Fathers and divorce-related parenting programmes

Abstract

This paper reviews divorce-related parenting programmes, assessing the extent to which fathers are included and whether father inclusion influences outcomes. The paper also discusses limitations of the research evidence and implications for future intervention and evaluation design. Thirteen programmes met the criteria in the review period 2005-2012 but only four had been evaluated using randomized control trials or with independent measures from mothers and fathers. Analysis of these four programmes shows modest evidence of reduced couple-conflict, improved coparenting and some evidence of improved child outcomes. Key issues raised are the need for improving the quantity and quality of demographic data about fathers; the importance of incorporating analysis by gender of parent into evaluation design; and the value of developing and routinely using father-related indicators to measure programme impact on men's parenting, fathering, and co-parental relationships.

Keywords: Fathers; parenting programmes; separation; divorce; evaluation; gender.

Introduction

Recent decades have seen continued anxiety about the absence of separated fathers from children's lives and the material and emotional costs of this to children, fathers, mothers, and governments (Amato, 2010; Parkinson, 2011; Centre for Social Justice, 2013). At the same time there has been increasing acknowledgement of the significance of fathers' contribution to children's well-being (Lamb, 2010) and gender equality (Haas and Hwang, 2008) initiating a drive to explore father-inclusive family policies and programmes (United Nations, 2011; Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2012). Coltrane (2004) has characterized the simultaneous

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trends of father involvement and paternal marginality, especially through relationship breakdown, as constituting the "paradox of fatherhood" in modern times. Similarly, Ashbourne et al. (2013:666) describe the reality of contemporary separated fathers as both 'the best and worst of times'

Enhanced divorce and re-partnering rates towards the end of the last century is a key demographic trend shaping practitioner and policy concerns. In response, divorce-related parenting programmes have proliferated, and in some US jurisdictions are mandated (Schramm & Calix, 2011; Owen & Rhoades, 2010). However, claims about programme effectiveness continue to be mixed (Hunt & Roberts, 2005; Kitzmann et al., 2012; Sigal et al, 2011) and in particular little is known about if, and how, such programmes may offer support to men as fathers. The field of research is further complicated by the fact that such interventions are highly variable in terms of design, methods, theoretical underpinning, target group and context for delivery. There have been number of reviews or meta-analyses conducted in related areas including court affiliated divorce education (Fackrell et al., 2011), generic fatherhood programmes (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2012), mediation orientation, (Kitzmann et al., 2012) and online divorce education (Bowers et al., 2011). However, none focus specifically on the issue of fathering after separation or seek to collate the range of interventions potentially available to fathers in this context.

Our focus on fathers has been in part to extend work on father-inclusive practice and evaluation in the field of child and family welfare services (Gordon et al., 2012; Zanoni et al., 2013). A central issue for father-inclusive programmes is achieving a balance between paternal involvement and child-wellbeing. In the context of separation and divorce, managing the emotional and economic investments of both parents is challenging. Given the consensus

of concern over certain psychological risk factors for children experiencing the separation of their parents, this challenge is increased. We also seek to highlight the potential of an approach to service delivery and evaluation which attends to gender difference; thinking critically about where, when, and how gender sensitivity can make a difference to the quality of provision (Doucet, 2006; Maxwell et al., 2012). Any analysis of longstanding gendered patterns of caring for children and the opportunities and constraints these bring, cannot be carried out by focusing only on the lives of women. A gender sensitive perspective would support men's greater involvement in caring for children and attend to distinctive features of men's parenting, and men's needs, without disregarding the historical gendering of care, or disenfranchising women as mothers (Ashbourne et al., 2013). We also argue for a more critical approach to the use of allegedly gender neutral language; the term 'parent' too often obscures or hinders knowledge about father participation and impact (Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

This paper Reviews reports and evaluations of divorce-related parenting programmes, published between January 2005 and July 2012 and has three key aims. Firstly, to examine whether and how divorce-related programmes are implemented to include fathers in practice rather than just in principle. Programmes may be presented as being available to fathers but not then be implemented in a way that makes father inclusion likely or possible. Secondly, to identify any impact of the selected programmes on separated fathers' relationships with mothers and with children. Thirdly, to reveal the limitations of the research evidence and the implications for developing father-inclusive interventions and evaluation.

Method and scope of the review

The review was conducted during 2012 .The time frame for selected publications was chosen to follow on from more generic reviews of divorce-related interventions with a father focus (Hunt & Roberts, 2005; McBroom, 2011; Sigal et al., 2011).

The criteria used for selection were:

- Evaluations or reports of findings from face-to-face divorce-related parenting programmes aimed exclusively at, or including separated fathers, and which focus on improving family relationships.

- Peer reviewed or commissioned research studies published between January 2005 and July 2012.

- Experimental and exploratory (e.g. qualitative, descriptive or feasibility studies) designs.

- Not restricted to the UK, but published in English.

The review involved a comprehensive search of medical and social science databases initially using the keywords 'fathers and divorce' (Academic Search Elite, Assia, Cambridge Journals Online, EBSCO, JSTOR, Medline, Psych Info, Scopus, Springer Link Collection, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, Zetoc). Further searches were then conducted using alternative combinations of keywords, including 'fathers and separation'; post-divorce parenting and fathers' to identify studies involving relevant parenting programmes. The most effective were 'fathers and dispute resolution' (all text) and 'fathers and co-parenting' (all text) and each database was searched using both combinations. A search was also made within the Cochrane Library (http://www.cochrane.org/cochrane-reviews/access-cochrane-library) and the Campbell Library (http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library.php).

The keywords 'fathers and divorce' (all text) produced two relevant results from the Campbell Library: one submitted title for a systematic review and one submitted protocol. To date, these reviews have not been published. An electronic search of relevant family support organisations was also conducted, to identify grey literature. In addition, hand searching from identified articles was undertaken to cross reference further publications. In all, twenty-nine publications were initially identified. From this, eighteen peer reviewed articles and one commissioned report met all the criteria for inclusion, and thirteen specific interventions were identified. Each intervention and its related publications were read by both reviewers separately and then discussed and cross-referenced together. Six articles were excluded because they were general studies or theoretical papers on families after divorce and separation (Sbarra & Emery, 2005; DeGarmo et al, 2008; Vukalovich & Caltabiano, 2008; Malcore et al., 2010; Brewster et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2012b) and three because they reported on interventions supporting fatherhood more generally (Cornille et al., 2005; Gearing et al., 2008; Cowan et al., 2009).

How are divorce-related programmes implemented to include fathers?

Thirteen programmatic interventions were identified (Table I). Nine are American, and one each from the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Israel. The programmes vary in terms of their theoretical base, context for delivery, target group and duration, but certain common aims can be identified. These are to increase parental awareness of the impact of separation on children; to reduce inter-parental conflict through the improvement of co-parenting and conflict management; and to improve outcomes for children particularly in relation to psychological and emotional adjustment.

Target group (Table II)

Of the thirteen interventions one was set up explicitly for non-resident fathers; *Dads For Life* (here after DFL). Six programmes involved mixed-sex groups of individual parents rather than 'couples': *Parents Forever, Focus on Kids, The Separated Parents Information Programme (here after SPIP), Parenting Apart, The Parenting Education Programme,* and *Parenting Through Separation*. Three targeted 'couples': *The Collaborative Divorce Project (here after CDP), The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme (here after CPDP),* and *Working Together*), and three were whole-family focused including children as well as parents in the programme: *Kids' Turn, Parents Achieving in Collaborative Teams (here after PACT,* and *the Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution Programme (here after CF & CI).*

Overall for ten of the thirteen programmes, there was some minimal demographic information showing that males had participated. More commonly no distinction was made between father or mother involvement with the term 'parents' used, making it difficult to ascertain if interventions did or did not include fathers. Similarly there was little consistent disaggregation of parents' residential or custody status with an implicit assumption that fathers were usually the non-resident or non-custodial parent. For three programmes, (despite objectives to include mothers and fathers) it was not clear if participating parents were female or male (*SPIP, Parenting Apart, Parenting Through Separation*). These findings resonate with reviews of father involvement in therapeutic interventions showing that most studies fail to delineate who is participating in treatment, making it difficult to assess maternal and paternal involvement in therapy (Phares et al., 2010).

Recruitment

The main pathway for recruitment was through court referrals; nine programmes were
directly linked to courts (Table II). Of these nine, four were court-mandated, where parents
were ordered to attend (*SPIP, CPDP, Parenting Apart, and Working Together*), and five were
court-affiliated, whereby parents were referred or recommended to participate (*CDP, Parents
Forever, Parenting Education Programme, PACT, and Parenting Through Separation*). The
remaining four programmes were available within the community for parents to be referred to
by another agency, or to self-refer (*DFL, Kids' Turn, Focus on Kids, and CF & CI*). As
indicated above, information on the gender of parents recruited onto programmes was rare.
Where data were present, participation of fathers tended to be higher in the court than
community samples (excluding the father-targeted *DFL* community programme): for
example the proportion of male to female participation in two court-based programme
evaluations was respectively 41% - 59% (*Parenting Education Programme)* and 47% to 53%
(*Parents Forever).* By contrast, for the community-based *Kids Turn* programme, despite
being aimed at 'whole families', the majority of participants (79%) were female.
Active strategies to boost father-recruitment were evident only in the *DFL* programme, which
was of course aimed at non-resident fathers. Here, the recruitment group were recently
divorced parents where mothers had custody of a child aged 4-12 years. Both parents were
identified through child support and court divorce records and both sent a recruitment pack.
The non-resident fathers pack included an additional component: a seven minute video
emphasizing the salience of fathers for children and the importance of their participation in
the programme. Both parents were also followed up by telephone and offered a small
financial incentive ($20) to complete a telephone interview. These techniques resulted in
initial contact with 1,489 fathers from an identified population of 5,968 couples in the County

and a final paternal response rate of 47% agreeing to participate (Cookston et al, 2006).

Mothers were not invited to attend, although were indirectly involved through four pre and

post assessments. Of the fathers assigned to the programme, over three quarters (77%)

completed the whole programme with a 9% no-show and 14% attrition. As well as the video

component, the authors attribute success in father recruitment to the emphasis on father-

related issues and down-playing of couple-related issues during recruitment.

As part of recruiting fathers on to programmes, the studies also demonstrated a process of

screening. Findings show that fathers with mental health, drug or alcohol problems or

histories of violence were routinely screened out and were excluded from the programme.

Four programmes were aimed at families experiencing moderate to high levels of inter-

parental conflict, or with entrenched disputes (*SPIP, PACT, Working Together*, and *CF & CI*)

but of these four, only one (*CF & CI),* did not exclude family violence cases. The

understanding of fathers as both risks and resources to their families is highly pertinent, and

has been prominent in discussions over contact, mediation and more recently in scholarship

about conceptual and legal implications of shared care (Hunt et al., 2009; Parkinson 2010).

For parenting programmes aiming to reduce inter-parental conflict and encourage cooperative

caring arrangements, the safeguarding of children and women is crucial. Excluding families

from such programmes when there is domestic violence may be appropriate, but raises the

question of where such families can access support. It also identifies a particular target group,

usually male, with multiple un-met needs (Smith & Trinder 2012).

Programme duration and intensity

In terms of duration and delivery (Table II), five constitute brief divorce education

programmes (*Parents Forever, Focus on Kids, SPIP, Parenting Apart, and Parenting*

Through Separation) in that they provided 1-6 hours of instruction. The content of these programmes was knowledge based, emphasizing the main requirement of the court; that of information transfer about the impact of divorce and inter-parental conflict on children (Brandon, 2006; Brotherson et al., 2010). The remaining eight were longer, more intensive programmes, in terms of both total number of contact hours, and number of weeks. Two (*The CDP* and *PACT*) involved extensive 'wraparound services' for separating families, including: case management by programme leaders, the galvanizing of wider family networks, mediation services, clinical or psycho-educational intervention and collaboration with legal and mental health professionals (Brown et al., 2009; Kline Pruett et al., 2005). There was insufficient evidence to disaggregate programme duration or intensity by gender of parent.

'Palatability' and feeling safe

All of the programmes aimed to reduce inter-parental conflict and improve the co-parental relationship. These aims meant that in the design of content and delivery, material on conflict management and relationship skills had to be handled constructively. Braver et al (2005) refer to the importance of making divorce-related parenting programmes 'palatable', in order to engage and retain fathers. In their *DFL* programme, the conflict and relationship content was seen as the most challenging and least appealing to fathers, and was deliberately delayed until group rapport and trust had been established. According to the authors, combining a generative, strengths-based model of fathering with a co-parenting approach was important in shaping the design of the programme, making it both more palatable and supportive to non-resident fathers: "Fathers came because they felt they would be understood and safe in DFL" (Braver et al, 2005, 92). *CDP* also sought to address the issue of presenting fathers with challenging material, whilst offering a supportive and respectful environment in which to

encounter this (Kline Pruett et al, 2005). In the evaluation of the *CF & CI*, the authors similarly report that fathers in the Child-Inclusive treatment group, experienced a 'levelling of the playing field' where they felt more empowered in negotiations over caring arrangements and more able to listen to views that differed from their own (McIntosh et al., 2007, 22).

Working with couples

In child and family services research there is on-going debate about the extent to which parenting and relationship programmes are optimally delivered to both parents together or to one parent only (McBride & Lutz, 2004; Panter-Brick et al 2014). Inconsistent reporting on father participation generally has meant this is a difficult question to answer and has rarely been considered in the case of divorce-related programmes. In terms of programme implementation, five programmes had a component which was routinely delivered to the separated father and mother couple together (*CDP, PACT, CPDP, Working Together, CF & CI*). Careful management was required to help couples have joint sessions. For instance in *CDP*, after initial in-take couple interviews (undertaken with a male and female counsellor), couples then had a series of psycho-educational parenting sessions on the theme of "Families after Divorce" separately in mixed groups, before they returned to further therapeutic couple based resolution sessions. Kline Pruett et al, (2005) suggested that having a component which involved both parents enhanced knowledge gain and improved parental alliance. In general there was little commentary on the benefits or otherwise of delivering programme components to the separated couple together, but where it did exist observations were positive.

Including the perspective of mothers and children

The opportunity to see a situation from the perspective of another was seen by programme leaders as a valuable tool in facilitating conflict reduction between parents, and increasing their capacity to focus on the needs of children. This is related to the significance of involving both fathers and mothers in interventions, and suggests one way in which behavioural or attitudinal change might be generated. Qualitative evidence indicated that 'perspective taking' could take place in both couple and mixed-sex group formats (McIntosh et al 2007). Some fathers reported that a benefit of being in a mixed-sex group was being able to hear a mother's perspective from a woman, who was not an ex-partner, which could generate reflection or a shift in perception. Attention to children's perspectives of the father-child relationship is a further component of a father-inclusive approach. In some cases this was implemented through the use of short films and/or vignettes depicting situations that children may face when their parents separate. These films were either scripted or involved 'real' children and their families. In two programmes, *Kids' Turn* and *CF & CI*, children were directly involved, via specially designed group work. In both cases children's views and feelings were shared with parents, through programme leaders or in the form of a newsletter. These methods were cited by programme leaders and participants as being a powerful means of generating reflection and potential change in family relationships. For example, in *Parents Forever, Parenting Apart, and SPIP*, comments from both fathers and mothers refer to the children's material as 'a light bulb moment' in terms of realising the impact of interparental conflict on children (Trinder et al, 2011). In the *CF & CI* programme, fathers in the Child-Inclusive treatment group described the children's feedback session as 'valued and transformative'. McIntosh et al. (2007), believe this may be linked to fathers improved capacity to reach agreement on caring arrangements, and their sense of 'fairness' around such negotiations. The suggestion is that this technique can be a powerful 'wake-up call', or a way

of making difficult issues around managing and reducing parental conflict more 'palatable' (Braver et al., 2005; McIntosh et al., 2007). However, an evaluation of the effects of *Kids' Turn* on 7-9 year olds presents a cautionary note about the impact of direct involvement for children themselves, suggesting that children "may need continued support in addressing the strong feelings the programme aroused" (Gilman et al., 2005:124).

Findings on impact:

Although each of the selected programmes had been subject to at least one evaluation, limitations in research design precluded a full assessment of impact. Only three evaluations were undertaken using a randomized control trial (RCT) design (Braver et al., 2005; Cookston et al., 2006; Kline Pruett et al., 2005; Whitehurst et al., 2008*). The design adopted by *CF & CI* involved a two stage lagged procedure in order to create comparison between the two intervention models. The remaining evaluations relied primarily on post-programme assessments of parental satisfaction. Therefore, we present here the main results reported in the three RCT studies and *CF&CI* as these offer the strongest evidence and all collect independent measures from both mothers and fathers (Table III).

Parenting outcomes: Conflict and Co-parenting

Overall, the strongest evidence of programme impact is for reductions in parental conflict, even in high conflict cases**.** This finding includes the reduction of conflict in the presence of children, or reduction of breadth and depth of conflict issues. Reduction in parental conflict is reported for all four programmes, and is frequently cited as a key benefit for children, fathers and mothers. In terms of improvements to the co-parental relationship, the evidence is more modest. This is not least because the operationalisation and measurement of this outcome is

varied, including: increased positive co-parenting behaviours, reduced negative co-parenting behaviours, improvements in perception of the other parent's co-parenting skills and improved relationship adjustment.

Fathers in the *DFL* programme reported improvements in co-parenting and a reduction in inter-parental conflict in comparison to controls (Cookston et al., 2006). These findings are particularly significant as they were corroborated by mothers who had not been involved in the intervention, and were not always aware of fathers' participation. The authors note: "the change in the one parent (the father) must have been substantial and comfortable enough that the entire dynamics of the relationship were revised in a way that was unmistakably apparent to the partner" (Cookston et al., 2006: 133).

In addition, the *CDP* evaluation also presents findings linked to fathers' reported understanding of 'gatekeeping'. In relation to their perception of mothers' co-parenting role, fathers' acknowledged the significance of their past, and on-going relationship with mothers, and the importance of mothers' support for fathers. Fathers also valued flexibility and practical support from mothers with regard to caring arrangements, and reported that mothers did facilitate contact (Kline Pruett et al., 2005). In the evaluations of *CPDP*, both fathers and mothers reported improvements in overall quality of the co-parenting relationship and assessment of their own, and the other parent's co-parenting abilities. However, fathers' increase in positive co-parenting behaviours (again based on self-assessment and assessment by the other parent) was slightly less than mothers (Whitehurst et al., 2008).

The reported findings from the *CF & CI* highlight particular benefits to families, and fathers, in the *Child-Inclusive* programme. In this group, fathers reported lower acrimony between parents and improved perceptions of co-parenting. In addition, qualitative findings offer further insights into the impact of the CI programme. Fathers in the CI group reported greater satisfaction with caring arrangements, were more likely to report that the mediation process was 'fair', and that they felt supported within the programme. Fathers in this group were also more likely to be content with arrangements which did not necessarily involve a substantial increase or 'equal share' in overnight stays. The authors suggest that the CI group enabled fathers and mothers to negotiate developmentally sensitive arrangements, and "made it easier to resist arrangements tailored to any sense of adult entitlement" (McIntosh et al., 2007: 22).

Child wellbeing outcomes

There is some evidence for the effect of these programmes on children's wellbeing and adjustment, in particular, a reduction in children's internalising problems (sadness and low affect) over time. Three of the four interventions are reported to show some positive effect on child outcomes (Table III). In terms of effects on relationships between children and their fathers, the evidence is minimal, predominantly because evaluations either did not seek to measure this, or did not report any findings related to it. Indeed where reporting on this question is included, potential effects are often inferred or raised as a discussion point rather than an empirically validated finding.

An aim of *DFL* was to improve psychological and behavioural outcomes for children by improving fathers' parenting and co-parenting. In the 2005 evaluation, the main reported finding was reduction in internalising problems for children (according to both fathers and

mothers) with the effect being strongest in those children experiencing the greatest problems at baseline (Braver et al., 2005).

The *CF & CI* programme presented a small number of unique outcomes for children as well as parents in the Child-Inclusive treatment group. Based on structured interviews, the evaluation found that children experienced improved emotional availability of their fathers, and increased feelings of closeness to him (McIntosh et al., 2007). Fathers, mothers and children in this group also expressed greater contentment with caring arrangements. The *CF & CI* evaluation was also the only one to use a standardised measure of parent-child relationship quality and to assess separately for fathers and mothers (Table IV).

CDP reported two indirect benefits to children arising from father's participation in the programme. Firstly, that father involvement remained constant with a small increase over time, and secondly, that there was an increase in payment of child maintenance by non-resident fathers (Kline Pruett et al 2005).

Limitations of the research evidence

These studies do demonstrate accumulating knowledge about the benefits of divorce-related parenting programmes. In addition to reported effects, the evaluation discussions also point to creative intervention processes, prevailing concerns and emergent ideas, which we argue are valuable for future research. There are points of comparison across the programmes and their respective evaluations: common aims, programme goals, and the use of standardised measures, which does make cautious generalisation possible. Therefore, despite the variation in programme and evaluation design, the synthesis of this research does reveal important insights about how parents may respond to such interventions; not least that parents who take part appear willing and, to some extent able, to improve their capacity for reflection,

attitudinal and behavioural change. However, there are several limitations of this body of research which are important to consider.

Lack of disaggregation by gender

Despite selecting programmes which involved, or were aimed at fathers, it was difficult to extract information about programme effects on, and benefits to them. There was not enough consistent analysis by gender of parent. In five evaluations gender appears as a demographic variable, either to simply identify numbers of fathers and mothers, or to analyse in relation to retention or satisfaction (Parents Forever; Focus On Kids; The Parenting Education Programme; PACT; CPDP). There were only four attempts to disaggregate fathers' and mothers' measures and outcome scores, or to consider how programmes may specifically affect aspects of men's parenting, father-child relationships, or fathers' perceptions of co-parenting (DFL; CDP; Working Together; CF & CI).

The issue of sample selectivity

In developing knowledge on how fathers both adjust to, and impact on, the process of family restructuring after separation, there is scope for evaluations of programmes aimed at a wider range of fathers, particularly those with mental health issues. The question of whether only parents who are highly motivated to change attend divorce-related parenting programmes is consistently asked of this type of intervention. It is relevant to issues of target population; whether programmes reach their intended target, or fail to reach those fathers and families who may need support most.

Evaluation techniques

In terms of summative evaluation, the randomised control trial (RCT) remains the key benchmark of intervention effectiveness, and has considerable standing in the context of evidence-based treatment. RCT evaluation design allows investigators to compare the efficacy of treatment versus no treatment or to compare the relative efficacy of more than one form of intervention. However, whilst being a powerful source of evidence, the RCT approach cannot necessarily provide insight into the processes by which the intervention works. In the context of divorce-related parenting programmes, this is particularly relevant, as there is a growing sense that such interventions can and do help separating families, but a lack of robust evidence as to exactly what constitutes the 'active ingredients' (Sigal et al., 2011). In the case of evaluating ways in which divorce-related programmes can support fathers, there remains a need for increased understanding of the processes, aims and practices involved in such interventions, for describing organisational settings and tracking of uptake of fathers. This means that formative evaluation, as well as summative assessment of efficacy, is important. Therefore there is scope for boosting RCT evaluation designs with mixed methods (for example qualitative approaches including ethnography or organisational case studies) in order to deepen understanding about supporting fathers after separation, and to design more effective programmes.

Need for father-related indicators

Attempting to analyse the impact of intervention on outcomes is a complex endeavour, and relies heavily on the operationalization of concepts and development of valid indicators. Historically, much of the conceptual and methodological development in family service evaluation has focused, either explicitly or implicitly, on the maternal dimension of family relationships (McBride and Lutz, 2004). In light of this, it is unsurprising that the fatherhood

research field has become concerned with the issue of concept scrutiny and the development of indicators to capture multiple and complex aspects of fathering identities, roles and activities. In this review we found very few father-related indicators, but even where indicators were used, corresponding findings were not always reported. Similarly, where programmes, such as *DFL,* expressed father-related goals, the evaluation did not always directly measure, or again, report on these. In order to evaluate divorce-related parenting programmes from a fathering perspective, a set of father-related indicators need to be adopted and systematically measured before and after the intervention. A central part of such evaluation is identifying particular dimensions of fathering relevant for the project at hand and then choosing the best available measure. Evaluators, researchers, and practitioners alike will need to ask 'What counts for positive change in relation to fathering? How do we measure and understand the effects of positive father involvement for children, families, and communities?' Efforts to improve the quality of father-related indictors both for research and programme evaluation has been initiated in the USA through the *Fatherhood Research and Practice Network* (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015).

Conclusion

Divorce-related parenting programmes have increased in many Western jurisdictions, particularly the US, over the past two decades (Sigal et al., 2011). Despite this proliferation it is striking how few of the reviewed programmes actually gave attention to and tracked outcomes for men's parenting, father-child and co-parental relationships. Whilst there has simultaneously been increasing emphasis on the significance of fathers to children's wellbeing, research on the impact of divorce-related parenting programmes on fathers, or on

issues relevant to father-inclusive recruitment, design and implementation for this group of men, are surprisingly rare.

Our review collated research evidence about interventions which focus on family relationships and psychological family restructuring after separation and divorce. Our aim was to investigate what this revealed about supporting men's parenting, father-child and co-parental relationships. The search process, identification, and analysis of the programmes points to some promising findings but also areas for further conceptual and empirical development. Central to this is the identified need for improving the quantity and quality of data about men in families. More systematic collection of data on men's lives as fathers would be valuable to researchers, practitioners and policymakers alike, and is crucial to intervention design and implementation. Such an advance would also contribute to enhancing social work practice where the lack of data on men in families, gathered as part of assessments, has been identified as a significant barrier to developing more father-inclusive practice (Clapton 2009, Swann 2015). Our review demonstrated, and was hindered by, the lack of disaggregation by gender as part of evaluating any effects of divorce related parenting programmes. Developing more systematic ways of including gender as part of both programme and evaluation design, would improve understanding of the complex process of family restructuring after separation. Whilst our review had a specific focus, our wider point is that this lack of attention to fathers in both programme design and implementation is linked to the ongoing problem of father-engagement, and its quality, in child and family social work more generally (Maxwell et al., 2012). The extent to which fathers, male kin, and unrelated males are assumed to be a risk or resource to children continues to be a practice challenge in social work and other child and family professional fields. Our highlighting of the limited recognition of, and response to, gender difference variation in relation to parenting, whether

in service delivery or evaluation, is relevant to broader debates on developing father inclusive practice. In addition, the emphasis on evidence-based programmes and service audit makes it increasingly important to generate direct, as well as inferred information on male parenting. We also point to the importance of conceptual work in developing theoretical frameworks to inform programme design and shed light on evaluation data (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). Our review has revealed that few father-related measures are used in the evaluation of divorce-related parenting programmes, and where they are present, they are not necessarily reported on. We argue that existing father-related indicators should be more routinely used, and that collaboration between researchers and practitioners in this field could contribute to the development of further measures of fathering activities and relationships. Overall then, our review has shown modest evidence of the benefits of divorce-related parenting programmes for fathers but also some important limitations of both their implementation and evaluation. Attending to these findings, and to the research recommendations offered here, contributes to the kind of "game change" that those advocating father-inclusiveness see as much needed for child and family services (Panter-Brick et al 2014).

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