that they received virtually no professional support, with very few services or groups available for young fathers and their children. Bunting and McAuley's (2004) conclusions are based on Speak et al. (1997) and Miller's (1994) research which is arguably dated and unrepresentative of the availability of service provision today.

Miller (1994) proposed that there should be a specific role for social workers in providing support for adolescent fathers. He argued that practitioners should investigate the stressors in the young man's life as well as the support available to him through family members. Another factor to warrant exploration would be the relationship between the father and the child's mother and her family. Miller (1994) asserted that this should all be considered in order to utilize the support in the environment and to address the sources of stress; as a result the young father would feel supported and connections with their child may be strengthened.

More recently, Dudley (2007) argued for greater policy and programme attention for teen fathers based on an American review of the research on non-residential fathers. Dudley identified areas for improvement in the current service provision:

- Young fathers need more help in understanding the benefits of establishing paternity;

- They need to feel valued as parents;
- There is a need for educational opportunities in job training, completing school sex education and parenting skills.

Dudley (2007) called for more sensitive assessments and interventions which are inclusive and responsive to the importance of the father in the family system.

The research identified appears to propose the ways in which services could meet the needs of young fathers. There is very little research found that includes the fathers' own opinions and views about what they need and want from services. One American based study by Weinman et al. (2002) used a focus group method to explore the service needs of 128 young fathers with a mean age of 21.29 years.

A list of 9 services was donated to the young men as potential choices for involvement and then a series of more open-ended questions were asked. The results are displayed below in Table 2.

Table 2. Services requested (Weinman et al. 2002)

Support service offered	Distribution of responses		Number Reporting
Educational/Vocational	Yes	74 (77%)	96
	No	16 (16.7)	
	Not sure	6 (6.3%)	
STD Screening	Yes	25 (33.3%)	75
	No	48 (64%)	
	Not sure	2 (2.7%)	
Mental Health Counselling	Yes	31 (39.2%)	79
	No	42 (53.2%)	
	Not sure	6 (7.6%)	
Child support Services	Yes	39 (48.1%)	81
	No	40 (49.4%)	
	Not sure	2 (2.5%)	
Substance Abuse Programs	Yes	7 (9.2%)	76
	No	63 (82.9%)	
	Not sure	6 (7.9%)	
Preventative health care	Yes	49 (59.8%)	82
	No	28 (34.1%)	
	Not sure	5 (6.1%)	
Social Services	Yes	55 (64.7%)	85
	No	27 (31.8%)	
	Not sure	3 (3.5%)	
Employment	Yes	96 (93.2%)	103
	No	7 (6.8%)	

The open ended questions asked the fathers to describe what they wanted from a programme for young fathers. 123 young men participated and content analysis was used to identify unique categories. The majority of young men wanted help finding a job, being responsible men, and being good fathers (N=76, 61.8%). They also wanted to be able to see their children and have a relationship with them (N=33, 26.8%). A few stated that they would like help with housing, counselling, legal help, and parenting lessons (N=14, 11.4%).

From Weinman et al.'s (2002) findings it is interesting and relevant to note that the need for help with employment is rated as a high priority. This concurs with the findings of Sigle-Rushton's (2005) study and the role occupancy perspective into the financial pressures and stress to provide for a child that is faced by many young fathers. However, due to the fact that the service categories were donated it could be argued that there are many more unmet needs that were not given as suggestions by the researchers.

I located a small scale British study conducted by Reeves (2006) who used interviews with 10 young fathers in the South East of England; they were all social service users at the time. She found that the young men described professional support as significant, particularly the provision by Sure Start, which offers a range of early learning, health and family services. The staff were described by the young fathers as 'approachable', 'friendly', and 'helpful'. Reeves (2006) also pointed out that some of the young men highlighted the significance of services dedicated to them in the form of groups for young fathers rather than focussing intervention and provision solely on the mother and child.

#### **d. The role of fathers in research**

Researchers have highlighted the lack of attention writers have paid to the role of fathers in research (e.g. Reeves, 2006; O'Brian, 2004; Quinton et al. 2002). Research on young parents is often from the perspective of the mother and as O'Brian (2004, p.20) asserted, there is very little from the viewpoint of young fathers, 'With one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe, young fatherhood, as a site of economic adversity, has become a focus for concern. However, despite this policy interest there is surprisingly little British empirical evidence to review.'

Ferguson and Hogan (2004, cited by Fatherhood Institute 2009) concurred with this assertion. They postulated that 'younger marginalized men who become fathers are not only perhaps the most at risk, but are also the most invisible.' One of the possible reasons for the absence of the young father's voice in research may be the fact that if a pregnancy is unplanned then there can be reluctance for the mother to include the father in the stages of pregnancy, birth and the upbringing of the child (Fatherhood Institute, 2009).

Reeves (2006) pointed out that access to young fathers may be complicated and take considerable time. She found that young fathers are difficult to gain access to even with the co-operation of gatekeepers. Often the young men are unknown to agencies and can have a reluctance to be involved in research sometimes due to the legal implications of under-age sex and the perceived negative attitudes of others towards them.

Rhein et al. (1997) found that the use of focus groups, adolescent research assistants, community recruitment, and personal interviews encouraged the inclusion of subjects who may have declined participation or withheld information in studies using more traditional methods of data collection or recruitment. The authors do not give details about the community recruitment method, but it was successful in that it included 173 teen fathers.

## **4. Conclusions**

### **Limitations of the research**

It has been highlighted throughout this literature review that the studies referred to are subject to critique on various levels; including chronology, the sample used, identity of the researchers and their epistemology, and the geographical location of the research.

A lot of the information cited about the NEET population uses a positivist approach which produces figures and percentages in order to generate government-led targets. The data that these positivist studies create is subject to interpretation by the authors who, in many cases, were writing reports for the DCFS. This results in a possible bias and a negative discourse around NEET status, which in turn informs policy decision making and the provision of support services.

Much of the research on the experiences and psychological effects of fatherhood has been conducted on older fathers, who are engaged in large longitudinal studies. This means that the men who make up the sample are willing participants who are not averse to having their personal lives explored; however the heterogenic nature of this population of young fathers means that the findings from such case studies can not claim to be representative of the general population. As was highlighted in section 4 'The role of fathers in research,' it can be very difficult to locate teenage fathers and challenging to engage them in research. As a result there is a gap in the literature which explores the experiences of teenage fathers, seeks their views and gives them a voice.

It has been claimed by many authors (Coleman, 1998; Reeves, 2006, O'Brian, 2004; Quinton et al., 2002) that researchers have not recognised the viewpoints of young fathers. There is one UK based study by Reeves (2006) that was located in this literature search, which gave the opinions of ten young fathers based in one area of the country about the support they receive. This small-scale study uncovered valuable opinions of teenage fathers which could inform service providers in that area of the UK. A larger study by Weinman et al. (2002) was American based, but highlighted the fact that when asked, young men know what form of help and support they require.

Some of the studies concerning factors associated with teenage fatherhood, such as the findings presented by Weinman et al. (2002) are based on dated research which took place in the USA and have not been replicated in the UK. This limits the conclusions that can be made from this research in terms of relevance to the UK population of teenage fathers. Dudley (2007) argued that what is known about teenage fathers is largely drawn from national health statistics on teenage mothers, small studies with convenience samples and feedback from teenage fathers in teen clinical programmes.

It could be concluded that the Government policy for raising achievement and learning in order to combat social exclusion has neglected to identify teenage fathers as a population who are at risk. The target to reduce the NEET population by 2% by 2010 has focussed on categories that recognise teenage mothers as a vulnerable population under the umbrella term of 'teenage parents,' but fails to identify support and service requirements for teenage fathers.

Sigle-Rushton's (2005) study highlighted that the early assumption of parental responsibility interrupts investment in job skills or career development. This finding accentuates the argument for the inclusion of teenage fathers in Government policy to combat NEET and social exclusion.

Simmons (2008) identified young people who are NEET as being largely from lower socio-economic classes. The research available on characteristics of teenage fathers shares this conclusion and suggests that fathers share a lot of the same challenging circumstances as mothers in terms of low educational achievement and living in low-income communities (Coley et al. 1998; Fagot et al. 1998). This would suggest that within the services aimed at reducing the



NEET population within teenage motherhood, a focus on teenage fathers' needs would also be beneficial.

The heterogenic nature of both the NEET and teenage parent populations suggests a requirement for carefully tailored programmes of interventions, ensuring that the 'one size fits all approach' doesn't happen. This requires the elicitation of the views of the people concerned and, as has been demonstrated in this literature review, further research in this area in the UK which uses the opinions of young fathers is clearly needed.

Bunting and McAuley (2004) concluded that investigations into the support available to young fathers is scarce and that there is an indication in the literature that service providers are viewed by fathers as unsupportive and aimed at mothers. It would be useful to investigate what service provision is available at the present time and how closely this matches with teenage fathers' views on what they would like to receive in the form of support.

Psychological research on this population would be useful to inform educational psychologists (eps) of the issues affecting a young man who is entering fatherhood. The young man could then be effectively supported in the education system through a clear person centred approach which seeks to recognise the stressors and psychological impacts on identity and role.

Professionals within an educational setting, through collaborative work with the ep, could approach the emotional and practical issues faced by the young man with an understanding that is perhaps lacking at the present time. Professionals in the education sector may currently view issues of adolescent pregnancy as a health sector remit for assistance and care. However this paper would argue that there is a role for the ep to explore how best to support the young men who find

themselves entering fatherhood. This could lead to better mental health and academic outcomes for the young man.

This literature review recognises that entering fatherhood is a transformative process with implications for psychological well being; it is argued that this may be particularly relevant for adolescent fathers. Future research needs to examine the experiences of teenage fathers pre- and post- natally and explore the psychological stressors that are associated with this change in identity and role. A careful and sensitive approach to include the voice of the father directly through interview is a methodology that has been infrequently used due to the difficulties associated with the inclusion of this population in research.

Researchers have highlighted the lack of attention writers have paid to the role of fathers in research, (Quinton et al. 2002; O'Brian, 2004; Reeves, 2006) this is especially the case in the United Kingdom. As the voice of the father is underrepresented (Reeves, 2006) future research should aim to use a methodology that is concerned with the individual's description about their experiences.

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## **The Experience of Being a Teenage Father: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

### **Abstract**

Teenage parents are identified by the Government as a population that is vulnerable and at risk of becoming not in education employment or training (NEET). Young fathers are under-represented in research about the experiences of teenage parents; they have also been portrayed negatively in the media. This has resulted in young fathers not only becoming at risk of marginalisation but also an 'invisible' and vulnerable group (Fatherhood Institute, 2009).

Seeking the actual experiences of young fathers has been largely overlooked as an explicit research focus. This study presents findings from a qualitative study with five men who had become fathers in their teenage years. Interview transcripts were subjected to interpretative phenomenological analysis. Resultant themes focused on psychological reactions to being told the news; the transformation of self in terms of role identity and society's expectations; and the role that other people had, including friends, family and professionals within educational settings. The prenatal period was a time of particular relevance to the emotions and reactions of the young men.

This study may be seen as expanding on the knowledge base on teenage fathers, specifically by adding new UK based qualitative data that are attentive to the voice and experiences of the young father. This study is also useful in informing professionals in educational and health settings effective and sensitive ways of working with teenage fathers.

## **PART TWO**

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## **Introduction**

Adolescent fathers are often stereotyped as irresponsible and reckless (Jaffe, et al, 2001). This is despite the fact that relatively little is known about teenage fathers in comparison to young mothers (Reeves et al. 2009) with the majority of writing and research emanating from the United States (for example, Ku et al. 1993; Allen & Doherty, 1996; Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998; Weinmann et al. 2002; Parra-Cardona et al. 2008). There is a smaller British literature which explores similar concerns, such as characteristics of adolescent fathers (Kiernan, 1992; Dearden et al., 1994; Sigle-Rushton, 2004) and service provision for young fathers (Quinton et al. 2002; Bunting & McAuley, 2004).

It is acknowledged in the literature that teenage fathers as a population are difficult to gain access to (Rhein et al. 1997; Reeves, 2006) and this has resulted in a lack of exploration into their direct experiences and the psychological effects of becoming a teenage father.

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of adolescent fathers and the psychological impact it has had on them. Teenage parents are identified by the Government as a population that is vulnerable and at risk of becoming not in education employment or training (NEET). However the National Support Agenda, which is overseen by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit (TPU), is focussed on reducing the risk of long term social exclusion of young mothers. This has resulted in young fathers not only becoming at risk of marginalisation but also an 'invisible' and vulnerable group (Fatherhood Institute, 2009).

This study aimed to highlight and explore some of the needs and the challenges faced by young men who find that they are going to be a father, with the hope of raising the awareness of service providers and professionals in education, social care and health.

## Psychological effects of becoming a father

Teenage pregnancy continues to grow in the United Kingdom (DCFS, 2008) and it is an area that impacts greatly on the life course of the young people involved. It is reported that for babies born to teenage mothers, 45,000 in 2007, (DCSF, 2009) about a quarter of the fathers are under the age of 20 years. Research available on the psychological impacts of becoming a father tends to focus on older men (for example, Strauss & Goldberg, 1999; Knoester & Eggebeen, 2001, 2006) and highlights two main perspectives:

1. The transformative perspective
2. Role occupancy perspective

### The transformative perspective

The transformative perspective (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2001) proposes that fatherhood experiences change men's feelings of well being, connections with family, social interactions and attachments to the labour force. This is closely linked with Strauss and Goldberg's (1999) exploration of the notion of 'selves and possible selves' during and after the transition to fatherhood and with Kaufman et al.'s (2000) use of 'Identity Theory' as a framework for highlighting new roles. It is postulated that if there is a discrepancy between the real and ideal self as a father then a man's psychological well-being may be adversely affected (Kaufman et al. 2000). What research has not explored is how the transformative perspective applies to teenage fathers and how the concept of 'possible self' is altered by the premature arrival of fatherhood. Identity theory (Stryker et al. 1982; cited in Kaufman et al. 2000, p.932) highlights the fact that becoming a father creates a new identity. The identity of teenage fatherhood and how it fits with the identities already held, these may include school/college pupil, son, boyfriend and friend, is an area that is relatively unexplored by previous research.

Leite's (2007) work on the experiences of young and unmarried fathers between the ages of 18 and 21 years during the prenatal period used boundary ambiguity theory as a guide to investigating this transition time for young men. Nearly half of the participants used in Leite's (2007) study were described as reflecting inconsistencies in their psychological and physical presence in the pregnancy, which results in boundary ambiguity. Boundary ambiguity is a risk factor for individual and relational wellbeing (Boss, 2004).

### The role occupancy perspective

The role occupancy perspective (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006) asserts that parenthood is a role or set of roles and men assume fathering roles according to the cultural and societal expectations of them. The role of economic provider is one that has been identified as an internal and external expectation of becoming a father. For teenage fathers, Rhein et al. (1997) found that financial insecurity was a factor that was likely to lead to disinterest in the rearing of their child. The role occupancy perspective connects directly with the NEET status. If society's expectations of an adolescent father is to find a job and provide for their new family then, as Sigle-Rushton (2005) argues, early assumption of parental responsibility can interrupt career development and investment in job skills. There is little qualitative research linked to the exploration of the pressures faced by young men to leave college, school or training to get immediate financial security for their new family. Better understanding of these pressures and experiences faced by young men pre- and post- the birth of their child, by professionals who work with young people in a variety of settings, may lead to more informed advice and support.

## **Aims**

- This study aimed to explore the psychological effects of becoming a teenage father and how this impacts on identity and role occupancy.

Researchers have highlighted the lack of attention writers have paid to the role of fathers in research, (Quinton et al. 2002; O'Brian, 2004; Reeves, 2006) and this is especially the case in the United Kingdom. As the voice of the father is underrepresented (Reeves, 2006) this study aimed to use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to study the experiences of five teenage fathers using a psychological method. IPA was chosen as an approach as it is concerned with the individual's subjective reports and, because young fathers have had little opportunity to express their experience, understandings, perceptions and views, it was felt that IPA methodology would facilitate this.

IPA readily acknowledges that interpretations are affected by the participants' ability to articulate their experiences and the researcher's ability to reflect and analyse (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). It was felt that the honesty of IPA in this respect made it ethically the right choice of methodology to most accurately reflect the experiences of a group who have been described as 'invisible, marginalised and vulnerable' (Fatherhood Institute, 2009).

This study wanted to give young fathers the opportunity to give their perspectives on the experiences they faced and to demonstrate what Yin (1989) describes as existence not incidence. IPA aims to give a thorough examination of human lived experience in a way which enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms rather than according to predefined category systems or expectations (Smith et al. 2009).

See the method section for further discussion of the epistemological matters of IPA.

## **Method**

### Design

This study aimed to explore the experiences of being an adolescent father. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information which was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996).

### Rational and Epistemology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

#### Methodology

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) focuses on the personal meaning and sense-making made by a participant of a particular phenomenon. It was chosen as it aims to capture the way in which the participant has interpreted their experience and acknowledges that the analysis involves a double hermeneutic; the interpretation made by the participant followed by the interpretation of the researcher. The analysis is transparent in its claims as it acknowledges that interpretations are bounded by participants' abilities to articulate their thoughts and experiences adequately and by the researcher's ability to analyse (Brocki & Wearden, 2005). It was felt that due to the lack of young fathers' voices in previous research and their negative portrayal in the media, IPA would be a methodology which would capture their experiences in an honest and transparent way.

The first aspect of the IPA approach involves phenomenology. The following definition of phenomenology encapsulates the approach that this study has aimed to take;

'phenomenological research is expressly interested in people's experiences and particularly the experiences of those people who are usually ignored.' (Levering, 2006, p.457).

Phenomenology has undergone change and development since its inception 100 years ago (Willig, 2001). Transcendental phenomenology was formulated by

Husserl in the early twentieth century and was concerned with the world as it presents itself to humans. Its aim was to set aside, or 'bracket,' that which we think we already know about a phenomenon in order to describe it. IPA acknowledges that it is not possible to suspend all presuppositions and biases in one's contemplation of a phenomenon.

The second major theoretical underpinning of IPA comes from hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. The interpretative element of IPA has its roots in the work of the theorist, Heidegger (1962/1927). Heidegger's notion of 'Dasein' (1962/1927), which translated means 'being in the world,' emphasises that it is not possible to be fully objective as experience, judgements and preconceptions can not be suspended. Heidegger argued that our access to lived time and engagement with the world is always through interpretation. IPA encourages the researcher to be reflexive and reflect on that which is brought to the act of perception through feeling, judging, thinking and remembering.

The double hermeneutic factor of IPA links with Willig's (2001) argument that it is important to consider the differentiation between the phenomenological contemplation of an event as it presents itself to the researcher, and the phenomenological analysis of an account of an experience presented by a research participant. The research participant's account becomes the phenomenon with which the researcher engages.

IPA aims to gain an understanding of how participants view and experience their world. The objective of the analysis is to obtain an insight into an individual's thoughts and feelings about a particular phenomenon, which will inform the researcher about a particular experience. In this, Willig (2001; p.66) states, IPA could be said to 'take a realist approach to knowledge production.' IPA does, at the same time, recognise that a researcher's understanding of a participant's thoughts is influenced by his or her own assumptions and conceptions. This is



viewed as something that is necessary for making sense of another person's experiences, rather than a 'bias' that needs to be eliminated. This means that the knowledge produced by IPA is reflexive as it acknowledges its dependence upon the researcher's own standpoint.

The assumptions made by IPA about the world as identified by Willig (2001) include the following:

- the interest is in the subjective experiences of an individual rather than the objective nature of the world;
- individuals can experience the same objective conditions in different ways;
- it does not claim 'truths' or compare participants' accounts to an external 'reality'; and
- IPA recognises that the meanings people ascribe to events are the products of interactions between actors in the social world.

This means that IPA subscribes to a relativist ontology and has a symbolic interactionist perspective.

It was thought that recruitment would be a challenge for this study and therefore a methodology suited to a small sample size was required; this links to the third major influence upon IPA – idiography. Idiography is concerned with the particular, as opposed to making claims at the group or population level. IPA is committed to understanding how a particular event has been understood from the perspective of particular people and, as a result, the sample size is small and purposively selected.

There is a clear relationship between the features of Grounded theory and IPA and Smith (1995, p.18) directs readers to Grounded Theory literature for guidance because it 'adopts a broadly similar perspective.' They both aim to identify themes and categories that are progressively integrated until master themes are established that capture the essence or nature of the phenomenon

under investigation. The reason IPA was chosen as the approach in this study was due to the fact that IPA was designed to gain insight into individual participants' psychological worlds, while Grounded Theory was developed to allow researchers to study basic social processes. IPA is a developing approach that provides the researcher with clear and systematic guidelines to identify and integrate themes making it a phenomenological methodology that is accessible to those who do not have a philosophical background (Willig, 2001).

### Participants and recruitment method

The sample was selected purposefully and potential participants were contacted via referral from professionals working at Children's Centres.

Attempts were made to recruit teenage fathers or fathers who were in their early twenties who had become fathers in their teenage years. Initial attendance at monthly 'Teenage Better Support Meetings' provided contacts in social care and health settings who could act as gatekeepers to participants. However, it became apparent over time and with frequent attempts to arrange contact, that young fathers are difficult to track and gain access to. An additional difficulty was that participants could not be recruited through a health route unless the additional necessary ethical consent was agreed. This proved too lengthy a process for the time-scale involved in this study.

Appeals for research participants were then made through learning mentors based in secondary schools and colleges and through Children's Centre staff in one local authority. The decision to include retrospective cases was made in order to broaden the chance of identification and also to improve the chances of getting rich and detailed accounts from older men who have had time to reflect on their experiences (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). Participants were selected on the basis that they represented a perspective rather than a population and, as it was especially challenging to recruit participants, it was felt that the boundaries

of homogeneity within the sample could be defined to include both retrospective and current perspectives.

Five participants were recruited; this is in accordance with the recommendation given by Smith et al. (2009) that the sample size should be between three and six participants. The five participants consisted of two teenage fathers aged 17 years old recruited through a group specifically run for young fathers in a Children's Centre, and three fathers who are now in their early 20s but had all become fathers at the age of 17, 18 and 18 years (see Table 1 for an overview). The three older fathers were also recruited through approaches made by Children's Centre staff. All the young men were of white British heritage and lived in the North West of England. The two Children's Centres that recruited the participants were located in areas of high socio-economic deprivation. Four out of the five young men had been at school or college when they became fathers, the other one was in employment. Two of the interviews were conducted at the Children's Centres and three took place in the young men's homes.

There was an assistant researcher present at all the interviews. The attendance of the assistant was communicated clearly to the participants at the time of seeking consent. The role of the assistant researcher was to utilise the recording equipment and to provide a reliability check at the interpretation stage. This was to ensure a degree of confirmability in line with current guidelines published by the British Psychological Society (2000-2010).

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age at interview</b>	<b>Age when told he was to become a father</b>	<b>Age of child</b>	<b>Current context</b>	<b>Context when informed that he was to become a father</b>
John	23years	17years	6years	Employed. Living alone. Sees son every other weekend.	Doing A'levels at sixth form
Paul	22years	18years	4 years	Employed. Lives with his parents. Sees partner and their 2 children regularly.	Working/training
James	23years	19years	4years	Unemployed. Lives with his partner and their three children.	At college
Chris	17years	16years	9 weeks	Unemployed. Shares a house with his partner and their baby.	At school, doing GCSEs
Peter	17Years	16years	18 months	Unemployed. Lives with his father. Sees daughter regularly.	At college training to be a joiner

**Table 1: An overview of the participants**

The participants were approached by a member of staff at the Children's Centre who knew them and their circumstances. Written information about the study, what would be expected of the participant and details about a financial token of

gratitude (£10 high street voucher) for taking part in the study was presented by the Children's Centre staff (see Appendix 1). The young men were asked to take the information away with them and let the centre know if they were willing to take part. The centre then passed on contact details of those willing to participate to the author to arrange a time and place of convenience to conduct the interview. Written consent was obtained at the time of the interview (see Appendix 1).

### Ethical Considerations

The guidelines developed by the University of Birmingham's School of Education Research Ethics Protocol were used to explore and identify the key ethical challenges inherent in the project (Appendix 2). These guidelines are based on the British Education Research Association's Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.

It was acknowledged that, while it was important to meet the ethical criteria set by the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee before embarking on the research, qualitative research also requires sustained reflection and review. It was deemed important to maintain awareness of the extent to which talking about, what could be a sensitive issue for the young men might constitute 'harm.'

It was considered good practice to revisit the issue of consent orally at the beginning of the interview and it was explained that anonymity would be maintained at every stage. The right to withdraw at any time up to the point of publication was explained at the beginning and end of the interview. The participants were offered a gift voucher for taking part in the research, this seemed appropriate as it was felt that the remuneration was not so high as to be

coercive (Ensign & Ammermann, 2008), yet represented an acknowledgment of gratitude that they had given their time to the study.

### Contextualising the interview

Notes were made following each interview to record reflections of interactions with each participant. These additional data sources are useful when interpreting the interview data. Reflections on the context in terms of environmental distractions and on the rapport between the researcher and participant were made by the researcher and the research assistant (see Appendix 3).

### Interview Schedule

A semi-structured interview schedule was constructed consisting of eight open questions in line with the recommendations made by Smith et al. (2009). The interview schedule began with rapport building questions about the young man's child/children and their current situation. This was followed with eight open questions with prompts asked in a chronological order to cover the pre- and post- birth period (see Appendix 4).

The topic areas that the interview schedule covered consisted of;

- initial reactions of self and others to the news;
- the experience of the birth;
- life and identity changes brought about by fatherhood.

The interview questions that were designed to cover the topic area of identity were within the context of the transformative and role occupancy perspectives (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2001, 2006). These questions were placed later in the schedule on the assumption made by Smith et al. (2009) that for most people these things may be easier to talk about after the less abstract topics earlier on. Probes were used to explore the potential influences of fatherhood on social

relationships and education, employment and training. Open questions were asked regarding changes that have been experienced since becoming a father. The phrasing of the open questions was prepared with the attempt to ask after the participant's experiences without limiting those experiences to just one of a range of possible feelings, actions, thoughts or events. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour. All were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### Analytic strategy

The data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996; Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1997; Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). This approach is both interpretative and phenomenological in that it is concerned with the individual's subjective report about an experience and it views the analytical outcome as being based on the joint reflections and frameworks of both participant and researcher.

As the researcher is drawing on their own interpretative resources to make sense of what the person is saying there is a need to reflect upon one's own values, experiences, interests, preconceptions and assumptions that are brought to the process. It is therefore recognised by the IPA researcher that it is impossible to remain 'outside of one's subject matter' (Willig, 2008). To abide by this standard of reflexivity the researcher recorded self-reflective notes in order to attempt to acknowledge pre-existing assumptions that may have shaped her interpretative framework. The notes include research interests, theoretical orientations and issues relating to her identity (see Appendix 3).

The first step in the analysis involved repeated reading of the transcripts and notes being made on descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments in the

transcripts (see Appendix 5). Within each transcript the notes were condensed to produce emergent themes. When this process had been completed with each transcript, recurrent patterns were then identified across the emergent themes and groups of super-ordinate themes were created.

The primary concern of the analysis is the lived experience and the meaning that the participant places on this experience, however the end result is an account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking. This double hermeneutic means that the analysis involves a high degree of subjectivity and is shaped by the researchers' interpretative frameworks. This study acknowledges that the truth claims of an IPA analysis are therefore tentative and subjective (Smith et al. 2009). All transcripts were also read by the assistant researcher who had been present at the interview to check for content validity of themes. In this study interpretations are illustrated by extracts from the transcripts in order that the reader can assess the persuasiveness of the analysis. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the participants.

## **Results**

Several themes were revealed in the analysis of the data. Table 2 presents an overview of the main themes and the subordinate themes within them.



Main theme	Subordinate theme
<b>Immediate psychological reactions</b>	Fatherhood invoking intense emotions A solitary burden Loss of future self and control Protection of self – denial of emotions
<b>Becoming a father – transformation of self</b>	The self as provider Acceleration into adulthood Managing society's expectations and judgements Social identity
<b>The role of others</b>	Silence Lack of support pre-birth The role of friends The role of family College and teaching staff

Table 2: Overview of main and subordinate themes

The subordinate themes under the main theme of 'immediate psychological reactions' link directly with the transformative perspectives and identity theory outlined in the introduction. The themes identified under 'becoming a father – transformation of self' relate to the role occupancy perspective.

Each main theme will be introduced and its subordinate themes will be presented with direct quotes from the participants to illustrate the interpretation, followed by researcher comments to expand on the theme.

## Immediate Psychological Reactions

The first main theme concerned the immediate reactions of the young men upon being told that they were going to be a father. It encompassed several subordinate themes that were present throughout the time leading up to the birth; the intense emotional reaction, the sense of solitude, the loss of future self and control, and the denial of emotions.

### Subordinate theme 1: Fatherhood invoking intense emotions

The researcher asked the participants to recall the time when they were told that they were going to become a father. All the participants were able to recall with clarity the time they were told and the memory of that moment served to remind them of the feelings that had been felt at the time.

The emotions that were recalled were extreme and negative in their nature.

**John:** I was overwhelmed with how scary it was...I was very, very scared.

**Paul:** It was horrible, it really was yeah. It was one of them...I didn't know what to do.

**James:** It was a shock

**Chris:** I felt a bit sick as well cos I felt in shock

**Peter:** scary though init, it is scary. Scary every single day [pause] God it was scary. It was all different emotions...everyday was a different feeling.

The strength of emotion evoked by the recall of this time was apparent for all the participants. The repeating of words, such as 'scary' by Peter and John's use of 'overwhelmed' encapsulate the depth of the fear felt by them when they were initially told. John and Peter both shared how this fear and worry remained throughout the pregnancy.

**Interviewer:** So you had three months from finding out up to when she was born. What were those three months like?

**Peter:** Scary. Every single day [pause] God it was scary.

**Interviewer:** You said you were scared when you first found out she was pregnant...

**John:** Very scared.

**Interviewer:** how long did that feeling last for?

**John:** All through really. Some of the fear went when I told my parents.

Within the experience of fear was the expression by some of the young men of being fearful of the reactions of significant others, such as parents.

**Peter:** Me mum was alright with me [pause] thought she was gonna go psycho, but she was alright.

**John:** They said you must tell your parents and I said I would and that my dad would kill me.

**Paul:** The worst part was telling me mum and dad.

### Subordinate theme 2: A solitary burden

All of the young men interviewed spoke about some experience of being alone and dealing with and trying to come to terms with the situation on their own. Chris and Peter both kept the news to themselves at first and initially did not share the burden of their fear with anyone.

**Chris:** I never told anyone for about 5 weeks or something.

**Interviewer:** What did you do when she told you? Did you talk to anyone?

**Peter:** Not for about a week. Didn't tell anyone then I told me mum.

John emphasised his feelings of being alone strongly and his tone of voice indicated that there were feelings of anger associated with this aspect of his experience.

**John:** I feel like I did the whole thing on my own, truthfully, I was on my own...I'd worry about how I felt, had I done the right thing, had I done things properly. I was a child making big decisions.

Paul describes a similar experience at the time of the pregnancy.

**Interviewer:** Was there any support for you during this time?

**Paul:** Yeah, me mum was like, I'm sure you can sort this out yourself, but it was one of them [pause] I kinda kept it quiet.

### Subordinate theme 3: Loss of future self and control

John, Paul and Peter all talked about the prospect of becoming a father bringing about a loss of sense of control in terms of what they could chose to do and what they had envisaged for the future.

**John:** I'd allowed myself to become trapped. I wanted to go to university.

**Paul:** When she told me I think she'd known for about 3 weeks and she'd wanted to go for an abortion but couldn't, she spoke to a lot of people and she made the decision before she told me that she wasn't going to have an abortion. So it wasn't up to me, the only choice I was making was to stick by her or not.

**Interviewer:** In those 3 months [pregnancy] were you thinking about how your life was going to change?

**Peter:** I just thought, my life's going to stop, it's just going to end. Have to support her. Can't do nothing myself cos of the baby, got to look after the baby haven't I?

**Interviewer:** How have you coped with it all?

**Peter:** Worst was before she was born. It was all different emotions really. Everyday was a different feeling. One day be like, can't wait for her to come, other days was just gutted and that [pause] got me life ahead of me.

All the young men, with the exception of James, made inferences to the fact that the control lay in the hands of the pregnant girl and, in John's case, her family. John, Paul and Chris all talked about the fact that other people knew before them, which served to accentuate the feelings of isolation and lack of control.

**John:** I went round and there was her mum and her nan, her uncle [pause] every family member [pause]. Her mum sat me down in front of the whole family and [pause] and said 'J' is pregnant....within a week her mum had phoned my dad and told him.

**Paul:** She'd spoken to a lot of people and she made the decision [not to have an abortion] before she told me that she wasn't going to have an abortion.

**Chris:** I'd just finished school and she picked me up with her mates and told me.

For Peter, the girl was 6 months pregnant before she told him, leaving him little time to come to terms with the situation before his daughter was born.

**Peter:** She said she didn't know [that she was pregnant], but I think she did.

#### Subordinate theme 4: protection of self through denial of emotions

When the subject of emotional support arose, John, Paul and Chris all made comments that indicated a degree of self protection. In John's case he openly stated that when he saw his son for the first time he attempted to prevent his emotions about the baby from surfacing and this may have been in order to regain some control.

**John:** I went round and the baby was about six days old. He was a lovely baby. I switched off my emotions because I knew they [the mother and her family] were waiting for a reaction. They were shocked by my lack of emotion.

Despite recalling the emotional difficulties they had faced when told they were to become fathers, Paul and Chris both seemed to recoil at the thought of needing emotional support.

**Paul:** Emotional support? I don't think I've ever needed any. I'm a chilled out person.

**Chris:** I'm not really an emotional person [girlfriend interjects – 'You were crying!'].

### Becoming a father – Transformation of self

The second main theme that was evident throughout the transcripts was the personal change that was brought about by becoming a father. Issues of identity and the need to transform and change roles were all discussed by the participants. This main theme subsumed four subordinate themes; the self as provider, acceleration into adulthood, managing society's expectations and judgements, and social identity.

#### Subordinate theme 1: The self as provider

This theme picks up on the suggestion of role occupancy as discussed in the introduction. All the participants except John talked about the need to become an economic provider for their children. John was the only participant who continued with his previous plans, which were to go to university in a different

region of the country. For Paul, James, Chris and Peter there was a sense of urgency and responsibility to get a job and earn money.

**Paul:** You just want to work more cos you want to make sure you've got enough money sitting there just in case 'H' needs anything.

**James:** It just made me quicken up my college career if you like and bring it to an end. I just knew I had to get a job.

**Chris:** I finished school before the baby was born, I just had to get a job and that, try to get money so I could provide for her an that, help her out.

**Interviewer:** So did you have plans for after school before you knew you were going to be a dad?

**Chris:** I was going to get a job anyway, but probably would have done something else. Just had to get what I could.

**Interviewer:** So in terms of your life and what it would have looked like, what's the difference being a dad?

**Chris:** ... if I wasn't a dad I would have had all the time in the world to do whatever I wanted, but now I can't do that cos I've got to look after me baby girl. Got to keep getting work an that.

For Peter it was a similar situation. He left his college course to get work that would immediately give him an income.

**Interviewer:** So you left college cos you were going to be a dad?

**Peter:** Yeah, I needed more money so I started working but then got laid off...I started signing on last week. Got to get money.



### Subordinate theme 2 – Acceleration into adulthood

Participants talked about the adult status that becoming a father brings with it. The comments were associated with the accelerated journey from adolescence to adulthood and, in John's case, the disparity between the adult world of fatherhood and his actual age.

**John:** I felt the pressure from the decisions and the grown-up-ness of the circumstances.

**James:** We haven't had a night out to a club for years. I feel like I've grown out of it now, it's not my thing now...You have to grow up quicker.

**Chris:** I've gone more mature, grown up more. I can't do stuff like I used to.

Peter made a clear statement about how he now views his friends who have not become fathers as 'kids.' For Peter the fact that he is a father means he is now an adult.

**Peter:** I've got some mates back, but they're all kids though, they haven't got babies.

### Subordinate theme 3: Managing society's expectations and judgements

John, Chris and Peter all made comments that refer to the way they thought society viewed them when they became fathers. With these views come certain expectations and judgements about what their role should become and what the life of an adolescent father should look like. For Chris and Peter these

expectations encouraged them to get jobs, for John it had an opposite effect and fuelled his desire to not conform with society's expectations.

**Chris:** [mates would say] what are you going to do when she's born? How are you going to support her and provide for her all that.

**Peter:** People think you should be going to work not college.

**Interviewer:** What were the reactions of other people?

**John:** You're in shit big time. Everyone thought I was trapped – that was the key to everyone's reactions. That was the thought of my step-mother that I'd failed, I was supposed to be bright and I'd failed. I resolved that I wouldn't be trapped.

**Interviewer:** What do you think they meant by trapped?

**John:** That it'd be like a ball and chain, that I'd stop my studies, get a flat or be going round to see the baby every other day, getting dead end job to support them and I thought that's not going to happen, but I think that's what most people predicted.

**John:** And you are always made out to be the bastard by everybody. Judgements are being made by people everyday; everyone just wants to judge you straight away.

#### Subordinate theme 4 – Social identity

For Paul, James, Chris and Peter becoming a father also had an impact on their social identity. It changed the way they spent leisure time and interacted with friends.

Paul talked about how he had been a dedicated swimmer and had represented the county in swimming competitions.

**Interviewer:** Has being a dad changed your life?

**Paul:** Well, it's changed a lot. When I was younger, like from when I was 12, I was second best in the country at butterfly and it carried on, then it was kinda dying down anyway cos when I was doing it fully I was swimming nine times a week, before school and that.

**Interviewer:** Will you ever go back to swimming?

**Paul:** Probably not, it's definitely harder cos it's commitment.

For Peter becoming a father has had a positive effect on the way he spends his leisure time.

**Peter:** I was always getting into trouble, like I would have been in jail if I hadn't had the baby. I stopped doing stuff and calmed down.

Peter was finding it difficult to adjust to his new identity of being a father in front of friends.

**Peter:** They [mates] come round when the baby's here, but [pause] sometimes I wish they never [pause] cos it looks bad like, but they're mates aren't they?

For James and Chris becoming fathers meant that other things had to stop.

**James:** I wouldn't say settle down, but that's what it's kinda like, I suppose, a big stop.

**Chris:** I used to play footy every night. Can't do that now.

## The role of others

All the participants discussed the roles that other people had played at different stages of their experience. This ranged from family and close friends to professionals in school and college. Subsumed under this main theme are the subordinate themes of ignoring, lack of advice and support pre-birth, and the role of friends and family.

### Subordinate theme 1 – Ignoring the situation

Four of the participants talked about their situation of father-to-be as being viewed as a taboo subject, as though it were too tragic an event to mention for some people and that others felt uncomfortable talking about it.

**John:** [talking about a teacher at school] he seemed very nervous to even broach the subject as did a lot of people. Other than talking to my friends no one else spoke about it, not my family, no one, it was as if it hadn't happened.

**John:** The only adults who knew outside my family were the school, but they treated me with such [pause] erm, they didn't know what to say to me.

**James:** The staff were like, oh congratulations and that, and then it all got swept aside really. It was just forgotten.

For Paul, the silence came from within his family home.

**Paul:** My dad didn't speak about it for like a couple of weeks [pause] you could tell he didn't really want to speak about it.

## Subordinate theme 2 – Lack of advice and support pre-birth

The participants all discussed the fact that they had been left without any advice or support during the pregnancy. All except John were present at the birth of their baby. The young men talked about how unprepared they had been for the birth.

**Paul:** I wouldn't say it was traumatic, but it was a shock.

**James:** it was daunting when he was born. I don't recall any advice being offered to me as a father. At the time I was just thinking this is horrible, this is horrible, I mustn't pass out.

Peter fainted during the birth of his daughter.

**Peter:** Yeah, I fainted. Saw the head and just fainted, fell on the floor. I collapsed and can't remember stuff for about an hour. The baby had been born for an hour and I'd just been asleep on the floor.

**Interviewer:** Had anyone told you what to expect?

**Peter:** No, no one. I didn't know what to expect.

Peter described how he had found the situation before the birth difficult to cope with.

**Peter:** Worst was before the she was born.

**Interviewer:** What support would you liked to have got?

**Peter:** Just advice and that. Someone telling me that it would be alright and what to expect and that.

John describes the lack of support he has experienced from pre-birth through to the present day, despite professionals and other key adults knowing about his situation.

**John:** There has never been a time when anyone has supported me in this. School could have helped me, my family could have [pause] but they all pretended that he didn't exist. People shied away from discussing it with me.

### Subordinate theme 3 – the role of friends

All the participants talked about the role that their friends had through their experience. All with the exception of Peter found their friends gave valuable support and were there to talk to. Peter had explained that he had lost many friends when he had started a relationship with the mother of his child and therefore lacked the social support that the other participants described.

**Interviewer:** Was there anyone in your family that gave you support?

**John:** No, no, it was all my friends. I talked to my friends about what I should do next and asked them [pause] erm, it was a lot to take on board for someone that age and to go through it alone, completely alone. I told friends to have someone to talk to. There was no one else to talk to.

Paul's comment mirrored John's reliance on friends for support.

**Interviewer:** In terms of support for you as a dad what has it been like?

**Paul:** ermm, It's just your mates really.

James and Chris both mentioned friends as people who had been supportive and positive.

**James:** My mates were all really good about it, I'd made good mates and they were all like oh yeah.

**Chris:**...mates supported me.

**Interviewer:** did people talk to you about it in school?

**Chris:** Yeah me mates and that.

#### Subordinate theme 4: the role of parents

All of the participants described the reactions of their parents and the subsequent levels of support that followed the news of the pregnancy. The experiences of the participants varied considerably in this area.

John and Paul's parents received the news with negative reactions.

**John:** From my family was very, very, very angry and very disappointed. Cos I was supposed to be quite bright, erm, they couldn't believe I'd done it. They were very, very, very cross and it caused a bit of a rift with my family. That felt horrible, horrible.

**Paul:** Me mum burst out crying and me dad just like...well I didn't give him time to say anything really, I just shot off. They were properly shocked of course.

James's mother was especially displeased with his decision to leave college.

**James:** She [mum] wasn't pleased cos she's always been you know you've got to go to college and get a good job. I could tell she was disappointed. She'd say you've always wanted to do this and it was a bit of a headache at the time. She was saying you should stick it out, we're here to help with the baby, but I'd already made my mind up.

For Chris and Peter their mothers were supportive and did not display negative emotions when they were told about the pregnancy.

**Peter:** Didn't tell anyone, then I told me mum. Me mum was alright with me [pause] thought she was gonna go psycho but she was alright.

**Chris:** They [mum and nan] were all made up and that.

**Interviewer:** Did that help you?

**Chris:** Yeah, cos I knew they'd support me and help me if I needed help an that.

#### Subordinate theme 5: The role of college and teaching staff

All the participants except Paul were at school or college when they discovered that they were going to be fathers. The reactions of college or school staff were mentioned by all these 4 participants. Chris was the only one who experienced positive input and support from a professional in the school setting.



**Interviewer:** When you were at school was there anyone you could go to?

**Chris:** Yeah, me teacher and me mates supported me, they were made up an that. Mainly me form teacher cos I'd had him since second year at school. He'd always been there to support me. I was lucky havin' him.

**Interviewer:** What kind of support did he give you?

**Chris:** Advice and that what to do, where to go and that.

For James, John and Peter it was a very different experience.

**Interviewer:** What about college, did you tell anyone there?

**Peter:** Yeah I told college cos I left. That's why I left.

**Interviewer:** What did college say? Did they help at all?

**Peter:** No, it was crap anyway. I left there with nothing. It was crap anyway.

**Interviewer:** Were you offered any support throughout this time?

**John:** The head of sixth form came to get me from my maths lesson and he knew already, but the only adults who knew other than me family were the school, but they treated me with such erm [pause] they just didn't know what to say to me...it was mentioned once when he [head of sixth form] asked me if everything was ok, was she having the baby or having an abortion. He seemed very nervous to even broach the subject.

**Interviewer:** At college what were the attitudes of staff?

**James:** ...there wasn't any support, no we have groups for that or like is there anyone you want to speak to or anything. I take it people go through that every year, but I didn't get offered anything or pointed to extra reading or anything like that.

## **Discussion**

Each emergent theme stands alone as a discrete concept, but they can also be appreciated within the context that they provide each other. An illustration of these links can be viewed in Figure 1. The three realms represent the three main themes and the subordinate themes can be viewed as impacting across these three areas.

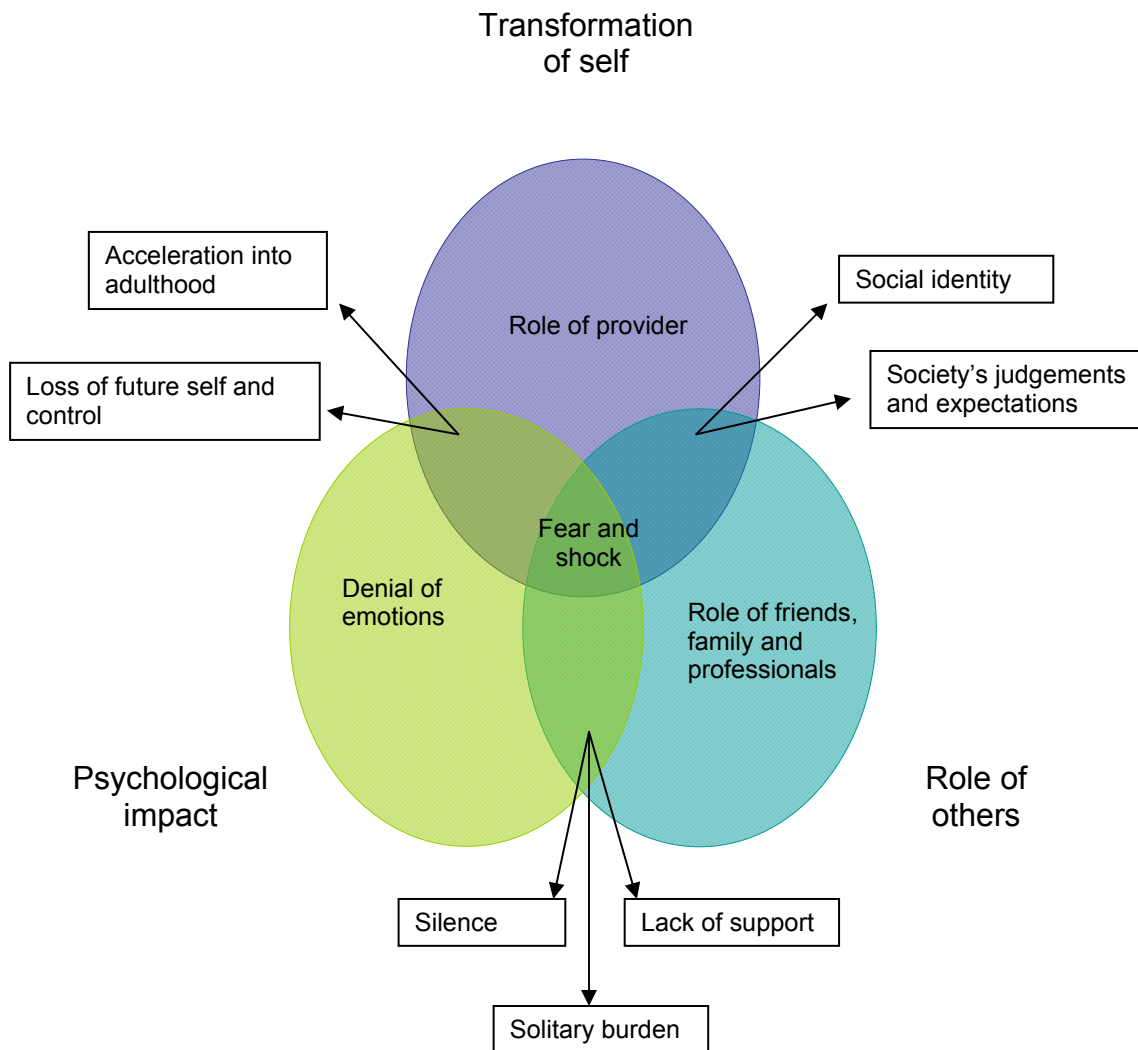


Figure 1: An overview of themes and how they impact on each other

With further reflection of the analysis it could be argued that the themes influence each other. The psychological impact of becoming a father effected the transformation of the self and how the young man viewed his future. This was also accentuated or dissipated by the role of others. The role of others included the expectations and judgements that the young men believe society to hold, which in turn led to the young man viewing his role and future, in most cases, according to what he believed was expected of him. This sudden change in the possible future self may be the cause of the intense emotional reaction.

A main theme of psychological reaction included the expression of intense emotions, which included fear and shock. These emotions can be viewed as remaining central to the other emergent themes as they were at the core of each young man's experience during the prenatal phase of the pregnancy.

The subordinate theme of experiencing intense emotions upon being told about the pregnancy, then the subsequent solitude that the young men experienced in deciding not to immediately turn to anyone for help, and the issue of denying emotions can be explored in the context of research done on 'masculinities' and depression in men.

In research that has been conducted on depression in men (Emslie et al. 2006; Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007; Oliffe et al. 2008) it has been reported that emotional control and the denial of vulnerability are important parts of hegemonic masculinity and that expressing emotion and crying are linked to femininity. O'Brien, Hunt and Hurt (2005) found that the men in their study emphasised the importance of remaining 'strong and silent' about emotional difficulties. Emslie et al. (2006) found that the men in their study referred to the school environment as a place that did not encourage boys to express emotions. This finding is especially pertinent to this research as four out of five of the participants were in a school or college setting in the prenatal period.

As men have poorer social supports, and they ask for professional help less often (Wilhelm, Parker & Dewhurst, 1998) it is important for professionals in the health and education sectors to realise the intensity of emotions that the young men have described in this study and the potential risk this may cause to their mental health. This theme of silence and loneliness continued within the emergent theme of 'the role of others' in the form of lack of opportunity for discussion and support for the young men and, in some cases, acknowledgement of the situation. This was particularly prevalent in the school and college settings,

where professionals were aware of the situation, but ignored it and failed to support the young men at a time when they would have appreciated advice and assistance.

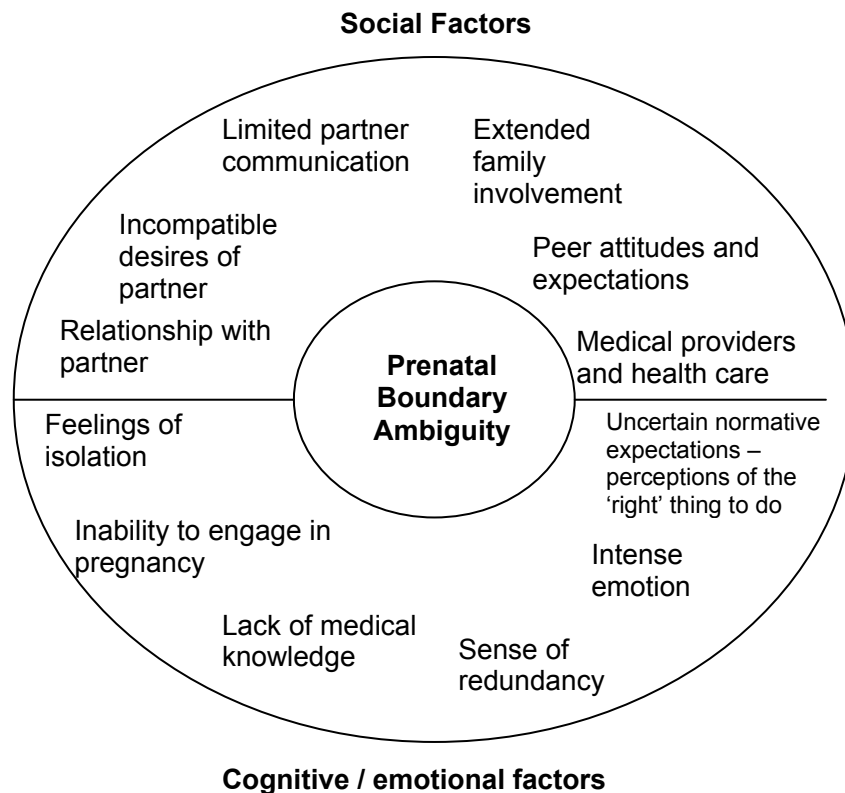
For the participants included in this study the role of others throughout their experience was a main theme of discussion. Friends were a main source of support for most of the young men with their own mothers mentioned by just two of the five participants as being emotionally and practically supportive. Miller (1994) found a similar result in his American based study; a sizeable minority of adolescent fathers receive little or no help from their families in learning to be a parent. This may not be such an issue if the young men were receiving the support from school, college or the health service; however the participants in this study commented on the lack of emotional and practical support offered to them during the prenatal period, which accentuated the solitude of the burden.

It appeared to be during the prenatal period that the young men were especially fearful of what the future would bring and felt a lack of control and support in the situation that they found themselves in. This finding concurs with White's (2010) claim that many young fathers-to-be feel excluded during their partners' pregnancy and with Leite's (2007) recommendation that more educational and support programmes be made available to men before their babies are born. Not only is this important for the wellbeing of the young father, but Miller's (1997) research highlighted how fathers who were more involved in decision making processes during the pre-natal period were more likely to report increased involvement with their children after birth.

With reference to heightened levels of boundary ambiguity at the time of transition to fatherhood (Boss, 1992) the participants, with the exception of James, fall into the group with inconsistencies between physical and psychological presence (Leite, 2007). The participants were physically absent

from activities and decision making associated with the pregnancy and yet were psychologically viewed by themselves and the mother of their child as holding the role of father during the pregnancy. High boundary ambiguity is a risk factor for individual and relational wellbeing (Boss, 2004); therefore it is important for practitioners to have an awareness of possible sources of prenatal boundary ambiguity. Leite (2007) provides a conceptual model to highlight the possible sources of prenatal boundary ambiguity among young, unmarried fathers; this is replicated as Figure 2.

Leite's (2007) model concurs with many of the overarching themes identified in the present study; the role of others displayed as social factors and the psychological reactions and transformation of self is encompassed under cognitive and emotional factors.



**Figure 2.** Possible sources of Prenatal Boundary Ambiguity (Leite, 2007)

Within the theme of 'transformation of self' there was clear support for the role occupancy perspective (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006). The participants all talked about the societal expectation and personal pressure they felt to support their new family financially. This had direct implications for some of the young men in terms of unemployment resulting from the sudden move from education and training to unstable and low-paid employment to provide immediate economic support. These young men then became a Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) statistic. As Sigle-Rushton (2005) explained, if the early assumption of parenthood interrupts career development and investment in job skills there could be long term economic implications.

The notion of a disrupted pathway to adulthood was evident in the themes of 'loss of future self' and the 'acceleration into adulthood.' These themes concur with Lee's (1994; cited in Johnson, 2001; p.517) assertion that fatherhood is best undertaken in adulthood when the developmental tasks of adolescence are completed. The notion of the possible self for the future was interrupted for these young men when they were given the news that they were to become fathers and this may have resulted in the fear that was experienced. The fact that they had to create a new identity of 'father' to go alongside that of school/college pupil and the adolescent social identity is what arguably caused such intense feelings of shock and fear.

## **Limitations**

This section will consider the limitations of the study. Although the sample may appear small, it conforms to the recommended sample size for IPA work (Smith et al., 2009). The sample cannot be viewed as representative of teenage fathers. The aim is to produce in-depth analysis of the accounts of a small number of participants; any conclusions are specific to that group.

The research reported here can claim originality on the basis of its investigation of the experiences of teenage fathers in the UK using a phenomenological and qualitative framework. The present study may be seen as adding new understanding to a growing body of knowledge about the challenges faced by teenage fathers in the UK.

A limitation to this study is the inexperience of the author as an interviewer. Although the principle of sensitivity to context (Yardley, 2000) was adhered to in terms of showing empathy, putting the participant at ease, recognising interactional difficulties, and negotiating the intricate power-play where research expert meets experiential expert; conducting a good IPA interview requires skill and technique which will improve with practice. Smith (2009) points out that novice researchers find interviewing demanding and that 'training and supervision is important in helping to ensure qualitative psychology is done rigorously' (p.181).

The participants' perceptions of the researcher and what might happen to the results may have impacted on the responses given in the interviews. Participants were informed that an assistant researcher would be present at the interview; her role was explained in terms of operating the technical recording equipment and to give credibility to the analysis. It should be acknowledged, however, that her presence may have influenced the participants' responses and made them feel exposed to the judgements of two professionals in the interview situation.

The sample was not a homogenous one in that it included three retrospective participants and two who were experiencing the subject in the present. This was mostly due to the difficulties in recruiting participants. The data obtained from the two younger men was not as rich in content as it may have been had a more experienced interviewer collected the data. The data obtained from the retrospective participants was richer and more detailed as they had the benefit of



being able to reflect on their experiences, this does however mean that they were relying on memory when they recalled their experiences, which can affect the reliability of their recounts. A good IPA analysis is dependent on the quality of the stories it is derived from and limitations to this study are recognised in terms of the difficulties encountered in capturing the depth of all the young men's experiences.

More time to build up a rapport with the participants would be one way of improving future IPA interviews; notes made following interviews with Paul and Chris reflect that the lack of time spent on rapport building may have resulted in their reluctance to articulate their experiences in great depth.

Reflections made after Chris's interview also highlight the negative effect that the presence of his girlfriend throughout the interview may have had on his willingness to talk openly about his experiences.

IPA as an approach suffers from several conceptual and practical limitations directly linked to the role of language.

It has already been acknowledged that an IPA analysis can only be as good as the evidence collected. The role of language in IPA is central to the approach, yet this requires the assumption that language provides the necessary tools to capture an experience. It could be argued that the stories and subsequent analysis informs the researcher about the ways in which the participant can talk about a particular experience within a particular context, rather than about the experience itself. Willig (2001) argues that language constructs rather than describes reality; the same event can be described in many different ways and may be described another way within a different context.

It could be argued that language precedes and therefore shapes experience, as the availability of words to describe a particular phenomenon also provides the categories of experience. This is particularly relevant when asking a person to

describe their emotional experiences in a manner that captures the subtleties of that experience, as was the focus of this research.

## **Summary**

This study has highlighted three main themes that emerged from the stories of the participants; immediate psychological reactions, transformation of self, and the role of others. Within these main themes are further subordinate themes, which link to, affirm and expand upon findings in current and past literature.

The pre-natal period proved to be a significant time for the young men in this study and is a key finding to inform service providers and professionals who are working with adolescent males. Emotions experienced by the young men at this time were extreme and reactive; shock, fear and perceptions of societal judgements resulted in withdrawal from school, college and training courses in pursuit of paid employment. At this time the young men reported a significant lack of support or interest from professionals and they experienced loneliness and solitude.

The findings from this study have implications for the practice of a variety of professionals who work with adolescent fathers and fathers-to-be. Within educational settings there are practical implications for the planning of pastoral care and support to be offered to young men in both the pre- and post-natal period. An awareness of the pressures experienced by the young man to leave school, college or training need to be appreciated by practitioners and explored sensitively with the young man. Establishing links between educational settings and Children's Centres would be one method of improving the availability of support and guidance offered to young fathers. Through the collaboration of

health and educational practitioners more young fathers could be identified and more educational and support programmes be made available.

A participant in this study explained that in the pre-natal period he would have benefited from someone telling him that it would be alright and informing him of what to expect. Future research in this area may consider the potential peer support role that a young father could adopt in supporting other young fathers or fathers-to-be. Peer support may be a valuable method of providing guidance with an empathetic understanding of the emotional reactions facing the young men who, as this study found, often find it difficult to disclose their feelings.

There is potential for future research in this area to expand on the findings of this study. Further exploration could be done through the recruitment of participants from different areas of the UK. Further research is also needed to explore the experiences of young men in the UK from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The perceived pressures, life changes and emotions may differ from the participants included in this study.

This study has highlighted a need to invest further research into seeking and representing the views of adolescent fathers with the aim of providing practical and emotional support that is informed and underpinned by young men's experiences.

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## Appendix 1 a

An example of a consent form given to potential participants. It has been made anonymous for the purpose of this appendix; the authority logo and my contact details have been removed.

### **Participant Consent Form**

**Please be aware that you have the right to withdraw from this research project at anytime.**

All information will remain anonymous however if a disclosure is made that puts you or others at risk of harm, confidentiality will be broken and the appropriate authority informed.

By signing the slip below you are giving informed consent to take part in the research project as described in the attached Information Sheet.

I have read the attached information sheet and consent to take part in the research project described.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 1 b**

**This is an example of a participant information sheet. The authority logo and contact details have been removed in order to make it anonymous.**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

As part of my Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology, I am conducting a research project into the experiences of young fathers.

The voice of the father in research and policy making is often unheard and I hope that this project will give an insight into the challenges faced by young fathers.

The research will consist of an **informal** interview with myself and an assistant psychologist for approx. 30mins. This will be held at the Children's Centre.

**All participants will receive a high street voucher for taking part.**

- **All data collected from the teenage fathers will be anonymous and confidential.**
- The findings from the research project will be disseminated to the Teenage Pregnancy Better Support Group in order to inform the future provision of services.
- Participation is entirely voluntary and participants can ask at any time for the recordings and transcripts of their interviews to be excluded from the project.

If you have any questions about how the research is being conducted please get in touch with me:-

Beth Sheldrake  
Educational Psychology Service

**Appendix 2 Ethics form.**

Not available in the digital copy of this thesis

## **Appendix 3**

**The IPA researcher is encouraged to be reflexive throughout the whole process of the research. As IPA analysis involves interpretation it is necessary to engage in reflective practices which acknowledge the researcher's preconceptions and identity. This is performed throughout the research process, before and after encountering the participant and listening to their story.**

**These self-reflective notes were taken before and during the research process. They are recorded informally and seek to bring to the consciousness personal experiences and beliefs that may influence my data collection and analysis.**

**The assistant Educational Psychologist also made some notes reflecting on each interview.**

### **Informal self-reflective notes**

#### **Research interests and theoretical considerations**

My research interests lie in the desire to explore the experiences of minority groups who have been neglected by previous research yet judged by society. I feel that qualitative approaches are necessary in order to hear the voice of that population. These beliefs are strongly influenced by my interest in person centred, interactional psychological approaches that consider the interaction between the person and their environment.

#### **Identity**

##### **Married female with children**

My husband became a father at age 18 years. This has shaped my conception of teenage fathers and has fuelled my desire to highlight their needs against often negative media portrayal. This perhaps makes me biased in terms of wanting to highlight positives and to show that these young men have strong emotions and need more support than they currently receive.

I have children of my own and so appreciate how life changing becoming a parent can be. I have experienced the transition to parenthood, I may draw on reflections of my own emotions instead of staying neutral to the participant's story.

#### **Ethnicity**

I am white British and so were all the participants in the study. This is a reflection of this area of the North West where diversity in ethnicity is poor.

### **Psychologist**

My professional role means that I have a desire to highlight strengths and look for positives. I often work with adolescent boys in this region of the North West; this means that I have preconceptions about this population. Working as an EP means that I am often invited to work with young people who are presenting with difficulties or problem behaviour; this gives me a skewed view of the problems faced by adolescents in this area.

The Children Centres that found participants to recruit for the research were all located in economically deprived areas of the region. This means I need to reflect on my preconceived ideas and experiences of difficulties faced by people in these areas. Social and economic deprivation are important factors for the people living in these areas and it could impact more strongly on the way they view me as a professional; the power imbalance may be greater.

### **Power imbalance**

How was I perceived by the participants? An outsider, naïve to their experiences, in a position of authority? There was an assistant ep with me; did this create an even greater power imbalance?

### **Values**

What is important to me as a researcher? To give a voice to these young men who are described as invisible and vulnerable. Make it an empowering experience for them, a chance to give their side and talk about what it has been like for them.

### **Perceived constraints of the research**

Finding participants to take part. Ethical restrictions of using participants through the NHS and Connexions route. The need to rely on gatekeepers to approach participants. The difficulties of arranging interviews with this population – 17 un-kept appointments.

The lack of time to ensure good rapport building. The difficulty to make contact with the participants meant that follow up visits were not possible.

Interview setting – did it feel intrusive in their own home? Did it feel uncomfortable in the Children's Centres?

Having two professionals present at the interview may have added to feelings of discomfort.

The need to tape record the interview caused an additional barrier to creating a relaxed and open rapport.

### **Preconceptions of the participants**

The areas where the participants lived are economically deprived; did I make preconceived judgements about their aspirations and achievements?

The demography of the areas led me to have concerns that the articulation of their experiences would not be to a depth sufficient to provide rich data.

### **Reflections on Interviews**

**John** – first interview so more uncertain of the questions and prompts. I was slightly nervous, which may have made John feel uptight. Rapport building went OK and I felt that he opened up to me, especially in the second half of the interview. Setting was in the children's centre, it was quiet and private and the room felt informal and comfortable.

*Assistant researcher's views:* The interview started and ended well, with each question flowing into the next. John appeared relaxed answering B's questions, giving detailed accounts for each one. The setting had a relaxed feel, and both B and John engaged well with each other.

**Paul** – interview took place in the children centre and felt less relaxed than the previous one. Paul was difficult to get to expand on his experiences and he was reluctant to talk about feelings and emotions. Paul was more descriptive and factual in his account of his experiences.

*Assistant researcher's views:* Paul appeared more difficult to connect with despite B's best efforts to engage with him. Paul seemed awkward expressing himself and B tried several ways of reframing questions to try to get Paul to 'open up'. The lack of Paul's openness, this may have been down to the setting and time of day he was interviewed at, late in the afternoon and he had been travelling all day for work.

**James** – the interview took place at James's house. His partner was there but not in the room. His daughter sat with us throughout the interview. James was keen to talk, he often went off on tangents about other topics and I had to bring him back to answering the question. Having his family there didn't appear to bother James although maybe he omitted certain facts/thoughts/feelings from his accounts as a result of their presence. The setting was noisy (dogs and a parrot). The rapport felt good.

*Assistant researcher's views:* James was very expressive and keen to share his experiences with B. The rapport between James and B was very good and relaxed, despite the potential distraction of his daughter and pets. James's eagerness to tell B his experiences did mean he often talked about other things, but B was excellent getting James back on track with the topic. James's partner

was in the other room and could have overheard James speaking, but this did not seem to put James off. This was an excellent interview to witness.

**Chris** – I went to his home that he shares with his partner as he had requested. His girlfriend sat next him throughout the interview, holding the 9 week old baby. Chris appeared nervous and was put off by the tape recorder. It was difficult to get rich data from Chris and I felt he was censoring his responses due to the presence of his girlfriend. Chris talked more freely when the tape recorder was switched off.

Issues to consider: New baby – time for it to sink in. Lack of sleep impacting on willingness to speak. Trust of me as a professional. Presence of his partner and baby contributing to feeling exposed and under scrutiny.

*Assistant researcher's views:* When the interview started, Chris stated he disliked the sound of his own voice being recorded, but after B reassured him it was only for her transcribing purposes and no one else would hear it, B asked if he wanted the recorder switching off but he said no. His girlfriend also joked about the tape recorder which may have put Chris off initially. Chris did seem reluctant to elaborate on some questions, and this meant B had to reframe questions to try and get his account. I feel the presence of his girlfriend and baby next to him may have been a reason for Chris's lack of rapport and willingness to expand on answers.

**Peter** – I met Peter at his dad's home where he was staying. He was alone. Peter seemed happy to talk to me although he had just found out that he had an appointment to keep, which made me feel that I couldn't keep him too long. He was chatty and it felt that he was honest about his feelings. He confided in me that he had fainted during the birth and this felt that he was sharing something that he felt ashamed of.

*Assistant researcher's views:* The interview went well although Peter did make it clear he had to go somewhere which did make the interview have a rushed feel. Despite this, B and Peter had a good rapport and questions and answers flowed. Peter appeared very happy to recall his experiences, despite saying he was ashamed of fainting during the birth. Interviewing Peter alone in his home could have given him the confidence to elaborate with B, as he felt at ease and relaxed.

#### **Appendix 4: The schedule to the semi-structured interview**

**The aim of developing this schedule was to facilitate a comfortable interaction with the participant. The questions prepared were open and do not make assumptions about the participant's experiences or concerns. Following advice given by Smith et al. (2009) seven questions were prepared along with prompts. The topics were put in a logical chronological order.**

Research aim:-

To explore the experiences of being a teenage father

#### **Rapport building**

Family detail and discussion.

#### **Pregnancy**

Can you tell me about the time you found out that ----- was pregnant?

[prompts: how did you find out/ how did you feel/ what were the reactions of your family/ what did your friends say?]

#### **The Birth**

Can you tell me about the day he/she was born?

[if not there – why weren't you there? Did you want to be there?]

#### **Post-natal**

What's it been like since ----- arrived?

What are the main differences in your life since becoming a dad?

Can you describe what it's like to be a dad?

[prompts: changes in your job/training/ relationships with friends and family/ money issues/ where you live/ involvement]

Throughout the whole experience who has given you the most support?

[Probes; what has stopped you accessing support?]

Prompts for me:

**Why? How? Can you tell me more about that? Tell me what you were thinking? How did it feel?**



**Appendix 5 An example of an analysed transcript.** Key: Normal text: Descriptive comments; *Italic text*: Linguistic comments; Underlined text: Conceptual comments.

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
Tricked and trapped	<p>[approx. 10 mins rapport building]</p> <p><i>Can you tell me about the situation, when he was born?</i></p> <p>I went to uni just after he was born.</p> <p>His mum was my girlfriend at the time.</p> <p><i>What was it like when you found out?</i></p> <p>Well leading up to it...when I was her boyfriend she had often eluded to the fact that she wanted to have my baby...and</p>	<p>Context of situation at the time.</p> <p>Suspecting her intentions, prior plan.</p>

<p>Control in the hands of the girl and her family – he is isolated and alone</p>	<p>she phoned me up and told me to come round... and I went round and erm there was her mum and her nan and her uncle – every family member which was strange erm and her mum sat me down in front of the whole family and ...and said Js pregnant.</p> <p>My first reaction was to look at her and say, you did it on purpose and she ...tried not to laugh. Then started to try to be serious and started to shout to try and be serious, but it wasn't real</p>	<p>Situation when told. All of her family gathered round. Vivid memory of this moment. Reliving it.</p> <p><i>Emphasising the fact that all her family were there through naming individually and then repeating 'every family member' 'whole family.'</i></p> <p><i>'Sat me down' - like a child, controlling</i></p> <p>Him on his own.</p> <p><u>A me and them situation – it's them against me. Is this where it becomes a battle of wills and resentment, the need to kick back against the situation?</u></p> <p>First reaction – tricked, on purpose</p> <p><u>Tricked – links in to above – fight back response, not nice feeling to be tricked, makes you feel stupid</u></p> <p>Her reaction – finding it funny, pleased with the outcome – her plan had worked. Twisting emotions around, pretending.</p>
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<p>Challenge of identity – age, teenager Threat to future</p> <p>Initial emotional reactions</p>	<p><i>you were told you were going to be dad?</i></p> <p>I felt like I was far too young, I felt like I'd moved on from that girlfriend, I didn't feel interested anymore. I wanted to go to university.</p> <p>I was overwhelmed with how scary it was.</p> <p>She found it exciting, I didn't. She was thrilled and really excited.</p> <p>She asked me when we were on our own if I was excited, I wasn't I was very, very scared.</p>	<p><u>A teenage relationship that has suddenly turned grown up</u></p> <p><i>A string of reasons why is was a negative event.</i></p> <p><u>Thinks future aspirations to go to uni may be in jeopardy?</u></p> <p><u>Overwhelmed – too much to deal with</u></p> <p>Feeling too young.</p> <p>Future plans.</p> <p><i>Use of the word 'overwhelmed' to express the extent of feeling</i></p> <p>scared.</p> <p>Extremes of emotions - contrasting</p> <p>Contrasting feelings to her. <i>Repeating 'very' for <u>emphasis</u></i></p>
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His family's reactions	<p><i>And when they told your dad, what was the reaction you got from your family?</i></p> <p>From my family was very, very angry and very disappointed. Cos I was supposed to be quite bright, erm, they couldn't believe I'd done it, they were very, very, very cross and it caused a bit of a rift with my family.</p> <p>That felt horrible, horrible, but I knew I had a way out because I was going to university. I had no bond with the mother and to her it</p>	<p>Strong emotional reactions</p> <p><i>'very, very' emphasizing the strength of feeling.</i></p> <p><u>This action was the opposite to being 'bright'? identity shifting and how others are perceiving him.</u></p> <p>His family's reactions. Anger. Disappointment.</p> <p>Negative connotations. <u>Way out – run away? Avoid the situation? Become free?</u></p> <p><i>Repeating 'horrible'</i></p>
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<p>Negative reaction from friends and family</p> <p>Others' perceptions of what a teen dad's life is like</p> <p>Link to failure/academic success. Identity questioned and future possible self changes.</p>	<p>completely biased so I didn't value their opinion.</p> <p><i>What were the reactions of your friends?</i></p> <p>'You're in shit big time.'</p> <p>Everybody thought that I was trapped – that was the key to everyone's reactions. That was the thought of my step-mother.</p> <p>Was that I'd failed, I was supposed to be bright and I'd failed.</p> <p>I'd allowed myself to become</p>	<p>Need to talk.</p> <p>Alone.</p> <p>Views of her family.</p> <p><u>Others perceptions of what a teen dad is like/does. Perceived as a failure. This could change self-identity, seen as clever before this happened.</u></p> <p>Trapped. Reactions of others. Catastrophising. <i>Repetition from early the link with 'cleverness' and becoming a dad as contrasting themes.</i> <i>'resolved' – strength of feeling about what</i></p>
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Own life out of control – need to regain some control	trapped. I resolved that I wouldn't be trapped.	<i>had happened to him, shift from fear to anger? Conscious decision to take action.</i> Viewed as a failure. Academic – bright – failed Let everyone down. <u>Trapped as a theme of disempowerment, working to manage people's perceptions of himself as not stupid.</u>
Society's perception/ expectation of a teenage father = role of worker/provider	<p><i>What do you think they meant by trapped?</i></p> <p>That it'd be like a ball and chain, that I'd stop my studies, get a flat or be going round to see the baby every other day, getting a dead end job to support them and I just thought, that's not going to happen, but I think that's what most people predicted, that it was</p>	<p>Trapped, tricked.</p> <p>Taking back control.</p> <p><u>Voicing his constructs of what failure looks like?</u> <u>Society's description of a teenage father?</u></p> <p>Perceptions of trapped and what it could mean to be a teen dad.</p> <p>Dead end job, no career.</p>



<p>Need for adult support</p>	<p>the end of my life and I just thought I can't let that happen.</p> <p><i>You said you were scared when you first found out she was pregnant.</i></p> <p>Very scared</p> <p><i>How long did that feeling last for?</i></p> <p>Some of the fear went when I told my parents</p> <p>and whilst they were really cross with me, I'd told someone older than me.</p>	<p><u>End of life – social life? Career? End of personal gains? Baby = end of life, paradoxical concept of new life ending existing life.</u></p> <p>Other people's predictions of what life is like for teen dads.</p> <p>Resolving to not let it happen.</p> <p><i>Use of the word fear – stronger than 'scared'</i></p> <p><u>The fear can be managed by others, it can be reduced. Letting self take role of child again and parents taking on some of the fear.</u></p> <p>Situation very scary.</p>
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<p>Change of identity in school</p>	<p><i>Were you offered any support throughout this time?</i></p> <p>No, no. My teacher erm... when my dad found out, when her mum phoned him, I was called out of school, so the head of the sixth form came to get me from my maths lesson and he knew already, but the only adults who knew other than my family were the school, but they treated me with such</p> <p>erm...they just didn't know what to say to me.</p>	<p>Adult roles.</p> <p><i>Hesitation when recalling the role of his teacher/school</i></p> <p>Reaction of parents.</p> <p><u>Feeling like caused a major drama that no one knew how to react to or handle – a scandal? Did this make him feel uncomfortable in school, like it was a taboo subject, everyone knew but no one acknowledged</u></p> <p><u>Change of identity in school from bright student to foolish irresponsible boy?</u></p> <p>Role of teacher/school.</p>
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<p>Role of school – uncertain what to do/say Ignored it</p> <p>Silence – taboo</p>	<p>They just, it was mentioned once when he asked me if everything was ok, was she having the baby or having an abortion, the head of sixth form asked me and that was it. He seemed very nervous to even broach the subject as did a lot of people. Other than me talking to my friends no one else spoke about it, not my family, no one, it was as if it hadn't happened.</p> <p><i>Can you tell me about the day he was born?</i></p>	<p><i>Hesitation, disgust in tone of voice?</i> Head of sixth form.</p> <p><i>Use of term 'they' – collective, not just one member of staff</i></p> <p>Negative way of being treated.</p> <p>Not knowing what to say.</p> <p><u>Became a taboo topic, no one knew how to react. Same as if something really bad happens to someone, fear of mentioning it. This caused isolation, did it make him feel disgusted with himself?</u></p> <p>Lack of support/lack of interest from school. <i>Emphasizing that no one spoke about it</i></p> <p>Ignoring, Silence.</p> <p>Nervous to discuss.</p>
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<p>The role of father pre-birth affecting the post birth contact and feelings</p> <p>Emotions – denial of emotions, self-preservation, male characteristic?</p>	<p>I wasn't there...I got a phone call and it was either her or her mother...and they said come and see the baby and I hadn't seen her throughout the pregnancy since the day her mother phoned my parents....I went round and the baby was about 6 days old, he was a lovely baby. (pause)</p> <p>I switched off my emotions because I knew they were waiting for a reaction. They left me on my own with him and I knew they</p>	<p><i>Hesitations through recalling the day he was born, memory not as vivid or too painful to recall?</i></p> <p>As if it hadn't happened.</p> <p>Role of father pre-birth linked to post birth contact?</p> <p><u>Switching off emotions, trying to claw back some control and revenge against her and her family – is this something he has learnt to do over the past months? Self-preservation?</u></p> <p><u>Ensure that the baby is not included in this battle</u></p> <p><i>Pause – reflecting, painful or happy memory – difficult to tell, lost in thoughts</i></p> <p>Absence at the birth.</p> <p>Told by a phone call, not as vivid a memory as when told she was pregnant. No contact through the pregnancy.</p>
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<p>Denial of emotions</p> <p>Not a part of any it but perceived by other as having a major role.</p>	<p>were listening at the door.</p> <p>They were shocked at my lack of emotion and my desire to move on with my life.</p> <p><i>Did you feel the same inside as you were showing on the outside?</i></p> <p>Yes, I did. I hadn't seen her, she hadn't got a bump when I saw her and I didn't see her. I didn't feel a part of the pregnancy,</p> <p>I didn't feel part of any of it. She wasn't my girlfriend in the first</p>	<p>Saw the baby for the first time.</p> <p>Switched off emotions. <u>Man and his show of emotions – shame to display emotions?</u> Being watched.</p> <p>Shock.</p> <p>Lack of emotion.</p> <p>Move on. Think of future.</p> <p><u>Isolation recurring. Not feeling a part of it yet had consumed the last 9 months of his life through emotional upset, rift in family, identity and other perceptions of him.</u></p> <p>Didn't feel a part of the pregnancy.</p> <p>Her baby.</p>
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<p>No support, yet there were opportunities for support</p>	<p>place, she was having a baby, we weren't. They were my feelings at the time.</p> <p><i>What's it been like since then?</i></p> <p>She wouldn't let me see him without her there, so I chose not to see him for some time. I didn't want her controlling me.</p> <p>There has never been a time when anyone has supported me in this,</p> <p>it's been really disappointing.</p> <p>School could have helped me,</p>	<p><u>Regaining some control at the expense of not seeing his son. The power lies with her. The expectation of having some support from somewhere leading to disappointment when left to deal with it alone.</u></p> <p><u>Disappointment as a reflection made through adult eyes.</u></p> <p><i>Use of word 'controlling' again, emphasises this feeling</i></p> <p>Access made difficult.</p> <p><u>Taking a hindsight viewpoint, a retrospective opinion of what could have been. Forgiving and understanding of the actions of family and school – has this been necessary in order to move on?</u></p> <p>Her controlling. Lack of support.</p> <p>Reflections on when help could have been offered.</p> <p>Pretended he didn't exist.</p>
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Ignoring the situation	<p>my family could have,</p> <p>they would have been the best.</p> <p>But they all pretended that he didn't exist, it was hard, I guess it was hard for them too. People shied away from discussing it with me and I didn't discuss it with many people either. I wouldn't have wanted external</p>	<p>Other people's reactions.</p> <p>External services, how perceived.</p> <p><i>'I wouldn't' – some personal control</i></p> <p>Clash of what was wanted.</p> <p><i>Use of the word 'truthfully' to emphasize that this is how he really felt – have people doubted him in the past, does he think I'm doubting him?</i></p>
Perceptions of external services	<p>services getting</p> <p>involved because I imagine they would try and get us back together and I wouldn't have wanted that.</p> <p>I feel like I did the whole thing on</p>	<p>Alone.</p> <p><u>Retrospective questioning of self and decisions made, indicating that now he is at peace with those decisions?</u></p> <p>Worry.</p> <p><i>'A child making big decisions' – this phrase is a useful summing up of his feeling</i></p> <p>On his mind.</p>

<p>Guilt, worry and isolation</p> <p>Role of child in an adult world- escalating into adulthood</p> <p>Decision to go to uni, not supported by anyone</p>	<p>my own, truthfully.</p> <p>I was on my own. When I was at uni it used to really pray on my mind and I'd worry about a lot. I'd worry about how I felt, had I done the right thing, had I done things properly.</p> <p>I was a child making big decisions.</p> <p><i>During those early years how did being a dad change your life?</i></p> <p>It didn't change what I did, I went to uni but emotionally I felt the pressure from the decisions and</p>	<p>Questioning self and actions.</p> <p>feeling too young.</p> <p>Making decisions.</p> <p><i>'grown upness' links to previous phrase of child making adult decisions</i></p> <p>University.</p> <p><i>Trailing off, pause, questioning self, feelings of guilt, lost in thought and the emotions raised by recalling this time?</i></p> <p>Pressure.</p> <p><u>A repercussion of society's beliefs and expectations of what a young father should do? Going to uni the opposite of staying and facing responsibilities? = guilt</u></p> <p>Absence</p>
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<p>Going to uni wasn't necessarily the easy option</p> <p>Financial pressure – even services made the decision to go to uni difficult</p>	<p>the grown upness if you like of the circumstance and that this boy had been born and I hadn't been there...</p> <p>I always wondered have I done the right thing, am I doing the right thing.</p> <p>Because it's just so difficult to know.</p> <p>The CSA are just despicable – when I was at uni I got billed for 40, 000 pounds.</p> <p>They billed me 90 pounds a week. It was depressing and stressful, but quite funny</p>	<p><i>'despicable' – strength of feeling</i></p> <p>Questioning decisions made.</p> <p><u>Further compounding society's expectations that financial support is the role of the father</u>  <u>Doubting was he right to go to uni or was that the wrong thing to have done? The morally wrong thing as judged by others</u></p> <p><i>'Depressing'</i></p> <p>CSA.  Money, financial stress.</p> <p><i>'emotionally draining' – depth of description into feeling</i>  <u>The financial pressure was the most difficult to deal with- feelings that not a proper man if can't provide for child?</u></p>
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<p>Judgments made by others</p>	<p>really as I was a student living on 25 pounds a week.</p> <p>That was the most emotionally draining aspect of the whole thing.</p> <p>The CSA nearly broke me – emotionally broke me. And you are always made out to be the bastard by everybody.</p> <p>Judgements are being made by people everyday, everyone just wants to judge you straight away, although men are often more sympathetic than women when you explain the situation.</p>	<p><u>The role of bastard – the man's responsibility and duty to stay and support not to go off to university</u></p> <p>Depressing.</p> <p><i>'Broke me – emotionally broke me' – strong use of language to express severity of situation</i></p> <p>Emotionally draining dealing with the CSA.</p> <p>Harsh judgments made by others.</p>
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	<p><b>[close of interview, recapping and reflecting. General chat about his son now]</b></p>	
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## **CONTEXTUAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES TO ACCOMPANY APPENDIX 5**

**Appendix 5** provides an example of an analysed transcript. The middle column, 'Original Transcript' is the participant's data that has been transcribed verbatim. The column entitled 'exploratory comment' displays the initial level of analysis, the semantic content and language used is explored. The text has been explored using three discrete focuses; descriptive comments, linguistic comments and conceptual comments.

Descriptive comments are shown in normal text in the transcript. These comments focus on describing the content of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk within the transcript. Key words, phrases or explanations are recorded.

Linguistic comments are shown as italic text in the transcript. These comments focus on exploring the specific use of language by the participant.

Conceptual comments are shown as underlined in the transcript. These comments focus on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level.

The column entitled 'emergent themes' is where the exploratory comments have been analysed to identify themes within the data.

The emergent themes were then put together to form clusters of themes which related to each other. The themes from each transcript were then analysed together to identify patterns across the transcripts. This process produced subordinate themes within main themes.

## **CONCLUDING CHAPTER**

This chapter contains some final reflections and conclusions relating to the research project.

Additional considerations included here relate to the design of the study, the impact of the study and the role of the educational psychologist.

### **Reflections on the design of the study**

This study used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the approach to conducting qualitative research into the experiences of teenage fathers. IPA has its origins in phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography.

Epistemologically, IPA as an approach recognises that attempting to get as close as possible to the personal experience of the participant becomes an interpretative endeavour for both the researcher and the participant; analysis is therefore subjective and limited by the constraints of a double hermeneutic.

The aim of this study was to contribute towards an understanding of the experiences of becoming a teenage father. IPA was selected as an appropriate methodology for the study as the approach is particularly suitable to exploring personal issues and gaining a deeper, more personal analysis. The transparency of the approach appealed to me as it encourages being openly reflexive throughout the process and recognising personal preconceptions and experiences that may influence the study. I felt that this had ethical importance in terms of the population involved; they had previously been described as 'invisible' and 'vulnerable' (Fatherhood Institute, 2009) and I wanted to ensure that their views were portrayed with an accuracy that acknowledged the limitations of the researcher's interpretation.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. Smith and Osborn (2003) described semi-structured interviews as the exemplary method for IPA however, it is important to recognise the limitations of the methodology. Smith et al. (2009) recommend developing an interview schedule in order to 'facilitate a comfortable interaction with the participant which will, in turn, enable them to provide a detailed account of the experience under investigation' (p.59). The interview schedule employed for this study was with the intention of facilitating the participants' ability to tell their own story in their own words, however it needs to be acknowledged that the questions posed must be crucial to the replies obtained (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). It could be argued that having a schedule gives a structure to the analysis before the process of data collection begins.

The role of the interviewer and the perceptions held by the participants of myself and the research assistant also need to be acknowledged as factors that contribute to the generating of the account given. I may have influenced the account given through my levels of passivity throughout the interview; active listening, prompts and encouraging further discussion on topics will all have had an impact on the data obtained. In future research I would prefer to have a less structured approach to the interview, this will be achievable with experience. I would aim for an interview process that more resembles Alexander and Clare's (2004) description of a collaborative approach that fully recognises that the participants are the primary experts.

Some IPA studies have used a focus group methodology (Dunne & Quayle, 2001; Flowers et al. 2003, 2001, 2000) to gather data. I believe that this would have been inappropriate for this study due to;

- Ethical considerations regarding anonymity and confidentiality;
- The sensitive and personal nature of the topic;
- Increased pressure of group conformity effecting data;

- Practical difficulties of gathering the participants in the same place at the same time.

Smith (2004) warns that focus groups may not be consistent with IPA's theoretical stance of being 'committed to the detailed exploration of personal experience' (p.50).

When gathering and analysing data obtained it is difficult to suspend all pre-conceived ideas and knowledge about the topic that is gained from experience and awareness of current literature. Smith and Osborn (2003) state that in IPA research there is no attempt to test a pre-determined hypothesis of the researcher, rather the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail, an area of concern' (p.53). This is where it may have been beneficial to have conducted my critical literature review after gathering and analysing the data, however the literature review was necessary to identify an area to conduct the research on.

There are limitations to my sample. IPA sampling tends to be purposive and broadly homogenous. Although my participants all shared the experience of being a teenage father and were all of white British heritage, three gave retrospective accounts whilst two were experiencing the phenomenon in the present. This was due to the difficulties in finding participants; I experienced 17 unmet appointments by men in their early 20s who had become fathers in adolescence. The data obtained from the older fathers were richer and more detailed. They were able to articulate and reflect on their experiences in greater depth compared to the adolescent young men. This is a factor to consider when embarking on future research with this population; a different methodology may be better suited to gaining the views of teenage fathers as they live through the stages of the phenomenon. There is also an argument for a single case study in order to keep the idiographic commitment of IPA. A single case study would preserve the richness of the individual's account rather than the search for

connections across cases potentially diluting the unique nature of each participant's experience.

IPA as a qualitative method is subjective and this raises questions of reliability and validity. As Salmon (2003) argues, 'the results of psychological research reflect the researcher as much as the researched' (p.26). In order to ensure transparency and openness in this study, clear acknowledgements of my perspectives, research interests and identity were made in self-reflexive notes. I believe that this self-awareness contributed to attempts to 'bracket' my preconceptions and ensure that interpretations were grounded in the data. I also had my analysis checked and interpretations validated by the assistant researcher and by one of the participants who gave me feedback on preliminary interpretations. Osborn and Smith (1998) state that the aim of validity checks is not to prescribe to the 'singular true account' (p.69), but to ensure the credibility of the final account. I made the decision to include verbatim extracts in the results section of the study, which provide a 'grounding in examples' (Elliott et al., 1999, p.222). This allows the reader to make their own assessment of the interpretations made.

### **Reflections on the Impact of this Study**

Smith (2004) argues that 'the very detail of the individual brings us closer to significant aspects of a shared humanity' (pp.42-43). IPA does not claim generalisability and it does not aim to achieve a representative sample in terms of either population or probability. I would argue that the parameters of teenage fathers are so varied that it would not be possible to achieve a representative sample.



My study has sought to produce an in-depth analysis of a small group of young men who have all experienced the phenomenon of becoming a teenage father. Conclusions are thus specific to that group, but I hope that the data and analysis obtained will be useful in providing insights and directing future research. Further studies of small group cases may subsequently lead on to generalisation (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

The inductive element of IPA has allowed me to discuss my analysis in terms of existing psychological theories and models; this has given my findings a context and has led to the inclusion of practical suggestions for professionals working with this population. These findings will be presented to the professionals who form the 'Better Support Group' for teenage pregnancy. The group is a multi-disciplinary group with representatives from the educational, social care and health sectors. This study has highlighted how useful it is to seek the views of teenage fathers in terms of increasing the awareness of their needs and increasing an understanding of potential pressures to leave education and training in order to take on the role of provider. This new knowledge may lead to a different support for teenage fathers through pastoral care and advice in educational settings.

### **Reflections on the Role of the Educational Psychologist**

For professionals working with teenage fathers this study's findings help to inform practitioners about some of the psychological impacts and life transforming decisions that adolescent fathers may be confronted with and so extends the evidence base from which informed practice can draw. Educational psychologists, youth workers and school and college practitioners may develop a supportive role for young fathers and ensure that they are emotionally assisted and practically informed of all the choices available to them.

Inclusion is a central issue for educational psychologists (Hick, 2005) and work at an individual, organisational or systemic level may assist in the prevention of young men leaving education and training due to their new role as a father. A method that draws on the solution focused orientation (DeShazer, 1985) may be a suitable approach to implement with regard to addressing the problems presented by the young fathers. The aim of solution focused therapy as described by O'Connell (2003) is to build upon people's own competencies and resources, to help them 'achieve their preferred outcomes by evoking and co-constructing solutions to their problems' (p.2). De Jong and Hopwood (1996) found solution focused therapy to be effective for variety of concerns, those relevant to this paper include; depression, anxiety, job related problems, financial concerns, parent-child conflict, communication problems, and relationship problems.

An additional feature of solution focused therapy is to achieve small steps forward and to improve things as quickly as possible (Simm & Ingram, 2008). This is particularly relevant when working within pre-natal time limits and the young man feels pressure to become a provider before his child is born.

There are already a number of 'dads groups' held in Children's Centres, these groups could provide a platform for more multi-agency working amongst professionals involved with young fathers. Examples of good practice need to be shared with those professionals who deliver pastoral support for students in schools and colleges. The educational psychologist would be well placed to create the links between the educational setting and other agencies. As Farrell et al. (2006) point out, a distinctive contribution to multi-agency working by educational psychologists is in 'building bridges between school and community' (p.43).

There is a need for future research to continue to explore a wider representative sample from different ethnic origins to ensure that appropriate support is offered in the right way to these young men. In the UK, research is recognised as one of the principal functions of an educational psychologist's practice (Gersch, 2004; MacKay, 2002), this study highlights that there is a need for future research with this population to continue to seek and represent their views. A valuable future direction for research in this area would involve working with young fathers to make changes within an educational setting, which they believe would have a positive influence on their wellbeing as they take on the new role of father. The author hopes that this study demonstrates the importance and the power of seeking the voices of this population and that, no matter how difficult, it is crucial to the understanding of the difficulties they face and to the shaping of future evidence-based practice.

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## **Appendix One – Public Domain Briefing One**

### **Research Proposal**

#### **An exploration of the experiences of teenage fathers: An interpretative phenomenological analysis.**

##### **The focus of the Research:**

- To gain an insight into the psychological difficulties and challenges faced when becoming a father in the teenage years.

##### **Justification for the Research:**

- For babies born to teenage mothers, about 25% of the fathers are aged 20 years and under (DfES, 2006).
- The Teenage Pregnancy Advisory Group (DCFS, 2008) highlights that fathers are still a largely unexplored part of the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy. The majority of policy initiatives on teenage pregnancy have been aimed at mothers and children.
- This research also relates to the population not in education, employment or training, known as NEET. Teenage parents are recognised as an over-represented group.
- The needs of young fathers have largely gone unnoticed (Reeves et al., 2009).

##### **Aims of the research:**

To explore:

- What are the psychological implications of becoming a teenage father?
- What are the needs of some teenage fathers?
- How can professionals work best to support teenage fathers?

##### **Method:**

A qualitative research method using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996) as the overarching approach.

The sample group needs to be between three and six (Smith et al., 2009).

Participants will be interviewed using a semi-structured format, this will be recorded, transcribed and analysed using IPA.

**Time scale:**

Phase	Action
1.	Detailed review of literature to identify research conducted on teenage fatherhood and the psychological effects of becoming a father.
2.	Attend 'Better Support Teenage Pregnancy Group' to inform other professionals of my research intentions.  Meet with Connexions manager to inform the organisation of my research intentions.
3.	Approach Children's centres and make contact with family workers who run dad's groups and meet young families. Inform them of my research and leave participant information and consent forms.
4.	Arrange and conduct interviews with participants.
5.	Transcribe and analyse data.
6.	Write up research project.
7.	Present findings and feedback to Better Support Teenage Pregnancy Group and Connexions staff. Identify ways forward.

Benefits for professionals working with this population: a deeper insight into difficulties and challenges facing young fathers, an opportunity to build on appropriate ways of supporting young fathers.

Benefits for young fathers: a chance to be heard, to voice their needs and experiences. A greater understanding from professionals may lead to more appropriate support.

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# The experience of being a teenage father: An interpretative phenomenological analysis

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## Available Research

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- USA based;
- UK – characteristics of teenage fathers;
- UK – service provision;
- Lack of exploration into direct experiences and the psychological effects of becoming a teenage father.

Adolescent fathers are often stereotyped as irresponsible and reckless (Jaffe, et al, 2001). This is despite the fact that relatively little is known about teenage fathers in comparison to young mothers (Reeves et al. 2009) with the majority of writing and research emanating from the United States (for example, Ku et al. 1993; Allen & Doherty, 1996; Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998; Weinmann et al. 2002; Parra-Cardona et al. 2008). There is a smaller British literature which explores similar concerns, such as characteristics of adolescent fathers (Kiernan, 1992; Dearden et al., 1994; Sigle-Rushton, 2004) and service provision for young fathers (Quinton et al. 2002; Bunting & McAuley, 2004).



## NEET population

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- National Support Agenda – aimed at reducing the risk of social exclusion of young mothers.
- Teen dads – ‘an invisible and vulnerable group’ (Fatherhood Institute, 2009).

As Sigle-Rushton (2005) explains, if early assumption of parenthood interrupts career development and investment in job skills there could be long term economic implications.  
Notion of disrupted pathway.



## Aims

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- This study aimed to get an insight into the psychological effects of becoming a teenage father and how this impacts on identity and role occupancy.



## Immediate Psychological Reactions

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Subordinate themes:

- Fatherhood invoking intense emotions;
- A solitary burden;
- Loss of future self and control;
- Protection of self – denial of emotions.

*'I was overwhelmed with how scary it was.'*

*'I feel like I did the whole thing on my own, truthfully, I was on my own..'*

*'I just thought, my life is going to stop, it's just going to end.'*

*'I switched off my emotions.'*<sup>143</sup>


The subordinate theme of experiencing intense emotions upon being told about the pregnancy, then the subsequent solitude that the young men experienced in deciding not to immediately turn to anyone for help, and the issue of denying emotions can be explored in the context of research done on 'masculinities' and depression in men.

In research that has been conducted on depression in men (Emslie et al. 2006; Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007; Oliffe et al. 2008) it has been reported that emotional control and the denial of vulnerability are important parts of hegemonic masculinity and that expressing emotion and crying are linked to femininity. O'Brien, Hunt and Hurt (2005) found that many men in their study emphasised the importance of remaining 'strong and silent' about emotional difficulties.

Emslie et al. (2006) found that the men in their study referred to the school environment as a place that did not encourage boys to express emotions.

This finding is especially pertinent to this research as four out of five of the participants were in a school or college setting in the prenatal period.

As men have poorer social supports, and they ask for professional help less often (Wilhelm, Parker & Dewhurst, 1998) it is important for professionals in the health and education sectors to realise the intensity of emotions that the young men have described in this study and the potential risk this may cause to their mental health.



## Becoming a father – transformation of self

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### Subordinate themes:

- The self as provider;
- Acceleration into adulthood;
- Managing society's expectations and judgements;
- Social identity.

*'I just knew I had to get a job.'*

*'I felt the pressure from the decisions and the grown-up-ness of the circumstances.'*

*'People think you should be going to work, not college.'*

*'I used to play footy every night. Can't do that now.'*

Within the theme of 'transformation of self' there was clear support for the role occupancy perspective (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006). The participants all talked about the societal expectation and personal pressure they felt to support their new family financially. This had direct implications for some of the young men in terms of unemployment resulting from the sudden move from education and training to unstable and low-paid employment to provide immediate economic support. These young men then became a Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) statistic. As Sigle-Rushton (2005) explains, if the early assumption of parenthood interrupts career development and investment in job skills there could be long term economic implications. This notion of a disrupted pathway to adulthood was evident in the themes of 'loss of future self' and the 'acceleration into adulthood.' These themes concur with Lee's (1994; cited in Johnson, 2001; p.517) assertion that fatherhood is best undertaken in adulthood when the developmental tasks of adolescence are completed. The notion of the possible self for the future was interrupted for these young men when they were given the news that they were to become fathers and this may have resulted in the fear that was experienced. The fact that they had to create a new identity of 'father' to go alongside that of school/college pupil and the adolescent social identity is what arguably caused such intense feelings of shock and fear.



## The role of others

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Subordinate themes:

- Silence;
- Lack of support pre-birth;
- The role of friends;
- The role of family;
- College and teaching staff.

*'Other than my friends no one else spoke about it, it was as if it hadn't happened.'*

*'I fainted...didn't know what to expect.'*

*'I told friends to have someone to talk to. There was no one else to talk to.'*

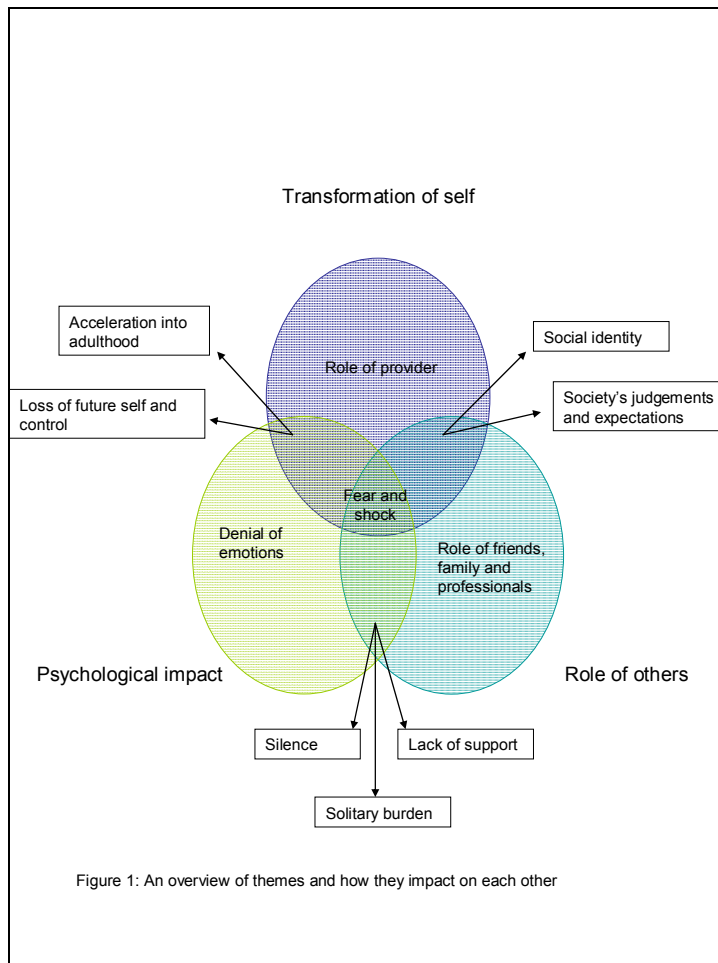
*'Me mum burst out crying.'*

*'He (teacher) seemed nervous to even broach the subject.'*

This theme of silence and solitude continued within the emergent theme of 'the role of others' in the form of lack of opportunity for discussion and support for the young men and, in some cases, acknowledgement of the situation. This was particularly prevalent in the school and college settings, where professionals were aware of the situation, but ignored it and failed to support the young men at a time when they would have appreciated advice and assistance.

For the participants included in this study the role of others throughout their experience was a main theme of discussion. Friends were a main source of support for most of the young men with their own mothers mentioned by just two of the five participants as being emotionally and practically supportive. Miller (1994) found a similar result in his American based study; a sizeable minority of adolescent fathers receive little or no help from their families in learning to be a parent. This may not be such an issue if the young men were receiving the support from school, college or the health service; however the participants in this study commented on the lack of emotional and practical support offered to them during the prenatal period, which accentuated the solitude of the burden.

It appeared to be during the prenatal period that the young men were especially fearful of what the future would bring and felt a lack of control and support in the situation that they found themselves in.



Each emergent theme stands alone as a discrete concept, but they can also be appreciated within the context that they provide each other. An illustration of these links can be viewed in Figure 1. The three realms represent the three main themes and the subordinate themes can be viewed as impacting across these three areas.

There are clear influences that each theme has on another. The psychological impact of becoming a father effected the transformation of the self and how the young man viewed his future. This was also accentuated or dissipated by the role of others. The role of others included the expectations and judgements that society holds, which in turn led to the young man viewing his role and future, in most cases, according to what was expected of him. This sudden change in the possible future self may be the cause of the intense emotional reaction.

A main theme of psychological reaction included the expression of intense emotions, which included fear and shock. These emotions can be viewed as remaining central to the other emergent themes as they were at the core of each young man's experience during the prenatal phase of the pregnancy.





## Implications of findings

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- Interventions
- Support
- Awareness
- Inclusion
- Future research

For professionals working with teenage fathers this study's findings help to inform practitioners about some of the psychological impacts and life transforming decisions that adolescent fathers may be confronted with and so extends the evidence base from which informed practice can draw. Educational psychologists, youth workers and school and college practitioners may develop a supportive role for young fathers and ensure that they are emotionally assisted and practically informed of all the choices available to them.

Inclusion is a central issue for educational psychologists (Hick, 2005) and work at an individual, organisational or systemic level may assist in the prevention of young men leaving education and training due to their new role as a father. A method that draws on the solution focused orientation (DeShazer, 1985) may be a suitable approach to implement with regard to addressing the problems presented by the young fathers. The aim of solution focused therapy as described by O'Connell (2003) is to build upon people's own competencies and resources, to help them 'achieve their preferred outcomes by evoking and co-constructing solutions to their problems' (p.2). De Jong and Hopwood (1996) found solution focused therapy to be effective for variety of concerns, those relevant to this paper include; depression, anxiety, job related problems, financial concerns, parent-child conflict, communication problems, and relationship problems.

An additional feature of solution focused therapy is to achieve small steps forward and to improve things as quickly as possible (Simm & Ingram, 2008). This is particularly relevant when working within pre-natal time limits and the young man feels pressure to become a provider before his child is born. There are already a number of 'dads groups' held in Children's Centres, these groups could provide a platform for more multi-agency working amongst professionals involved with young fathers. Examples of good practice need to be shared with those professionals who deliver pastoral support for students in schools and colleges. The educational psychologist would be well placed to create the links between the educational setting and other agencies. As Farrell et al. (2006) point out, a distinctive contribution to multi-agency working by educational psychologists is in 'building bridges between school and community' (p.43).

There is a need for future research to continue to explore a wider representative sample from different ethnic origins to ensure that the correct support is offered in the right way to these young men. In the UK, research is recognised as one of the principal functions of an educational psychologist's practice (Gersch, 2004; MacKay, 2002), this study highlights that there is a need for future research with this population to continue to seek and represent their views. A valuable future direction for research in this area would involve working with young fathers to make changes within an educational setting, which they believe would have a positive influence on their wellbeing as they take on the new role of father.

The author hopes that this study demonstrates the importance and the power of seeking the voices of this population and that, no matter how difficult, it is crucial to the understanding of the difficulties they face and to the shaping of future evidence-based practice.