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Scottish Fathers and Family Services

Abstract

An awakened interest in Scottish fathers and fathering is traced alongside a UK-wide increase in awareness of the value of the positive involvement of fathers and the importance of encouraging this in family services. This is presented together with evidence of Scottish policy and practice that marginalise fathers to consequent detriment of women and children. Recent efforts to shift attitudes and practices in Scottish central and local government are outlined. The paper concludes with a discussion of the obstacles to embedding in the inclusion of fathers in family policy and services by focusing on powerful cultural stereotypes of Scottish fathers.

Introduction

The importance of fathers' positive involvement in lives of children and families is now acknowledged both in the research literature (**Asmussen and Weizel**, 2010) and in society as a whole (**Lammy**, 2013). Though families without fathers ought not to be seen as necessarily and intrinsically secondary forms of family life, e.g. lesbian couples (Golombok, 2002), the value of fathers has been asserted in the face of attitudes that have worked to marginalise men and men's role in family life, these can be seen in children and family services, especially health, education and welfare however men regularly report that but attitudes and practices in employment deflect them playing a fuller role in their families (Speight, 2015).

Action on this general acknowledgement of the value of fathers and that they can be marginalised in provision for family services, faces some particular challenges in Scotland. A widespread image of Scottish men and fathers as unable to display their caring sides or change a nappy and unbending patriarchs made from girders, has deep cultural roots. This paper reviews relevant developments within the UK, discusses influential discourses of Scottish fathers and the history of activity around the subject of including fathers in Scotland. The paper reports on recent efforts that have sought to bring the subject of fathers from the margins of public policy and family services into the mainstream.

Fathers as Parents

Health and Welfare services have long considered men as auxiliary parents. This has grounds in the reality of expectations that fathers be bread-winners and mothers be home-

makers. Abetted by the views of a range of leading psychologists (**Erik Erikson**), counsellors (**Carl Rogers**) and those with major influences on child rearing practices (**Mia Kelmer-Pringle, Melanie Klein**), as discussed in **Clapton** (2013), father as secondary parent was highly influential in the formation of modern children and family services in the 1940s and 1950s. The parental guidance handbooks of the time, such like **Dr Spock's** famous child care manuals, carried the advice that fathers should get involved with child care to give mothers an occasional rest (**Stearns**, 1991), or devote 15 minutes to playing with their child before unfolding the evening paper after a hard day at the office (**Weiss**, 1977).

The result was a tendency to concentrate on mothers or represent the views of mothers (who were most easily contactable) as that of both parents in research (**Daniel and Taylor**, 2001), policy-making (**Stanley**, 2005) and practice (**Ryan**, 2000). Despite wider societal expectations of fathers' greater involvement in child rearing and child care and economic changes that have reduced the emphasis on men as the breadwinner, attitudes towards fathers, especially in health and social work services remain rooted in the belief in the primacy of maternal care with the resultant continuing lack of inclusion of fathers or provision for father involvement by these key family services, to the detriment of women and men (**Clapton**, 2013).

Fathers and Family Services

Scholarship relating has been slow to develop in the UK however the 1990s saw considerable moves to encourage government, policy-makers, services and practitioners become more mindful of fathers' contribution to the lives of children, women and families. In their report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, **Burghes et al** (1997) noted the growing interest in the role of fathers. Since then a steady stream of studies has pointed to the benefits of including fathers, (**Flouri**, 2005; **Lewis and Lamb**, 2007; **Burgess**, 2009; **Panter-Brick et al**, 2014). Others have concentrated on specific populations of fathers e.g. young fathers (**Speak et al**, 1997 and **Ross et al**, 2010), fathers involved with child protection services (**Ashley et al**, 2006), or fathers in prison (**Boswell and Wedge**, 2002). **Family Services and UK fathers** Backed up by the work of **Lewis and Lamb** (2007), throughout the 2000s, a steady stream of authors pointed to the lack of inclusion of fathers by children and family services. In social work services, **Scourfield** (2006) and **Clapton** (2009) pointed to the various negative stereotypes that surround men and fathers and **Ashley** and colleagues showed how fathers can

be marginalised in child protection practice (2006). But practice change proved slower. In their review of services for fathers in England and Wales, **Page et al** found that:

...there was also some evidence from interviewees that ‘traditional’ views of fathers remained prevalent among the workforce. This was seen to have led some staff to hold negative attitudes towards males as less able or willing carers of young children (particularly in Sure Start Children’s Centres and safeguarding and looked after children) (2008: 89).

The following year the Fatherhood Institute (2009b: 79) echoed similar dismay over the slow progress of change: ‘...current service provision in the UK for vulnerable families is generally based on an assumption at odds with the evidence and with the child’s perspective – that fatherhood is an optional and marginally significant “add-on” for children, unlike motherhood, which is an essential’. In her research study of social work files, **Roskill** (2011) found a lack of practice interest in fathers with no information recorded about birth fathers in 20% of the cases, and for the fathers of children who were in care, the figure was higher at 31%.

In health services, similar attitudes and marginalising practices have been highlighted by **Flint** in maternity services (2013), and **Machin** (2015). In their recent study of men’s transition to parenthood, **Kowlessar et al** (2015: 14) conclude that ‘Despite increasing public awareness and socio-political changes affecting paternal parenting culture, fathers still seem to feel undervalued and unsupported when it comes to antenatal support’. Elsewhere, for example in primary health care, **Humphries and Nolan** (2015: 1) find that ‘...there is little evidence that the importance of engaging fathers is reflected in Health Visitor training or that primary care services are wholly embracing father-inclusive practice’. In sum then, despite significant advances in evidence, and understanding, of the disadvantages of failing to involve fathers, child and family welfare services remain behind shifting societal attitudes in their lack of involvement of fathers. Is there a specific Scottish dimension to this process of discovery of the value of fathers and their relative neglect by family services?

Scottish Fathers: Shifting Cultural Stereotypes

For every **Brendan Rogers**, manager of Celtic Football Club, who re-organised preparation for an international match so as to ensure that fathers in the team could take their children to their first day at school (**The Scotsman**, 17 August 2016), there is no end of memoirs about abusive Scottish fathers from, for example, comedian **Billy Connolly**, author **Alan Burnside** and actor **Alan Cumming**. Clearly there are troubling (and troubled) Scottish fathers but the sheer volume of their depiction, seems to have led to the creation of widely held view of all Scottish fathers. Cruel fathers of the type played by **Peter Mullan** in the film *Neds* (2010) and described by **Andrew O'Hagan** abound:

Those Scottish fathers. Not for nothing their wives cried, not for nothing their kids. Cities of night above those five o'clock shadows. Men gone way too sick for the talking. And how they lived in the dark for us now. Or lived in our faces, long denied. And where were our fathers? We had run from them (**Our Fathers**, 1999).

Such characterisations of men stretch back many years and, based on her research in 19th century children's care records, historian **Lynn Abrams** has made a number of trenchant comments regarding Scottish fathers and their supposed lack of interest in their offspring. These debunk the popular stereotype of the absent or distant Scottish father:

In fact we know more about the minority of fathers who deserted their wives and girlfriends, and the fathers who beat their wives and children, than we do about the many who struggled to provide for their families (1999: 227).

Abrams goes on to argue that 'One of the consequences (of popular stereotypes of Scottish fathers) has been the maintenance of the belief that children have needs which can only be met by mothers, thus perpetuating the marginalisation of fathers from their families' (ibid: 229).

Abrams' observation that 'working class fathers were as affective, indulgent and involved with their children as their middle class counterparts appear to have been' (ibid: 228) goes some way to rethinking popular stereotypes of Scottish fathers. A more generous view of Scottish fathers' generativity is bolstered by emerging facts from the Millennium Cohort studies about 21st century Scottish fathering and how this compares with other fathering practices throughout the UK. **Kelly, Macfarlane and Butler** have revealed that Scottish fathers are as likely to watch their babies being born as any other father in the UK (2004).

Jones and Smith also show that throughout the UK, a greater percentage of the fathers who wish to spend more time with their children are Scottish. They go on: more Scottish fathers than in other UK country read to their children and get them ready for bed ‘several times a week’; more Scottish fathers than in other UK country play outdoors and indoors with their children; and more Scottish fathers than in other UK country look after their children on their own (2008).

Scottish Fathers: growing research, increasing activity

Activists and writers have been calling for policy and practice for over twenty years. A brief overview includes sporadic conferences, the first of which in the current period was ‘Father Figures’ in 1994, the Aberlour charity’s national Scottish Fathers’ Day in 2002, the enacting of the Gender Equality Duty in 2007 that led to the setting up of a programme of work by Children in Scotland entitled ‘making the gender equality duty real’ (<http://makinggenderequalityreal.org.uk/>), and a burst of research findings in the mid to late 1990s (**Moss**, 1995; **Milligan and Dowie**, 1998; **Milligan and Smith**, 1999). There also been growth in Scottish research. **Taylor and Daniel** argued, in the case of health visitors, that:

The social rhetoric of new fatherhood has a limited expression in reality. Similarly, the practice rhetoric of working with parents is still largely expressed through intervention with mothers. It is asking a lot of health visitors to change social structures. However it is limiting to restrict practice to intervention with women only. (2000: 18).

Bradley et al contributed a similar comment in their research on first-time Scottish fathers when they remarked, ‘the postnatal health and experience of fathers has until recently taken a backseat to that of their partners and official definitions and guidelines to professional practice rarely emphasize the father in a nurturing role’ (2004: 45). Scotland-based research has continued to provide a fresh look at Scottish fathers, see for instance **McCullough’s** A History of Fatherhood in Scotland project.

The 2000s also saw the beginning of the publication of evaluations of Scottish father services: ‘Dad’s The Word’ (**Cavanagh and Smith**, 2001), ‘Lads Becoming Dads’ (**Smith and Cavanagh**, 2002), Aberlour’s work with prisoners (**Clapton**, 2003) and on Family Group Conferences (**Ross**, 2008) are four services that have been written up (**Cadell’s** 1996

account of work with Edinburgh fathers is an exception to the general absence of published accounts of work with Scottish fathers).

On the ground and in practice, the early 2000s marked the establishment of local fathers' support groups such as Dads Club (2002) and Dads Work (2003). Elsewhere, again on a local basis, things were on the move, the annual 'Family Man Fun Day' organised by the South Lanarkshire Community Learning And Home School Partnership grew from 780 participants in 2008 to 2,300 in 2016. Fathers Network Scotland has pointed to a growth in specific services for Scottish fathers from three that were found in a 2007 sample of 382 Scottish services for parents to the eighty services, projects and agencies in 2015 that 'in one way or another, are either for dads, are dad-friendly or reach out to include dads' (Fathers Network Scotland, 2016a: 1).

Yet, at the end of the first decade of the 2000s, fathers and fathering were an absence in Scottish public policy, most strikingly expressed in the Scottish Government's description of the purpose of its Children and Family Directorate:

To work across government and with delivery partners to support systems and behavioural change to improve outcomes for children, young people and pregnant women (Clapton, 2012b: 21).

Whilst the research aspect remains slow to grow (Ross et al, 2010 on young Scottish fathers is a notable addition), changes can now be detected at a policy and practice level. And how has this happened? And what are the obstacles to further progress?

An Effective Change Agent?: the example of Fathers Network Scotland

Established in 2008, and arguably surfing some of the changes in thinking and activity that were taking place throughout the 2000s, Fathers Network Scotland (FNS) drew from some of the individuals and groups involved in the afore-mentioned activities and ongoing work and was a loose collection of fathers' group members, interested individuals, academics, professionals and a representative of the children's charity, Children in Scotland, that had been campaigning to have fathers included as a part of the 2007 Gender Equality Duty on public services.

An early emphasis in the work of FNS came about because of the involvement of fathers' support groups and other individuals who echoed the view in the literature that Scottish children and family services were felt to be the greatest perpetrators of stereotypical mother and father roles and responsibilities and, consequently, some of the greatest obstacles to father-inclusion, especially by social services. Thus family policies and services became an early focus for activity and change.

Links were commenced arising from existing individual connections with the National Childbirth Trust and ante-natal classes were delivered by FNS to men and women, flowing from this, the NHS asked FNS for advice in revamping an expectant parent website, and peer groups to support fathers workers were launched. FNS Board members published research relating to the lack of involvement of fathers in child protection (**Smithers**, 2012) and the lack of Scottish policy initiatives (**Clapton**, 2012b) and there was an FNS exhibition of photographs of fathers and their children held in the Scottish Parliament in 2012 ('In Dads Shoes'). 2012 also saw the launch of Dads Rock. Sponsored by FNS, Dads Rock was a Saturday mornings play group uniquely run by fathers for fathers and their children: 'Games, Making Stuff, Rocking Out, Singing, Snack and Story Time'. With a logo for T-shirts and badges, expert use of social media such as Twitter and much mainstream media coverage, Dads Rock has quickly gained widespread public attention and support. It has since expanded geographically and offers diverse support for fathers such as counselling (www.dadsrock.org.uk).

However it was research sponsored by FNS that was to play a central part in embedding acknowledgement of the importance of fathers in Scottish policy circles. This research began as 'invisible fathers, demonised fathers' (eventually published as *Where's Dad?*, FNS, 2013, and *Where's Dad Too?* FNS, 2016b) and was a mostly image-based study of the way that fathers were depicted throughout family services offered by central and local government, the NHS and third sector agencies. The research was disseminated via FNS presentations throughout Scotland beginning in 2011.

The message was straightforward. How fathers were written about, visual images in publicity, the look and 'feel' of a waiting room or reception area, it was argued, conveyed the assumption that children and family policies, practice and services were just for women and mothers. Images on leaflets, posters, websites and other publicity materials (or lack of them)

projected powerful messages about what constitutes a family and who a service is designed for. Key planks of Scottish Government publicity featured in examples of the exclusion of fathers, for instance attention was drawn to the Scottish Government's flagship policy for pre-schools, the *Early Years Framework* which was illustrated with a mother and her children with no counter-balancing images of men with children:



Figure 1 *The Early Years Framework*, Scottish Government, 2008

A Pathway of Care for Vulnerable Families from the Scottish Government (2011) was for 'pre and post birth for both mother, child, family', yet it was pointed out that in it there were twenty nine references to mother and 'Phrase not found' was result of a search for the word 'father'.

The case was made that images of fatherless families or writings that failed to mention fathers suggested that children and housework were women's business and secondly that men by being rendered invisible, are dispensable in the lives of families.

Local Government's social services also featured in the presentations and examples of father-free publicity in fostering booklets or women and children illustrating child minder resources were given. The NHS and Third Sector agencies were also found to be portraying assumptions about what a family was (father-free images of a woman and a child), generally inadvertently but nonetheless, when pointed out to audiences, to striking effect that was to become evident.

Training resources, on-line materials, case studies were also targeted for a pervasive absence of any decent father, or just not having a father in the picture. In one of the examples deployed, John's parents morph into only his worried mother:

John has also been refusing to go to school as least once a week and his parents have struggled to get him there. His parents are worried that this may be linked to some form of bullying. John has asthma that makes him feel like he cannot fully take part in play with other children. John's mother is at her wits end and is completely unsure of what to do next. John will talk to her about some things but starts shouting and screaming if he is asked about school. John's mum is desperate to get help from someone (CWDC, 2010: 12).

Elsewhere it was pointed out that mothers were often 'mums' and fathers were 'the father':

Claire's mum engaged well with education services for all four children. Claire's father was not available during the home visit (Lanarkshire, 2010: 14).

Social service receptions, clinic foyers, GP waiting rooms were also shown to be places where fathers were not expected. Examples were shared of posters and leaflets on the walls and tables that were mostly intended for women e.g. Weightwatchers, Moon Walk or carry hotlines and warnings to women about dangers such as rape (Rape Crisis). It was also argued that when men featured it was generally negatively as in domestic violence posters.

These powerful presentations concluded on the lighter note of asking what was available to read in the waiting areas of these children and family services and answering with an illustration of the normal reading material – women's magazines such as '**Bella**' and '**Take a Break**'. The initiative's call was for Scottish services to be 'father-proofed', that is, greater thought to go into images in publicity, the lay-out and content of waiting rooms and reception areas, more balanced depictions of fathers in the various case studies used to illustrate services, and greater reference in general to fathers in the content of advice, information and support materials.

By 2012, FNS had secured funding from a Scottish grant-making trust for a part-time organiser and its strategy of targeting policy change in family services publicity and facilities

bore fruit with the inclusion in the Scottish Government's National Parenting Strategy of specific references to the importance of the inclusion of fathers (2012). The Scottish National Parenting Strategy was Scotland's first such plan and it drew upon a fathers' research literature review produced a FNS Board member (**Clapton**, 2012a) and other Board members also helped in the draft stages of the strategy.

The Strategy (Scottish Government, 2012, p. 36) committed the Scottish Government to 'A fathers' roundtable meeting (that) will be held twice a year, acting in an advisory capacity on national policy and how this impacts on fathers, and ensuring the interests of fathers are properly included in the implementation of the National Parenting Strategy'. The roundtable, with active FNS involvement, became the National Fathers' Advisory Board which has gone on to sponsor 2016's 'Year of the Dad' (see below).

Based on the 'invisible fathers' materials, the targeting imagery strategy was taken to politicians and presentations were made by FNS to the Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee the following year in 2013. Considerable discussion ensued with the Committee concluding that:

Whilst it is clear that tradition and culture plays a strong role in how men and fathers are seen, it is clear that some organisations and individuals are making the effort to challenge stereotypes. We are pleased to see that the Scottish Government has already taken steps to address fathers in its literature and guidance, but we feel that more can be done to support the idea of fathers being involved in childrearing as being the norm.

Witnesses told us that the use of the term 'parent' is not sufficient as this is often taken to simply mean 'mother'. We ask that the Scottish Government and all organisations and companies working with parents and children continue to ensure work is aimed at both parents, and in recognition of the fact that 'parent' is often taken to mean mother, actively work to include fathers specifically.

We were pleased to meet fathers who wanted to take an active role in raising their children, in particular their belief that they were not a minority. However, we recognise that many of the dads we met felt indebted to support groups in helping

them to achieve this role. We ask that all providers (including local authorities as funders) of parent and children groups, encourage the use of the terms like ‘mothers and fathers’ group’ or ‘mums and dads’ club’ as opposed to simply ‘parents’ to encourage fathers to access this vital source of support (Scottish Parliament, 2014: 9).

Image changes began to be evident. North Ayrshire Council altered its logo for children and family services from a woman with children:



Figure 2 North Ayrshire Council ‘[Children and families](#) Information on [child protection](#), [Children's Hearings](#), [fostering and adoption](#), and more’, October 2014

to that of a man and woman with children:



Figure 3 North Ayrshire Council ‘[Children and families](#) Information on [child protection](#), [Children's Hearings](#), [fostering and adoption](#), and more’, 2015

The Scottish Government’s revised edition of *National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland* appeared with a similarly improved logo in its cover, improved from this father-free family image in 2010:

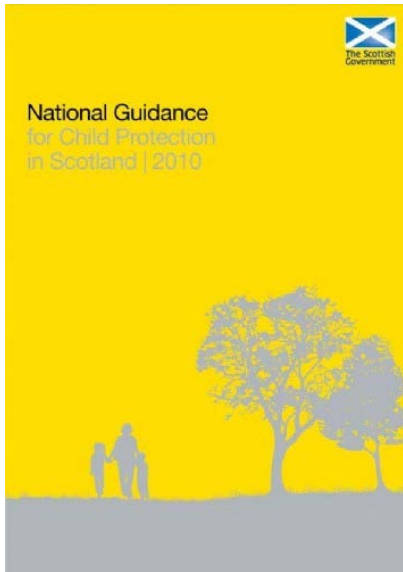


Figure 4 *National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2010*, Scottish Government, 2010

to this in 2014:

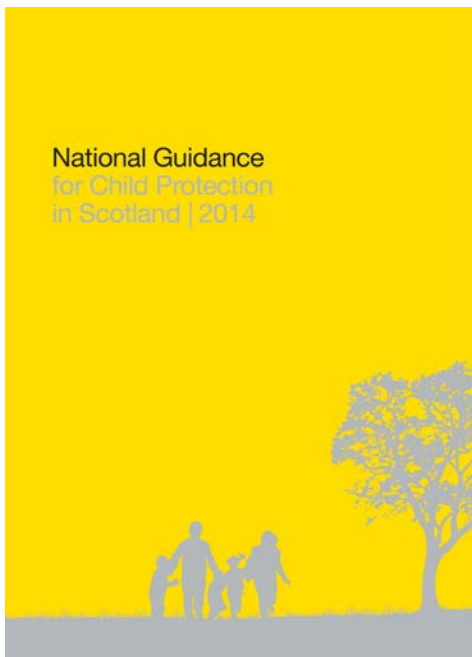


Figure 5 *National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014*, Scottish Government, 2014

In 2014, FNS achieved Scottish Government funding for further resources. Emboldened by this and such successes as the campaign to change representations of fathers in the publicity for family services, the success of Dads Rock, requests for ‘father-proofing’ advice from the

NHS, and interest from practitioners e.g. health visitors and midwives, in 2015 FNS called for 2016 to be a Year of the Dad (YotD). At the time of writing the fruits of the YotD initiative can be seen in awakened interest amongst Scotland's local authorities:

The research undertaken by Fathers Network Scotland has influenced our thinking. We recognise that we need to better understand the needs of fathers and how to support their engagement and contribution to parenting (Carrie Lindsay, Head of Education and Children's Services, Fife in 'Improving Dads Engagement Partnership', 2016: 4).

Local councillors have also passed motions supporting YotD initiative.

A follow-up paper will assess the impact of FNS's 'Year of the Dad' but at the time of writing there are a number of comments that can be made about changing Scottish policies and practices relating to the marginalisation of fathers in family services and some of the obstacles to this.

Scottish Fathers: Shifting Political and Social Moods

The issue of marginalisation of fathers and what to do about it had surfaced on and off throughout the 1990s and early 2000s in Scotland with a variety of one-off conferences and local or short-term initiatives. So what has changed the mood as discussed in this paper? One reason that cannot be ignored in today's Scotland is the recent wider societal developments. In the case of Scotland in 2012-2014, the country was in political ferment in the run-up to the vote on whether or not to become independent. Fresh ways of looking at everything, especially equality matters, were everywhere from street-corners to political circles. Other social changes have been abroad for longer, the end of Scottish heavy industry and other traditionally male-orientated employment and the increase in women working (Crone, 2002), have meant more men available to engage in child-care with a consequent rise of greater social receptivity to, and acknowledgement of, the importance of fathers' involvement (a development with which family services have been slow to catch up). There is also in Scotland, a Government that has appeared willing to listen to citizen-led voices for change. In such circumstances, it could be said that campaigns for the recognition of the benefits of fathers' involvement were knocking at an open door. Certainly the particular

nature of the most recent activity: an influential combination of press and social media savvy, images-dominated evidence for change plus other multi-media events such as exhibitions, rock music and a play at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival seems to have been helpful.

What were – and remain – the challenges to putting the benefits of father involvement on the map? As noted, family and social services have a long tradition ‘facing’ only mothers however any campaign for fathers has to engage with the suspicion engendered by campaigns for fathers’ rights e.g. for child contact after separation that have incurred opposition by privileging men’s rights over that of children and mothers. With the latter in mind, a crucial early internal debate within FNS ensured that its philosophy and policy was not based on any narrow fathers’ rights perspective; instead FNS ensured that everything it did and said put the benefits of father involvement within the context of the benefits to children and families, and mothers. As a result FNS often reached out to sections of the women’s movement and made alliances with children’s agencies. At present its Board is made up 50/50 of women and men and it has a female CEO.

A second challenge is that in any efforts to put fathers in the picture, it can be seen that when this is successful (as in the examples provided earlier) that the nuclear family is privileged. That is heterosexual of norms of female and male parents and two parents (as distinct from single parents) are privileged over other forms of family life.

However the abiding challenge for

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