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Empowering fathers through social work: Barriers and solutions to father engagement in parenting programmes.

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Melissa Joy Gray

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Abstract

This thesis explored six social workers' perspectives on potential barriers and solutions to father engagement when delivering a parenting programme. Engagement with fathers in parenting programmes is an under-researched area and this thesis adds to this body of knowledge. This qualitative research was conducted using an interpretivist approach drawing on social constructivism as a theoretical framework. Semi-structured interviews with six social workers allowed for flexibility and the collection of meaningful data. Thematic analysis was used to find meaning in the data, where there was a consensus among social workers.

The findings of this thesis indicate that social constructions of parental roles impact on father engagement in parenting programmes. Perceptions from social workers, other professionals, communities and on a societal level may be marginalising fathers from attending or feeling included in parenting programmes. Gender safety for fathers in a female dominated social work industry was also thought to impact on engagement. Numerous practical factors also effect the level of father engagement in parenting programmes. It is recommended that social workers strive for father empowerment on different levels to ensure that fathers are valued and can engage in parenting programmes.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Parenting programmes can have a positive impact on the whole family (Coore et al., 2017; Furlong et al., 2012; Lindsay & Totsika, 2017; Sanders et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2014). Research indicates that fathers are less likely to participate or engage in parenting programmes (Coakley, 2021; Frank et al., 2015; Lechowicz, 2019; Pfitzner et al., 2020). There can be a variety of reasons for this on an individual, professional, organisational, community or societal level (Burn et al., 2019; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Koerting et al., 2013; Pfitzner et al., 2017; Symonds, 2020; Tully et al., 2018). Understanding what barriers and solutions may impact on engagement with fathers is crucial to support fathers in the future and to benefit communities. Social workers may deliver a parenting programme as a part of their work alongside families (Connolly et al., 2018). The aim of this research is to explore social workers' perceptions of engagement with fathers in parenting programme delivery.

Research that explores fathers in parenting programmes is limited and this research is important as it adds to the small body of literature internationally and particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand (Glynn & Dale, 2015). This study sought to understand potential barriers and solutions to father engagement through interviews with six social workers who deliver parenting programmes and interact with fathers. It will add to the body of knowledge related to engaging fathers in parenting programmes including uncovering the barriers and potential solutions to father engagement. It is hoped that with insight into the barriers and potential solutions that fathers can be empowered to have a voice in parenting programmes. Social workers may also learn new skills that they can add to their knowledge to support positive change for fathers.

This chapter is an introduction to the study topic and explores background information about the research. Firstly, the rationale gives context to the research and outlines why this was an area of interest to the researcher. The aims and objectives of the research are stated, which describe the intent of the researcher for outcomes of the study. Researcher positioning explains both personal and professional reasoning for the chosen topic. Background information about the fathers and the parenting programmes is explored to provide an overview of the international and Aotearoa New Zealand contexts of the study. Finally, the thesis structure is outlined to support the reader to understand the order of the thesis.

Rationale

There are several factors that can impact on fathers' engagement in parenting programmes. These can be related to the level of engagement fathers have with their children, societal expectations of the role of the father and through unconscious bias on the part of social workers (Nygren et al., 2019). Gender influences parental engagement when there is a social service involved and this is highlighted in a multitude of studies (Forbes et al., 2020; Grundelova & Stankova, 2019; Nygren et al., 2019; Widding, 2015). Societal pressures exist for both mothers and fathers in terms of their parenting roles (Forbes et al., 2020). Mothers are often seen as the primary caregiver when their child is an infant, as they are perceived as the nurturer. A father may feel some exclusion at this early stage and may be unsure of his role as a parent. A father may also feel pressure from society about being more sensitive and gentler, however this perception appears to be changing (Forbes et al., 2020). Additionally, there could be an element of discrimination against fathers from social workers, which may be intentional or unintentional (Nygren et al., 2019). At times, a social worker may overlook the value of the father, which could manifest in actions like excluding him from the conversation. Understanding what may be leading to a bias towards fathers is important for understanding why engagement in parenting discussions may be poor (Nygren et al., 2019). A social worker may have a conscious or unconscious bias towards fathers and a father may be less likely to engage because they also hold the belief that they have less value (Grundekiva & Stankova, 2019).

Father engagement in social work is an under-researched area (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). Father involvement with his own children is also an under-researched area (Pryor et al., 2014; Luketina et al., 2009). From the small body of research that exists in this area fathers are less likely to engage with social services (Coakley, 2021; Frank et al., 2015; Lechowicz, 2019; Pfitzner et al., 2020). There are numerous individual, professional, organisational and societal factors that have been identified as potential barriers to father engagement (Burn et al., 2019; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Koerting et al., 2013; Pfitzner et al., 2017; Symonds, 2020; Tully et al., 2018). According to Nygren et al. (2019), the level of involvement a father has with his children will impact on how he engages in a parenting programme. A core belief of social work

is the need to work alongside the whole family and inclusion is an important value when having parenting discussions (Connolly et al., 2018). Social workers can find it difficult to engage fathers in parenting programmes (Brewsaugh & Strozier, 2016; Burn et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). Understanding the reasons that impact fathers' engagement in parenting programmes is the central aim of this research. It will contribute to literature on the barriers and solutions to father engagement in parenting programmes with social workers.

Research aims and objectives

This research seeks to understand barriers and solutions for social worker engagement with fathers when delivering a parenting programme.

Aims and objectives of the research:

- To explore social workers' perceptions of father engagement in parenting programmes.
- To explore potential barriers and solution to engaging with fathers.

Objectives of the research:

- To examine potential barriers that may hinder engagement with fathers when delivering a parenting programme.
- To examine potential solutions as outlined by social workers that have supported engagement with fathers when delivering a parenting resource.
- To add to the small body of literature to find solutions that empower fathers.

The research undertook a qualitative exploratory approach involving semi-structured interviews with six social workers who had experience in the delivery of parenting programmes.

Researcher positioning

According to May (2001), social research requires the researcher to examine their own basic values and the relationship of these values to decisions in order to provide justification for valid research. In terms of qualitative research, the researcher will become interested in a topic after experiencing a phenomenon in their personal or professional life (Ryan et al., 2007). The researcher's professional role in this area has led to interest in this research.

The researcher was inspired by their recent role as a Family Start Whānau Worker at Plunket Whānau Āwhina. In this role they worked alongside whānau in a social work capacity and supported them to meet their goals and deliver a parenting resource which is tailored to meet the needs of the whānau. Colleagues and the researcher had often discussed how fathers are less likely to engage with the parenting resource if they are home when the worker was visiting. One of the male social workers also found it more difficult to engage fathers. The criteria for joining the programme was that the mother is pregnant or the child was under one. Often the referrals had the mother's issues as meeting contract criteria for risk factors, which is understandable as they were engaging with different professionals during pregnancy or after birth. Quite often the father was only named if he was a risk factor, such as in cases of family harm. From this early stage there was a strong emphasis on the mother and how she parented her child. The researcher was interested in this topic to understand what some barriers could be for fathers' participation, whether these are systematic, societal or whether there is a professional bias from social workers. The researcher was also interested in exploring solutions, which is why they chose to speak with social workers about their experiences and how to better support fathers in their parenting.

Background

A father who is involved in his child's life is positive for their development (Bernard et al., 2015; Devault et al., 2015; Henry et al., 2020; Holmes et al., 2020; Jessee et al., 2018). A child will be most likely to have positive social, emotional and educational outcomes if their father figure is an engaged parent (Henry et al., 2020). Gender roles have changed significantly in the past few decades. Starting in the 1970's, women in Western nations began to focus on

their career as traditional family structures were no longer supported by changing neo-liberal social environments which gave rise to higher living costs, meaning two incomes were needed to support a household (Fine-Davis, 2018; Flouri, 2005; Myers, 2015; Zoch & Schober, 2018). Generally, in the past twenty years there has been a shift away from traditional Western gender roles, and both parents are likely working and co-parenting (Luketina et al., 2009; Pryor et al., 2014). There is research to suggest that although roles are changing, women are still more likely to undertake domestic tasks (Pryor et al., 2014; Luketina et al., 2009). However, fathers are more active in their children's lives than that of their fathers and this new phenomenon is under researched. In recent years there has been a decrease in the number of fathers not listed on the birth certificate in Aotearoa from a peak of nine percent in 2013 to five percent in 2018 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). Generally, birth rates are decreasing but the age of fathers is increasing as parents choose to leave having children until later in life.

In the Aotearoa context, after the release of the White Paper for Vulnerable Children¹ in 2012, the importance of positive parenting and supporting parents with young children was highlighted (Robertson, 2015). This showed the importance placed on parenting programmes in Aotearoa. There are currently several parenting programmes supported by the Government, such as SKIP, Incredible Years, Triple P and Family Start (Health Navigator, 2020). Some of these are for individual support, such as Family Start, and some for group work, such as Incredible Years. Since 2015, there has also been a focus on father specific programmes such as Plunket's Dads4Dads. These parenting programmes range from prescriptive to individually tailored to meet the specific needs of the parents. Parents appear to have a wide range of options if they are needing evidence-based support for parenting (Health Navigator, 2020).

Parenting programmes are designed to support caregivers of children with guidance and strategies to inform their parenting (Butler et al., 2020). Parenting programmes are generally based on the latest scientific findings of child engagement from parents which support children's development (Butler et al., 2020; Evans, 2006; Lindsay et al., 2019; Zhou et al.,

¹ The White Paper for Vulnerable Children was developed by the Fifth National-Led Government to investigate and establish a strategy to reduce abuse for vulnerable children.

2017). Parenting programmes are delivered in communities as a part of initiatives to encourage positive parental involvement with their children (Smart, 2020). Parenting programmes may be designed for individual or groupwork. The ultimate goal is to enhance the life outcomes of children and young people while supporting the family holistically (Smart, 2020).

Research highlights the importance of the father in his children's lives, but there is little guidance for a social worker on how best to engage with a father in a parenting programme context (McHale & Negrini, 2018). Since 2015, there has been tailoring of some parenting programmes towards fathers in response to a perception that father's interaction with their children is increasing (Smart, 2020). Quite often it is mothers who attend parenting programmes, as in the past parenting programmes have been delivered during the day when fathers may have been working. This has been changing, where some fathers are becoming the primary caregiver or a co-parent, yet there has not been an increase in fathers attending parenting programmes (Smart, 2020). Some fathers found that a major barrier to them attending parenting programmes was how they thought society perceived them, but also their own personal attitudes to what their role was as a father as a factor (Luketina et al., 2009). There is now more pressure from society on fathers to have a dual role of being a provider and spending time with their children. Many fathers feel as though services are more tailored towards mothers and their children (Luketina et al., 2009).

This research will examine how social workers who have a parenting element to their work, such as delivering a parenting programme, engage with fathers. Understanding how social workers engage with fathers will be explored to have a better understanding of their experiences and to identify barriers and solutions. The aim is to not only understand what barriers could be but also to look at strategies or opportunities as outlined by the social workers to improve the engagement of father's participation.

Key Terms

The following key terms are used throughout the thesis:

Engagement: in social work can be described as a process where the client responds in a meaningful way to the therapeutic relationship with the social worker (Tetley et al., 2011). It

is a subjective process where different social workers will have different measures for what they define as successful engagement. The client may also have a different perspective on whether they feel they have been engaged in the process. How fathers engage with social workers delivering a parenting programme is central to the topic of this study.

Fathers: The term father or dad has been used interchangeably throughout this research. A father can be described as a person who identifies as male and cares for children in a parental capacity (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013; Ryan, 2018; Zoja, 2018). The social workers in this research outlined their own individual definitions of fatherhood and these different definitions have been described.

Generative fathering: is informed by Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and is a theoretical framework used by professionals to understand the capacity a father has as a parent (Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019). Generativity is a measure of how an individual father acts with his children's best interests in mind and how engaged he is with his children.

Non-Government organisation: is typically a social service that offers a service to the community, generally to vulnerable populations. Non-Government organisations may hold Government contracts and/or may receive funding from elsewhere.

Oranga Tamariki: is a Government agency that has statutory powers in terms of child protection and youth justice, previously referred to as Child, Youth and Family or CYF's.

Paid parental leave: is a payment that is made by the Government when a person or couple has a new baby (Employment New Zealand, 2021). The length of entitlement will depend on how long the person has worked in their current role.

Parenting programmes: come in various forms and are designed to support parents with parenting skills (Evans, 2006; Lindsay et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2017). The parenting programmes referred to during this research are from a variety of sources, including government parenting resources. Both group and individual work was undertaken. Parenting programmes seek to teach skills to parents to improve their children's behaviour and enhance the family dynamic. Parenting programmes can have positive outcomes for family cohesion.

Social workers: promote social change and empower people to achieve holistic well-being (Bamford & Bilton, 2020; Bisman & Bohannon, 2014; Doel, 2012; Timms, 2018). Generally,

social workers work alongside clients or groups who need support. All of the social workers recruited for this research were practicing and currently registered. For a professional to call themselves a social worker in Aotearoa they must be registered (SWRB, 2021).

Structure of thesis

The overall structure of the research is organised around six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the research and offers context to the focus of the research, social workers engagement with fathers in parenting programmes. The objectives and aims of the research are then explored. Chapter Two contains the literature review, where the researcher examines the topic of the research, exploring various concepts that relate to the topic and research already undertaken in this area. The literature review has six sections: Parenting programmes, the social construction of fatherhood, other cultural understandings of fatherhood, father's participation in parenting programmes, generative fathering and the role of social workers in parenting programmes. Chapter Three explains the methodology and method used to complete the research. It also discusses ethical implications as well as limitations. The results of the semi-structured interviews are presented in Chapter Four. Six themes were identified: Fatherhood, structural barriers, gender barriers, motivation of dads to attend, practical barriers and skills of the social worker. Chapter Five compares and contrasts the findings from the data to that from the literature review. Similarities and differences were identified and discussed to find meaning from the interviews. The themes were then grouped to identify possible barriers and solutions to father engagement in a parenting programme. Chapter Six concludes the research explaining the key findings and the implications for social work. This chapter also identifies key areas that could require future research to understand more about the topic.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the topic by describing the relevance of fathers in their parental role. How social workers engage with fathers in parenting programmes has been briefly explored to understand what barriers may exist for father engagement. The Aotearoa context

for parenting programmes was also explored briefly to give an overview of this area of social work. The aims and the objectives of the research were detailed, focused on the topic of how social workers engage with fathers in parenting programme delivery. The researcher's personal and professional rationale for choosing this topic were described. The structure of the thesis is then outlined to assist the reader through the work. The following chapter explores the literature that relates to the research topic.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This research aimed to explore social workers' perceptions of fathers' engagement in parenting programmes and to explore potential barriers and solutions to engaging with fathers. The purpose of this chapter is to present a literature review. The literature review will provide a foundation of knowledge for the reader upon which the rest of the research can build. The chapter is divided into six sections: Parenting programmes, the social construction of fatherhood, other cultural understandings of fatherhood, father's participation in parenting programmes, generative fathering, and the role of social workers in parenting programmes.

Systematic literature reviews are vital to understanding a body of literature about the research topic (Hart, 2018; Noble & Smith, 2018). This literature review involved sourcing both peer reviewed and grey literature from the period 2010-2021. Some older literature was included where the information was still relevant, such as in descriptions of topics related to the research and if the information was seminal to current research. Literature was sourced from multiple databases and search engines, including the Massey University library database - Encore, Google Scholar and Government websites. Key words searched included: Father engagement, father parenting, fathers, parenting programmes, social work engagement, positive parenting, generative fathering. Articles were limited to those published in English. The final review included scholarly peer reviewed journal articles, textbooks, and grey literature. Articles' reference lists were also used as a source for further articles on the topic.

Parenting programmes

Parenting programmes are effective in achieving positive outcomes for parents and their children (Coore et al., 2017; Furlong et al., 2012; Lindsay & Totsika, 2017; Sanders et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2014). Programmes are often designed to provide strategies for challenging behavioural, emotional or social difficulties that a child may display (Lindsay & Totsika, 2017). Since 2013, there has been a move towards universal parenting programmes as a health response to support a broad range of parenting difficulties (Lindsay & Totsika, 2017). Universal programmes are for any parent and are not designed for specific demographics

They are designed to support the next generation with their parenting skills with evidence-based education in order to improve the outcomes of the population. Often parenting programmes are supported by government funding or come under government initiatives. This can often be a part of government policy to improve the well-being of families. This has implications for overall outcomes of the population over time (Cullen, 2019; Lindsay & Totsika, 2017).

Parenting programmes in Aotearoa can be categorised in three ways (Superu, 2014). Firstly, universal, as discussed above to support the general population with their parenting skills. Secondly, there are parenting programmes designed to support certain populations, such as teen parents. Thirdly, there are tertiary programmes where a person may be mandated to attend after abuse has occurred. A programme may move between various categories as it can be tailored for different environments, such as the Triple P programme (Superu, 2014).

The Triple P-Positive Parenting programme is designed to support parents and families with their parenting (Triple P, 2021). It is designed to prevent and reduce behavioural issues that may present in children and teenagers. The main goal of the programme is prevention, to support stronger families and communities and to empower children (Triple P, 2021).

Another programme that is widely used in New Zealand is Incredible Years. The programme seeks to support caring and nurturing relationships between parents and their children, building their resilience for the future (Incredible Years, 2021). The programme is based on thirty years of clinically proven worldwide research, allowing it to evolve and be evidence based. The programme also seeks to prevent the formation of behavioural problems for children (Incredible Years, 2021).

A programme may be delivered in a wide range of settings such as through primary health care, at the early childhood centre, at community centres or in the home (Superu, 2014). Programmes in New Zealand share a commonality where the aim is to promote positive parenting which in effect creates positive outcomes for children.

There are similarities in the content of these parenting programmes (Superu, 2014). Teaching parents how to manage their expectations of their child's age and stage, teaching empathy

and positive reinforcement are some common topics. The ultimate goal is to improve the outcomes of the child in terms of how they internalise and externalise behaviour, the development of their cognitive or educational skills and the development of pro-social skills. It should be noted that different programmes have different aims and goals for their participants which means it can be difficult to compare different programmes and to gauge whether they had effective outcomes. Some parents may be asked to do a parenting programme as their children are showing signs of a conduct disorder. Early intervention programmes were introduced to support high risk families in a preventative approach to reduce the risk of disorders being developed from the environment. Early intervention programmes usually occur in the home and are usually tailored for the family, not only offering parental education but social support as other factors may be impacting on parenting. These types of programmes encourage education, allow for flexibility and also allow for child safety checks (Superu, 2014).

Parenting programmes generally share a common goal of supporting positive outcomes for families, the next section details how the social construction of fatherhood impacts on father engagement in parenting programmes.

The social construction of fatherhood

A father is a person who cares for children in a parental capacity and generally identifies as male (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013; Ryan, 2018; Zoja, 2018). Children do not need to be biologically related and the father may not live in the home. What defines a family is complex and it can be difficult to obtain a clear definition of a father (Daniel & Taylor, 2001). Social constructivism challenges traditional fatherhood and creates space for a new identity to be created (Hermans, 2002; Hibberd, 2005; Lock & Strong, 2010). How fatherhood is socially constructed depends on the individual, culture or society.

The social construction of gender impacts on parenting in society with masculine and feminine traits defining roles (Amato, 2018). The social construction of a father is based on the masculine values of performance and achievement for his family, however there is a shift towards a sharing of domestic tasks due to women also working to support their household

(Fine-Davis, 2018; Flouri, 2005; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Myers, 2015; Zoch & Schober, 2018). Gender roles in society are changing which impacts on the traditional social construction of fatherhood (Goldberg, 2014; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Molloy & Pierro, 2020; Owens, 2018). Masculine traditional norms may still be persistent for fathers and there may be identity confusion around what the role of a father is (Gul & Uskul, 2019; Lock & Strong, 2020; Molloy & Pierro, 2020; Petts et al., 2018; Sicouri et al., 2018). New fatherhood is a term used to describe a father who is an engaged and nurturing parent (Petts et al., 2018; Podnieks, 2018). Despite these shifting gender roles, fathers may still be perceived on a societal level as the main provider for the family (Mattila, 2020). Feminine traits, such as nurturing children are more closely associated with mothers (Su & Dwyer, 2020; Kukla, 2000; Roskam & Mikolajczak, 2020).

Parenting culture in Aotearoa is slowly changing (Owens, 2018). Generally, when children are under five the mother is more likely to stay home and care for the children, but in the last decade there has been an increase in fathers staying home to raise children. Even if the father works full time, he is more likely to play an active role in his children's life than that of his father. However, only one percent of the parents who take parental leave are fathers (Duff, 2021). As stigma around men being able to show emotion and talk about their mental health decreases, men appear to be more involved in their children's development (Owens, 2018).

Although society is changing men still face discrimination and stereotypes in the father role (Owens, 2018). A father can be perceived as a helper to the mother, which can devalue his role and put more pressure on the mother (Owens, 2018; Roskam & Mikolajczak, 2020). Providing and having time for their children is a balance that men in a co-parenting role must now balance (Luketina et al., 2009; Owens, 2018; Petts et al., 2018; Pryor et al., 2014). The way in which fathers are portrayed in terms of the media and through social policy also impacts on the way fatherhood is perceived and the identity of fathers appears to be in a transition period (Goldberg, 2014; Gregory & Milner, 2011).

Maternal gatekeeping is where a father may be perceived as a helper or secondary parent by the mother and interactions with the infant may be limited (Olsavsky et al., 2020). In this case the mother is socially constructing fatherhood. Maternal gatekeeping can also occur at the referral stage where a mother is more likely to access services, such as medical appointments

and may not include her partner. Another example could be a professional not including a father in a referral to the parenting programme (Dermott & Gatrell, 2018; Maxwell et al., 2012; Pfitzner et al., 2017). Professionals need to assume co-parenting is taking place and include the father in the referral (Brewsaugh & Stozier, 2016).

Fathers may be labelled as a risk if there has been an incident of family harm (Sarker, 2018). As early as social work training, fathers can be portrayed as a risk factor in textbooks, with a deficit focus, creating a professional social construct which influences social work practice (Brewsaugh & Stozier, 2016). This appears to be most prevalent in child welfare services and fathers may be excluded from attending a parenting programme if he is deemed a risk (Brandon et al., 2019; Shadik, 2020).

Up to twenty five percent of new fathers experience some level of post-natal depression but this is not often screened for by health professionals (Edwards et al., 2019). Emphasis is usually on the mother due to having given birth and the chemical imbalance associated (Eddy et al., 2019; Edwards et al., 2019; Parfitt & Ayers, 2009; Rusten et al., 2019; Sarker, 2018). According to Sarker (2018), engrained throughout the history of society is the idea of the forgotten father. This can be seen in popular culture, such as films, and also in the medical field. Medical professionals form another social construction of fatherhood, where a father's mental health may not be considered as he enters parenthood. Eddy et al. (2019), also describes how post-partum depression in fathers is rarely screened, underdiagnosed, and often not treated. Parfitt and Ayers (2009), explain how if post-natal depression is not detected early for fathers this will impact on the bond between father and baby. This can also impact on the relationship between the parents. In a New Zealand context between three to twelve percent of men experience depression either during their partner's pregnancy or after birth compared to thirteen to eighteen percent of women (Underwood et al., 2017). There was a higher risk of this if they felt stressed or had poor health with feelings of depression being stronger post-partum (Pryor, 2014). If a father suffers from post-natal depression it may not be detected and this could potentially lead to decreased desire to participate or engage in a parenting programme.

Fathers can face discrimination in terms of shared day to day care of their children when the relationship has ended between the parents (Bantekas, 2016; Bradshaw et al., 2002; Crowley,

2008; Milchman, 2018). This could be societal as there is a perception that children should naturally be cared for by their mother, which once again aligns with how fatherhood is socially constructed (Milchman, 2018). Men may seek full custody as another form of power and control designed to suppress women further (Milchman, 2018). Busch et al. (2014), explain that there was a fathers' rights movement that grew as a response to the movement of women leaving violent relationships. Changes to legislation, such as changes to the Crimes Act in 1985 where rape in marriage became a crime, were intended to protect women in abusive relationships. Some men saw these types of changes as a way of favouring the mother so that a father was charged by police and this impacted on his access to his children (Critchton-Hill, 2010). Additionally, parents who do not have day to day care of their children are less likely to engage in a parenting programme (McWey, 2015; Symonds, 2020). This is potentially a result of the social construction of fatherhood where fathers may be less likely to have day to day care because they are not perceived as the primary caregiver.

According to Spoonley (2020), there has been a significant rise in unmarried parents in the last decade, which has challenged traditions, dynamics and roles in terms of parenting. Su & Dwyer Emroy (2020), identify multiple factors in relation to father engagement. There has been a rise in co-parenting, but this is a transition period where current father's own fathers would have parented very differently. Generally, a father who currently has small children may not have been role modelled co-parenting and although there is a move towards equality in parenting roles, quite often the mother faces most of the parenting duties (Su & Dwyer Emroy, 2020). This can impact on engagement in terms of who needs to be involved in the education around parenting. Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are also less likely to engage. Those who are married are more likely to engage and this could be because of the level of commitment and the defining of roles and identity that can come from a formal declaration of the relationship. Generally, those fathers who are living with their children are more likely to engage in parenting programmes than those who do not. Fathers who had higher earnings and education, fewer children and fewer risks, such as substance abuse were more likely to engage. Fathers who engaged in parenting programmes were very co-operative and showed a strong commitment to parenthood, leading to longer engagement. It is important to understand how changing structures of families and parental relationships impact on the level of engagement for parenting programmes. The way in which research is

conducted should also be explored to understand a father's engagement in parenting programmes (Su & Dwyer Emroy, 2020).

This section has explored parenting programmes and their context nationally and internationally. The social construction of fatherhood has identified potential stereotypes that fathers may encounter that could impact on their engagement in parenting programmes along with the influence of change in society. The next section explores other cultural understandings of fatherhood.

Other cultural understandings of fatherhood

The role of a father changes depending on the culture. In the Aotearoa context, whānau is used to describe all extended family as well as immediate family, meaning that members have a shared whakapapa or ancestry, which can differ to the Pākehā² meaning of family where this usually means immediate family members (Durie, 2003; Kuokkanen, 2006; Warbrick et al., 2020). Traditionally for Māori, all whānau care for the tamariki³ collectively (Durie, 2003). Collectivism falls under the concept of whanaungatanga⁴ and these values are vital to the well-being of all the whānau. Another key concept is whakapapa which is important to the whānau and shapes the identity of a person. This is a person's ancestry and how they make their connections to their past. According to Edwards and Ratima (2014), when the first colonial settlers arrived, they observed that Māori fathers were kind and nurturing, taking their children with them as they went about their daily tasks to prepare them for adulthood. This was a strategy for survival where the child's self-efficacy and spirit were nurtured. Europeans observed co-parenting and support from wider whānau, such as aunts and uncles (Edwards & Ratima, 2014).

Today, although influenced by dominant Western views of parenting, in a household where the whānau identifies as Māori there is usually collectivism and nurturing from the whole whānau (Edwards & Ratima, 2014). The impacts of colonisation, such as lack of education

² Pākāha is a Te Reo Māori word meaning European Aotearoa New Zealander

³ Tamariki is a Te Reo Māori word meaning children

⁴ Whanaungatanga is a Te Reo Māori word meaning in its simplest form a close relationship between people.

and poverty, are some of the barriers that may impact on Māori fathers' involvement with their children. Pākehā tend to focus on the nuclear family for the care of children, with the parents taking most responsibility (Warbrick et al., 2020). Māori fathers can face pressure as they live between two worlds, and time with their children is valuable. In terms of this research it is paramount that the bi-cultural context of Aotearoa is taken into consideration, to not only understand Pākehā concepts of fathering, but also Māori (Warbrick et al., 2020).

Edwards and Ratima (2014), believe that in order to engage Māori fathers, parenting programmes need to at least have been adapted to be culturally appropriate or further kaupapa Māori programmes need to be developed. There are wide disparities between Māori and Pākehā fathers, such as in health outcomes and education due to the impacts of colonisation and this can create additional barriers to their involvement in parenting programmes. This is a mistrust in Pākehā systems that have oppressed Māori which could lead to less engagement in Government sponsored parenting programmes (Edwards & Ratima, 2014).

Social workers need to be bi-cultural in their practice, being culturally responsive to not cause further harm (Hepi et al., 2007). It must be acknowledged that Māori fathers face additional barriers to engagement in parenting programmes and may be more resistant than Pākehā fathers. Allowing time for rapport building encourages trust to support change in clients. Inclusion, building self-esteem and empowerment should be key areas of focus for social workers when engaging with Māori fathers. Trust and rapport are important to social work but are crucial to the engagement of fathers in terms of parenting programme involvement (Hepi et al., 2007).

According to the most recent census from 2018, Pasifika people represent just over eight percent of the population (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). Aotearoa New Zealand has an enduring and special relationship with its Pacific neighbours (Connolly et al., 2018; Paterson et al., 2016). It is important to understand the cultural differences for Pasifika in the Aotearoa context. Pasifika is an umbrella term for island nations in the Pacific and there is cultural diversity among the islands. A common aspect of Pacific cultures is the extended family as a foundation for holistic well-being (Paterson et al., 2016). Parenting can vary between cultural groups such as in the Tongan language the word for mother is the same as aunt, with aunt's

holding a significant role in the lives of their niece or nephew. Problems are traditionally solved within the family, so in terms of parenting programmes a social worker would need to be aware of the input of the extended family and the importance of this in parenting (Paterson et al., 2016). According to Malungahu and Nosa (2016), there has been a breakdown of these traditional family structures as Pasifika people have migrated to New Zealand. There is a rise in single parent households and notably a lack of male role models or fathers being present in their child's life. New generations may not be as connected to their culture and this is one factor in what may be contributing to a lack of male role models (Malungahu & Nosa, 2016). It is important to have this cultural understanding of Pasifika people in the New Zealand context to understand what may impact on their engagement in a parenting programme.

Pasifika peoples are often put under the same umbrella culturally, but there is much diversity within these communities and cultural identity can be fluid depending on ethnicity, geography, church, family, school, age, gender and whether a person is born in Aotearoa New Zealand or not (Siataga, 2011). These complex factors need to be considered and explored when working alongside a Pasifika father. At times it may be more appropriate for a Pasifika practitioner to deliver the resource, such as a Pasifika educator facilitating Incredible Years. Social workers need to embrace traditional and contemporary social norms for Pasifika families (Su'a -Tavila, 2019). Social workers should talk with the family about roles and responsibilities as well as responding to the diversity within Pasifika culture. There may also be cultural practices that must be upheld or implemented that could impact on the family dynamic and how interventions are implemented (Su'a -Tavila, 2019).

Aotearoa New Zealand is a culturally diverse country and multiple cultures need to be considered when exploring what a father's role is. According to the 2018 census, just over fifteen percent of the population identify as Asian (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). These are people who are from, or who have ancestral ties to, China, India, the Philippines or Korea. Just over one percent of the New Zealand population identify as Middle Eastern, Latin American or African (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). It would be difficult to investigate every culture to identify cultural norms in gender roles and parenting, but it is important to be mindful that Aotearoa New Zealand is a multi-cultural country. There will be cultural

differences between groups and individuals within that culture and having this understanding is needed by those in social sector settings to work effectively alongside people for change (Corey et al., 2014).

Social workers need to be aware of the oppression that can occur for ethnic minorities in Aotearoa (Dominelli et al., 2016; Greene, 2019). The inability of social workers to work with ethnic diversity has been common throughout the profession's history. Developing cultural sensitivity and humility is important when working alongside fathers from an ethnic minority. Social workers must strive to embrace difference and not treat all fathers as a homogeneous group. Best practice involves employing an inclusive model of intercultural communities and the management of diversity (Green, 2019). There must be a balance of equality and recognising diversity in order to be inclusive and flexible in practice. Dominelli et al. (2016), suggests another way for social workers to support diverse communities is to challenge the resource that they deliver. With any parenting programme, it is important for the practitioners to consider whether it is culturally appropriate and adaptable, or designed to assimilate people from different cultures into mainstream parenting ideals (Dominelli et al., 2016).

According to Keddell (2009), social workers need to move beyond believing that mainstream is a Pākehā worldview when working with ethnic minorities. Social workers should understand that there are many narratives and destabilise the idea that Pākehā is mainstream and that everyone else is different. A social worker needs to be careful not to have set ideas about a client's culture as there is difference among those who are a certain ethnicity. Not making assumptions and clarifying with fathers from an ethnicity or culture that is different to the social worker displays cultural competency which is core competency required by registered social workers (Social Work Registration Board, 2021). If a social worker has certain beliefs about an ethnicity, they may put in place inappropriate interventions which can lead to disengagement. This is a barrier that could impact on those fathers from ethnic minorities in Aotearoa (Keddell, 2009). Ensuring parenting programmes are ethnically appropriate may require further research (Patel et al., 2011; Ruiz et al., 2017).

This section has explored other cultural understandings and how these may impact father engagement in parenting programmes. Engaging with fathers from different ethnicities

requires social workers to reflect on their practice. The next section explores fathers' lack of participation in parenting programmes and how this impacts on social workers' engagement with fathers.

Fathers' participation in parenting programmes

If both parents are involved in a parenting programme and can both apply interventions consistently at home this can have better outcomes for children's behaviour (Frank et al., 2015). Co-parenting leads to cohesion in the home reducing conflict, yet fathers are less likely than mothers to engage in parenting interventions (Coakley, 2021; Frank et al., 2015; Lechowicz, 2019; Pfitzner et al., 2020). If a father attends a parenting programme but the mother does not, this can be less effective due to a lack of interparental constituency, where parents may not implement the strategies from the programme as they have a different level of understanding (Frank et al., 2015). Fathers are often excluded as co-parenting is often not encouraged by professionals, such as assuming the mother was the primary parent (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). Recruiting fathers to attend parenting courses is one area where there can be bias against fathers (Burn et al., 2019; Pfitzner et al., 2017; Symonds, 2020). There is research to support that social workers need to assume the father is involved when accepting a referral (Symonds, 2020). The initial engagement of fathers to attend the parenting programme can determine whether there will be meaningful involvement in the programme (Symonds, 2020).

Programme design can also impact on father engagement in parenting programmes (Frank et al., 2015). Fathers who are experiencing higher levels of parenting and personal stress need extra support is tailored to their needs (Frank et al., 2015). Programmes are primarily designed by the Government departmental staff and then delivered by non-Government or statutory agencies. Subsequently, programmes are designed, measured and evaluated by the Government. There is a systematic failure in the way programmes are designed, delivered and evaluated that is not consistent with father inclusion. Programme content and where the programmes are delivered requires adaption to respond to fathers' needs (Frank et al., 2015).

Timing and location are some practical considerations when recruiting fathers for a parenting programme, as generally fathers are working and parenting groups are more likely to take place during the day (Burn et al., 2019; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Koerting et al., 2013; Pfitzner et al., 2017; Symonds, 2020; Tully et al., 2018).

Fathers' participation and contribution should be viewed as important by the social worker if they are to participate in parenting programmes (Symonds, 2020). In a group setting if the participants are female along with the facilitator a father will be less likely to engage as they do not feel comfortable sharing in a group as the only male (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Shapiro et al., 2020). These factors need to be explored further to understand the unique needs of fathers so that they can effectively engage in an environment that caters for their needs (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Koerting et al., 2013; Lucas et al., 2021; Tully et al., 2018).

A potential reason for lower participation is the way that parenting programmes are advertised (Metzler et al., 2012). In order to reach a broader range of the population, there is a need to utilise the internet and particularly social media. The research highlights there is a need for diversification to meet the unique needs of certain demographics, such as sole fathers (Metzler et al., 2012). Generative fathering is examined next to understand how individual factors of the father impact on engagement in parenting programmes.

Generative fathering

A father who is engaged with his children is more likely to have a positive relationship with his children (Coakley, 2021; Frank et al., 2015; Lechowicz, 2019; Pfitzner, 2020). Generative fathering is a theory of fatherhood informed by Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and is used by professionals to determine a father's parenting capacity (Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019). Generativity was described by Erikson as an individual's drive to guide and contribute to future generations. Generativity has been applied by researchers and has determined that fatherhood offers an opportunity to become generative or may motivate a father to become more generative (Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019). In the past there has been a deficit focus on fathers as being emotionally challenged or absent, which can most likely be attributed to the societal context of what fathering was over the past fifty years (Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019).

Generative fathering is strengths-based and focuses on positive parenting traits, such as how a father supports his children to meet their goals.

Dollahite and Hawkins (1998), created a conceptual ethic of generative fathering where they engaged a non-deficit perspective and proposed the ethical obligations fathers had to parenting. Within this model there are seven factors of a father's role framework which at certain stages of the child's development may be more appropriate than others. The factors are ethics, stewardship, developmental, recreation, relational, spiritual and mentoring. The model seeks to focus on the strengths and capabilities of fathers to be generative and therefore have a positive effect in their children's lives (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998). This model provides a guide for the researcher to understand by positive and negative social constructions of fatherhood and how these may impact on the analysis stage.

Generative fathering can be understood in two ways (Pratt et al., 2012). How the father experiences fatherhood and variations in personality as to how fatherhood is experienced will impact on generativity (Pratt et al., 2012). The transition to fatherhood and the maturity level of the father is also influential to the level of generativity displayed by the father. Research has often focussed on these individual factors that impact on engagement rather than macro factors influencing engagement. Pratt et al. (2012), argued that the idea of generativity occurs at different stages throughout a father's life and their level of engagement might not be contributed to solely by the experience of becoming a father. Some characteristics that have been found in fathers who have a high level of generativity was that they had a sense of early advantage, empathy for the needs of others, pro-social goals for the future and the ability to be able to see positive outcomes in the face of adversity (Pratt et al., 2012). Fatherhood can be an opportunity to grow generativity as there is a transformation of sense of self in this new role. The life change of fatherhood creates an opportunity for generative development that may have not arisen at other times during the lifespan (Pratt et al., 2012).

A commonality between the models is how they highlight the complex factors that impact on a father's involvement with his children which will influence how he engages in a parenting programme (Allport et al., 2018; Doherty et al, 1998). Allport's Integrated Behavioural Model and Doherty's Influences on Responsible Fathering Model both explore individual, cultural and social elements and how these may be impacting on the relationship with his child. Both

models were based on the nuclear family with culture not being acknowledged. Norms was a common theme between the models. The father's attitude is considered important as this will influence how he engages with his child, and in turn the parenting programme. Norms of society such as parental roles are also explored through each model such as economic factors and social support. Mental health, self-esteem and personal agency can all impact on the professional relationship and how involved a father is in a parenting programme (Allport et al., 2018; Doherty et al., 1998).

This section explored generative fathering models to add to the knowledge of different perspectives on positive aspects of fathering. The next section explores the roles of social workers in parenting programmes.

[The role of social workers in parenting programmes](#)

Social work as a profession promotes social change, problem solving and encourages the empowerment of people to achieve holistic well-being (Bamford & Bilton, 2020; Bisman & Bohannon, 2014; Doel, 2012; Timms, 2018). A social worker utilises social and human behaviour theories to work alongside people in their environment. Social justice and human rights are key principles of social work. A social worker may work alongside individuals, families and/or whānau, communities or on a national level to create positive change. Supporting people to actively participate in society by removing barriers is one way in which social workers can create change. Social workers advocate for people when they face discrimination from society and support people to live the life they strive for (Bamford & Bilton, 2020; Bisman & Bohannon, 2014; Doel, 2012; Timms, 2018). A social worker who delivers a parenting programme needs to be mindful of these social work values and particularly advocacy in terms of inclusivity of fathers.

Social workers must be registered in order to practice in Aotearoa (Social Work Registration Board, 2021). This was a recent change as of February 2021, and it is significant for the profession as it aligns social work with other regulated professions such as teachers, nurses and lawyers. This change will see recognition of social work as a profession and also increase

safety for the public. Social workers must hold a practising certificate that they renew annually (SWRB,2021).

Part of being a Registered Social Worker in Aotearoa New Zealand is adherence to the code of conduct (SWRB, 2021). This outlines professional standards that a social worker must follow and is grounded in social work values and ethics. Key principles include working with integrity, respect of tangata whenua, respect of cultural needs, ongoing professional development, promoting the rights and interests of clients, maintaining trust and confidence of clients, respecting client confidentiality and privacy, respectful interactions with colleagues, maintaining public trust in the profession and keeping accurate notes that are secure. If a social worker does not follow the code of conduct and has their professionalism questioned, they may lose their right to practice (SWRB, 2021). All these values and ethics must be considered by a social worker who is delivering a parenting programme and is engaging with fathers.

The role of a social worker working alongside families is to support change within the family system and the family in their environment (Van Hook, 2019). A social worker creates an alliance with parents to collaborate with them to meet their goals. Before beginning work with whānau, a social worker should check certain factors about the family such as risk factors and understanding their culture (Van Hook, 2019). Establishing trust in the social worker's competence, understanding of needs and genuine concern about the welfare of the family are all important to ensuring that goals can be achieved (Pithouse, 2018). Parents need to be aware of why the social worker is working alongside them and have clarity around their role (Van Hook, 2019). Expectations for engagement should also be discussed. A social worker needs to be flexible and adaptable in their approach to the family. Learning their dynamics and the reasons behind certain behaviours will inform the social worker of the best interventions to support the family (Van Hook, 2019).

Social workers have an important role in the delivery of parenting programmes. How successful the parent's engagement in the parenting programme depends on how they feel they are perceived by the social worker (Van Hook, 2019). There may be a feeling of shame from the parents, especially if the referral is mandatory due to child protection services being involved. Initial interactions with parents should mainly focus on rapport building, with the

next session asking questions about concerns, but allowing the parents to tell their story. Separating the person from their behaviour is an essential skill to gain trust of fathers. It is important to maintain trust and rapport that increases the chances of change, but also does not minimise risk to the child's well-being (Van Hook, 2019).

Social workers need specific training to be able to best meet the needs and advocate for fathers, so they are not excluded from parenting discussions (Sicouri et al., 2019). An awareness of bias towards fathers is important for a social worker to reflect about whether their practice is inclusive and is responsive to the collective well-being of the whole whānau (Haworth, 2019; Hibberd, 2005). Fathers are often not involved with a social worker or in a parenting programme (Haworth, 2019; Sicouri et al., 2019). Fathers do not receive the same support as mothers and social workers are not supported to work in a meaningful way alongside fathers (Sicouri et al., 2019). Exclusion of fathers is systemic, with policies and their implementation being designed towards mothers as the primary caregiver, meaning fathers are less likely to engage with social services (Sicouri et al., 2019).

Social work is a female dominated profession which may be contributing to the low number of males attending parenting programmes, as fathers may not feel comfortable due to gender safety (Grundekiva & Stankova, 2019; Haworth, 2019; Roger, 2013; Sicouri et al., 2019). A male's level of comfort in an all-female group or with a female social worker may make him less likely to share and be engaged with a social worker because he may feel his opinion is not valued in a female dominated environment (Glynn & Dale, 2015; McGirr, 2020). A solution to this would be more male social workers in the community. Social work is a female dominated industry that pays less than male dominated industries (Faulk, 2013; Lane & Flowers, 2015; Lewis, 2018). One reason there are less males working in the community is because males in social work are more likely to end up in senior roles (Rogers, 2013). Gender roles may also be prevalent in this context, with managerial positions being traditionally held by males and those who display masculine traits (Rogers, 2013).

According to Brewsaugh & Strozier (2016), there can be a negative perception of fathers in a child welfare setting which means they may not receive the same level of attention to engage. For example, social workers may also develop a bias if they continually see incidents of family

harm in their work and means they could be less likely to engage with fathers in a positive way (Zhang et al., 2018).

As discussed earlier, the paradigm of the absent father is a persistent social construct that impacts negatively on fathers in society (Canuto et al., 2019, Leath, 2017, Scheibling, 2020, Weber, 2020). Social workers may be influenced by their own social constructions of fatherhood formed from both personal and professional experiences and this may impact on how they engage with fathers (Volling & Palkovitz, 2021). This gender bias appears to occur quite frequently in this field and can impact on how social workers perceive fathers and their engagement with fathers (Brewsaugh & Stozier 2016; Hanna, 2018; Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019; Symonds, 2020). Social workers need to assume that co-parenting is already taking place in the household upon the initial contact, in order to be inclusive of both parents to encourage participation in the parenting programme (Brewsaugh & Stozier, 2016). Symonds (2020), explored how language impacted on father's engagement in parenting programmes and found that social workers needed to use more inclusive language and assume the father was attending and was co-parenting the child.

According to Nielsen (2012), stereotypes about fathers are widespread among other professions, such as education. Fathers may be less likely to participate if they are feeling undervalued in many sectors of society in relation to their children. A father may feel like his opinion is not valued and may not feel as though he has a voice in terms of parenting discussions (Nielsen, 2012). Social workers need to strive for inclusion and empowerment to truly value fathers. These are basic values of social work that require the professional to explore personal bias that may impact on rapport and engagement with a client (Connolly et al., 2018).

This section has explored the role of social workers in parenting programmes and explored literature from this area to understand how this may impact on father engagement in parenting programmes. Negative social constructions of fatherhood may impact on social worker perceptions and subsequently impact on the level of engagement from fathers.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents a summary of the literature relevant to the research topic. The chapter explored the nature of parenting programmes including the different types and availability across Aotearoa. The social construction of fatherhood was reviewed to understand the impacts of individual and societal beliefs on father engagement in parenting programmes including different cultural perceptions. The literature highlights potential gender bias towards fathers from social workers and other professionals. Social constructions of gender continue to impact on fathers in parenting programmes. The chapter also presented information about fathers' engagement in parenting programmes including practical factors that are barriers to fathers attending, as well as societal social constructions of fatherhood. The next chapter sets out the methodology and methods for this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

The aim of this research is to examine how social workers engage with fathers when delivering a parenting programme. The researcher wanted to understand the barriers and solutions to father engagement. This chapter explores the processes that were used to complete the research. It describes the methodological approach for the research, the selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, limitations of the study and ethical considerations. The reasoning behind a social constructivist-qualitative approach for the design choice of this research is explored and justified. This chapter also describes the participants and why they were chosen for this research. It examines processes used for data collection via semi-structured interviews. Following that, the chapter describes the data analysis to highlight how this aligns with qualitative research, including how coding of the data was completed. Finally, the study's limitations and ethics are explored to understand the constraints of the research.

Research Design

The aim of this research was to explore the perceptions of social workers who work alongside fathers and deliver a parenting programme, in pursuit of discovering barriers and possible solutions to father engagement. The research methodology was designed to support the subjective nature of the investigation. Methodology is a framework of techniques and procedures to gather information and analyse data (Cardano, 2020; D'Cruz & Jones, 2004; Mayan, 2009; Tesch, 2013). There are different styles of approaches towards research, but they can generally be divided between quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative is an analytical approach that focuses on statistical data to draw conclusions. Qualitative research is focused on exploring a person's experiences. When choosing the research approach, the researcher must have a clear understanding of the paradigm that supports this approach as this will influence the results of the research (Cardano, 2020; D'Cruz & Jones, 2004; Mayan, 2009; Tesch, 2013). A qualitative approach has been chosen for this research due to this being aligned with social work research. Justification for a qualitative approach is detailed in this section.

According to O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2015), research design should first articulate the research ontology, which is the belief system on which the research is based. Interpretivism has been chosen as the research is of a subjective nature as the researcher is seeking to understand social worker perceptions. An interpretivist approach to research requires the researcher to acknowledge that different phenomenon is open to interpretation and that qualitative research is subjective in nature (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The research aligns with interpretivist approaches as a small sample has been taken, but in-depth questioning through semi-structured interviewing has been used to find meaning (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). Interpretivism informs this research as the social workers being interviewed are sharing their experiences of working alongside fathers and their experiences are subjective. This clearly aligns with an interpretivist approach as the researcher is aware how social workers will have different experiences and the researcher also acknowledges their own experiences which will influence the analysis.

The primary aim of the research was to understand barriers and solutions to father engagement with social workers in parenting programmes. After ontology has been determined, the researcher then decided how the research aligned with the epistemology of social constructivism. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and how knowledge is understood (Gray & Webb, 2013). The researcher has conducted a literature review to understand social constructions of fatherhood, along with other factors that can impact on father engagement. The interview schedule was developed with questioning that facilitated an open-ended and wide epistemological pursuit.

Qualitative research is not new in the sense that understanding human behaviour has long been documented informally throughout history in the form of oral history or visual history (Darlington & Scott, 2020). Over the past two decades there has been a growing interest in qualitative research from the education, nursing and social work fields as issues arise from the frontline with questions that need answering. As this research is exploring the perceptions of social workers in their work alongside fathers in parenting programmes, this is the most appropriate approach.

Qualitative research is often used when the research question is subjective (Creswell, 2017; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Prasad, 2018; Ryan et al., 2007; Seidman, 2019). According to

Merriam and Tisdell (2016), social work research can align with a qualitative approach as this field explores people's everyday lives. This research sought the opinions of social workers about what are barriers or solutions to father's engagement in parenting programmes. Qualitative research was chosen to support the participants to tell their story, which creates a detailed picture of what they are experiencing. Commonalities were sought between the responses of the different interviewees to further understand this topic, or in cases of no commonalities, explorations of differences (Creswell, 2017; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Prasad, 2018; Ryan et al., 2007; Seidman, 2019). The researcher decided that qualitative research was most appropriate as the social workers interviewed were giving their subjective opinions about engagement with fathers in parenting programmes.

This is an exploratory piece of research as social workers' perceptions are being sought to understand engagement with fathers. Qualitative research is exploratory in nature as rich narrative data is gathered to find meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To achieve in-depth analysis of the phenomenon that may be occurring, an understanding of social work practice is required. This research sought to understand solutions to father engagement to support future social work practice in parenting programmes. Research that focuses on discovery, insight and understanding can lead to positive change for not only social workers but also those they work alongside. The researcher understood the foundations on which the research was based as this influenced the design and implementation of the study and without this there may have been a lack of understanding from the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Method

In-depth interviewing and participant observation are commonly used for this type of research and are well suited to exploring questions in human services which seek to find meaning in experiences and the complex nature of human behaviour (Darlington & Scott, 2020). This is especially important in this research, as the researcher is seeking to understand social workers' perceptions of engagement with fathers. According to Shekedi (2005), social constructivist-qualitative research can be defined by the emphasis on a reflective treatment of the subject matter, which aligns with an interpretivist approach due to the subjective nature of the topic. This type of research is used to understand the situation holistically.

Information gathered is seen as complex and interconnected. Understanding the context of the phenomenon is how the reality of phenomenon can be understood. The historical context of the phenomenon, as well as the current, are equally important for social constructivist-qualitative research which aligns with social work values such as holistically understanding a person. This aligns with the type of approach adopted for this research where the researcher was led by narratives but also is considering the background and context that could impact on how fathers engage (Shekedi, 2005). For this research, semi-structured interviews were used to interview six social workers.

Social constructivism

Social constructivism can be described as giving meaning to objects (Crotty, 2020). The world and everything in it only has meaning when people consciously engage and find meaning. It is through experience with the world that we find meaning. From the social constructivist perspective, no observation can be completely objective as experience influences our meaning of the truth. We do not merely create meaning we construct it from our own knowledge base (Crotty, 2020). Social constructivism implores people to be critical of our examinations of the world (Burr, 2015). This challenges us to acknowledge that traditional knowledge is subjective. Examining our own assumptions about a phenomenon that we observe requires us to explore how our experiences may be impacting on our constructions (Burr, 2015). Kukla (2000), describes social constructivism as collectively inventing the world rather than discovering it. A person's perceptions may be changed by micro or macro influences and social constructivism requires an unconstrained outlook that challenges conventional traditions and replaces them with new ones (Hermans, 2002; Hibberd, 2005; Lock & Strong, 2010). Social constructivism focuses on how the individual engages in the construction of knowledge from their own knowledge of social constructions. These social constructions have been developed through social processes and actions historically and culturally (Young & Colin, 2004). In terms of this research it is important to understand that gender roles are a social construct and will vary between individuals (Elder-Vass, 2012). How social workers interpret interactions that they see during their work with themselves and others present, such as mothers and professionals will also impact on data.

It was important to place social constructivism in the paradigm of this research and outline how this will inform the research. Qualitative research is congruent with social constructivism as qualitative research seeks in depth knowledge and people's perceptions during interviews. This lens was applied because the social workers all had different perspectives about their experiences working alongside fathers when delivering a parenting resource. Social constructivism is woven throughout the research; the literature review, the interview schedule and in the discussion. It was paramount to understand existing social constructions of parental roles in the literature review to identify issues that could arise for engagement from fathers. The researcher also used social work skills to acknowledge the person's own perspectives of their experiences of working alongside fathers. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, as the researcher was seeking to understand the participants' constructions of fatherhood and experiences of engaging with fathers. The theory of social constructivism was applied as the researcher was interested in the interactions between the social workers and fathers. Social constructivism was also applied during the discussion stage as a way of analysing the data and finding themes where perceptions among the participants were shared.

Participant selection

The following section outlines the recruitment of participants for this study. It describes the selection criteria for participants, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations and study limitations.

Purposive sampling involves recruiting participants who have relevant experience in the field to which the question is being asked (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As this research sought to understand the perceptions of social workers, it was most appropriate to take a targeted approach to participant recruitment. Following the ethics approval, participants were recruited using the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) recruitment invitation system, where social workers who were members of the ANZASW were invited to participate (see appendix one). All of the participants were social workers with experience in delivering parenting programmes. ANZASW circulated the research information, which included the details about the researcher and the aim of the research, to

their members. This information was also posted online on their website. All the participants were volunteers. Interested parties contacted the researcher to indicate they were interested in participating in the research. A consent form along with the information sheet (see appendix three and four) and questions were sent to the participants (see appendix two). All of the six social workers who first responded all meet the criteria and were accepted. The six social worker participants were from different parts of the country and were from a variety of organisations, including faith-based organisations, community agencies, iwi providers and statutory agencies. Details about participants can be found in the results chapter. Any questions about the research were answered before the interview took place.

Data Collection

As noted earlier semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. As the research is of a subjective nature, this type of interview is required to understand a person's story. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility for in-depth data (Elliot & Timulak, 2005). An interview schedule (see appendix two) was developed to create a base for questioning, which meant the researcher was prepared but still had flexibility in questioning (D'Cruz & Jone, 2004). According to Babbie (2013), for semi-structured interviews, participants may be given the questions in advance, meaning they have time to reflect on the questions. The researcher is able to ask follow up questions to gain deeper insight into their answers. This allows for flexibility in the discussion, but the researcher needs to be aware that comparable data is being sought, meaning that follow-ups should not differ too far from the original questioning (Bernard, 2013). The questions were open-ended to allow for detailed responses (see appendix two). This type of questioning allows the researcher to collect different perspectives, as they are able to expand on their answers rather than only answer one question (McLaughlin, 2012). Close ended questions were also used to gain specific information, such as how long the participant had worked in the field. Further follow up questions were also used to ensure the information gathered by the researcher was correct.

According to Seidman (2019), a researcher needs to think carefully about the type of questions they will ask to ensure that the questions are relevant to the topic and will provide room for the participant to give information that is specific to the research topic. While it is important to scrutinise the questions because of the nature of qualitative research and follow up questions being used, the researcher needed to listen carefully and look for opportunities of further exploration. In a practical sense it was important to ask participants when there was a miscommunication to ensure the information is correct. It was important for the researcher not to lead the conversation so that the participant was influenced as little as possible. Listening is the most crucial part of interviewing so that the participant could tell their story and the researcher was aware that follow up questioning was not interrupting them (Seidman, 2019).

As the researcher worked in this field, being aware of personal bias was important when taking interviews. This is known as insider research, where the researcher works in the industry they are studying (Humphrey, 2013). Ethical dilemmas can arise from this type of research and the researcher was aware during interviews not to collude with participants to gain their perspectives of father engagement. Before and after interviews this possible bias was acknowledged to ensure professional experiences were not impacting on the selection or data collection process. Reflection took place particularly for follow up questions to ensure that coercion was not occurring.

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. A pilot test interview was completed two weeks before the commencement of interviews, but this data was not included in the results. Pilot interviews are undertaken to test and strengthen the questions (Maison, 2019). A colleague of the researcher was asked to participate as they had experience with fathers and parenting programme delivery. The pilot was an in-person interview, with the actual interviews subsequently being on Zoom. The primary reason for the pilot interview was to ascertain whether the questioning was appropriate and flowed well. The pilot interview identified that the order of questioning needed to be changed. It was also found that some questions were too similar and redundant. During the pilot, the participant asked for the clarification of some questions, which meant that those questions were re-written to be more concise and easier to understand before the interviews took place. The pilot

interview was valuable to understand how the questioning could be interpreted and gave the researcher an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the questioning. The researcher's cell phone was used to record the audio during the pilot and the recording was found to be good quality. It was then decided that this method would be used as an extra form of recording for the main interviews. Subsequently, as the interviews were via Zoom, this was an extra measure in case the quality of the audio recording from the video was not clear.

A total of eight people responded to the advertisement. One applicant did not respond after they had been sent the information and did not have an interview. Another person responded too late, a few weeks after analysis was being undertaken and so was not interviewed. For the remaining six, after they made contact, they were sent information about the interview, a consent form and the ethics approval. Consent forms were emailed through before the interview commenced with most social workers sending these through after the interview, but informing me they had signed before the interview commenced. Before the interview commenced the researcher also read through this with the participant to ensure they were giving informed consent (see appendix three). The information sheet and the Ethics Committee approval letter were also sent in advance of the interview (see appendix four and five). Interviews were with individuals and were all via Zoom. This was due to social workers being located in different parts of the country. Interviews were between an hour and an hour and a half long. The allocated time allowed opportunities for follow up questions that are fundamental to successful semi-structured interviews. All participants' information was stored on the researcher's laptop which was password protected. The researcher's phone which was password protected was used as a back up recorder which participants were informed of; this was then deleted once data was collected. Any notes taken were kept in a locked cabinet. Following examination of the thesis all files were destroyed to protect the privacy of the participants.

Interviews were transcribed manually by the researcher by listening and writing what was said along with any non-verbal cues to add meaning to what was said. It is important to do this to understand the meaning of what has been said and to also listen to the tone of what has been said as this can change the nature of the information (Barbour, 2014). Transcripts were emailed to participants to check that information was correct which upheld the

trustworthiness of the research process. This ensures that there is transparency in the analysis, and the social workers were able to make corrections to the researcher's work (Barbour, 2014). Tracy (2013), explains that transcripts should be sent through in a timely manner and can be a part of an email to thank the participant for being involved in the research. Two of the participants made minor changes where they wanted to explain something they had said in more detail.

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis is to make sense out of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to do this the data must be condensed to a point where the researcher can find meaning and ultimately draw conclusions and make recommendations. Data analysis is complex and requires the researcher to move between concrete and abstract thoughts, between description and interpretation. Ultimately, data analysis requires the researcher to answer their research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research sought to understand social workers perceptions of barriers and solutions to father engagement in parenting programmes.

Cardano (2020), explains that in order to find rich information to inform analysis a researcher must gain the trust of participants. The researcher has a social work degree, so used rapport building skills to find in depth information. The participants were also social workers, and because reflection is a part of their practice, they were able to provide detailed answers that led to rich data. The rich data supported in-depth analysis to occur.

Thematic analysis is used to explore data by finding patterns and themes of commonality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis aligns with qualitative research as it takes information gathered and seeks meaning in narratives. The data was transcribed so that the researcher could find common words or phrases that have been mentioned by the participants. Similarities in words and phrases supported the researcher to establish themes and to be able to draw conclusions from the stories of the social workers.

A challenge of qualitative research is how it can be open ended (Castleberry & Nolan, 2018). Text as a form of data can be difficult to reduce in size and to find meaning. The activity of coding was used to find emerging themes. A code serves to make retrieval and categorisation of data easier to recognise. Specific questions need to be asked of the data. Understanding what is happening in the text, where and when it is happening in the text, along with some reasons why this may be occurring as well as understanding the actors and their roles. A coding strategy was determined to ensure the rigour of this research, which used descriptions that were signalled by the participants to find themes. When coding, groups were identified and then defined in relation to the context of the research question of identifying barriers and solutions. These definitions form the basis for the rest of the data to be categorised. This type of analysis aligns most closely with an inductive approach where the researcher seeks to generate themes from data collected rather than starting the research with a hypothesis (Bryman, 2012). After the completion of the initial coding the data was reviewed again to see whether there are any further categories that need to be added or whether certain groups could be combined into one (Castleberry & Nolan, 2018).

A table was created to replicate the following categories of code label, definition, description, qualifications or exclusions and examples (Roberts et al., 2019). The code was created from the common themes or words coming through and a definition was given to this code. A description of what the code meant in further detail supported links between common themes. Qualifications or exclusions will be a category that seeks to justify the reasoning for this code. Examples were then added that will include quotations from participants. Using this model ensured the reliability of the data and was a systematic approach to analysis when the topic is subjective. The model supports the integrity of analysis as each code is questioned in detail. This type of coding can be time consuming but ultimately leads to a thorough investigation which can lead to a robust piece of research (Robert et al., 2019). The researcher used this type of coding to assist with analysis to ensure the rigour of the research. An example of the process of data analysis as described above is included below:

Table 1.1 Coding

Code Label	Definition	Description	Qualifications or exclusions	Examples
Value of fathers	Social workers spoke of how they empowered fathers and valued their voice.	Social workers identified that they took a pro-equity and inclusive approach with fathers in parenting programmes but identified that other social workers and professionals may not do this in their work and this was a potential barrier to engagement from fathers.	This was talked about by all of the social workers so was a prominent theme	<i>“And find the strength as quickly as possible to get that vibe thing... make them feel important and once you have got that, I think you can grow” (Eva)</i>

O’Leary (2014), outlines that reflective analysis is needed during the analysis of data to achieve the greatest understanding. The researcher must first organise the raw data. The interviews were transcribed word for word by the researcher. This ensures there was no bias when conducting the interviews and allows for themes to be discovered. It was important for the researcher not to undertake full analysis while interviewing as this may interfere follow up questioning throughout other interviews. Interviews were written out for the researcher to find common words and phrases which form the basis of the themes. The themes were then interpreted for meaning which informs the discussion of the research. Social constructivism informed this interpretation. The data was then analysed, and recommendations were made about how to effectively engage with fathers (O’Leary, 2014). Reflection at every stage was crucial including the analysis stage, constant reflection ensures the rigour of the research. According to Hardwick and Worsley (2011), listening and writing narratives from participants in a clear manner creates authenticity in the research. Excerpts from the interviews were used to show how themes were reached. This correlates the data gathered with the findings and conclusions. Research should aim to share the voice of the

participants (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011). Reflection was an important part of the analysis process. Time was spent reading but also reflecting on the content between transcripts to ensure the correct meaning was found in the data.

Ethical Considerations

The aim of the research was to gain a better understanding of how to engage fathers when there is a parenting programme element to the social workers' role. The researcher abided by the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants. This study was notified by the Massey University Ethics office as a low risk notification (see appendix five). This low risk notification was prepared in accordance with the MUHEC Code of Ethical Conduct. As the researcher is a Registered Social Worker the Social Workers Registration Board Code of Conduct was adhered to throughout the research.

Informed consent is the process of ensuring that the participant is fully aware of how their data will be stored and used during the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is also a process of explaining their rights and protections throughout the interview. Informed consent was obtained from the social workers. Social workers were sent the consent form in advance and then this would read together before the interview commenced. Some social workers had signed before the interview and some signed after we read through the consent. These were then emailed to the researcher after the commencement of the interview.

Confidentiality was an important ethical consideration throughout the research. Confidentiality means that the participant's information was kept private and would not reveal their identity (SWRB, 2021). All client information was kept privately on a password protected laptop and cell phone for audio purposes. During the discussion section, the social workers' names were changed to pseudonyms. Participants also had the right to withdraw from the study before transcription took place as the research was voluntary, or could make amendments to the transcription. Participants had access to this information in the form of an information sheet, consent form and verbally before the interviews were conducted.

The ethics of beneficence was adhered to throughout the research. Social workers were asked to participate to understand their perspective on barriers and solutions that impact on father engagement. Not causing further harm to those involved was important to ensuring ethical research (Massey University, 2017). The researcher was careful not to interview participants known to her personally or professionally as this would be a conflict of interest.

Risk of harm to participants was another ethical consideration taken by the researcher in line with social work ethics (SWRB, 2021). As the researcher is a trained social worker, they were able to manage any distress that arose to support the well-being of the participants. One social worker became upset when sharing an experience. The researcher was able to support them through this with empathy and guide them to their supervision along with the counselling number the researcher had available. The researcher provided the number of different counselling services if the participants were triggered and felt they need external support. Professional protection of the social workers is also another consideration to not cause further harm. The researcher also acknowledged social work ethics as a Registered Social Worker of the Code of Conduct from the Social Worker Registration Board. These were upheld throughout the process of the research to ensure a high ethical standard that contributed positively to the body of research on this subject.

Te Tiriti O Waitangi was considered not only when interviewing those who identify as Māori but also to think about how the research could impact on Māori communities. The researcher sought to not cause further harm to Māori by having this awareness and being culturally sensitive. O'Leary (2014), describes how there is a power dynamic that exists in research when the researcher is in the majority and is interviewing or talking to minority clients. While it is important to acknowledge differences the researcher also needs to be aware of not "othering" those who come from a different ethnic background. There was an acknowledgement from the researcher that there are many truths and striving to understand the dominant truths in our society may impact on the direction of the research. There was also a power balance due to the researcher being a student which can lessen this, but nevertheless the researcher was aware of power dynamics and the effect this could have on the direction and ultimately the outcome of the research (O'Leary, 2014). Tika⁵ was

⁵ Tika is a Te Reo Māori word used to describe what is fair, correct and just through a Māori worldview.

considered to ensure the research was purposeful to explore how social workers effectively engage with fathers.

The researcher is bi-cultural in their social work practice but did not ask specific questions about Māori populations as extra cultural ethics approval had not been sought and the research is not specifically focusing on Māori populations. There is a risk that because of this a predominately Pākehā voice was heard, however as the researcher identifies as Pākehā this appears to be most appropriate for the research as to not create further harm for vulnerable populations. The researcher was aware that a social worker may talk about culture and the researcher felt she had the correct social work training to talk through this. Being culturally sensitive and practicing cultural humility ensured the safety of participants who may identify as Māori or from another ethnic minority.

Study limitations

This study has limitations that need to be acknowledged.

The researcher was a Master of Social Work student at Massey University and this was the first research she had undertaken. The researcher had the supervision of her supervisors to ensure that the research was to a high standard and considered the ethical elements.

Due to time constraints and limited response, the sample size was small with a limit of six participants. Because there was a small sample size results may not have the wide scope of how social workers engage with fathers. This could impact on the results and recommendations on completion of the research. Acknowledging the limitations of this should ensure the reader is aware of the sample size so that broad generalisations are not made. However, a qualitative research process was followed which adds to the rigour and trustworthiness of the research process. Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be defined as the key findings being as close as possible to the participants' perspectives (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). The level of reflexivity from the researcher throughout the analysis stage increases the level of trustworthiness of the research.

Chapter summary

This study sought to explore the perspectives of a group of registered social workers regarding barriers and solutions to engaging fathers when delivering a parenting resource. This chapter has explored the design, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, study limitations and ethical issues.

The research was designed using a qualitative approach as this most aligned with social work research due to the subjective nature of the topic. The participant selection section explores why social workers have been chosen for this research, what criteria they needed to meet and why these criteria were decided upon. The type of data collection was described, and the use of semi-structured interviews justified. The chapter also explores what types of questioning was used and how this was beneficial for the research. Data analysis was then justified as to why it was appropriate for this study. The ethics section outlines how the care of the participants was considered and how causing further harm to vulnerable populations was restricted. Finally, the limitations of the study explain factors that could have an impact on the research, both during the study and upon interpretation of the results.

The next chapter will detail the results and identify themes from the data.

Chapter Four: Results

This research aimed to explore social workers' perceptions of fathers' engagement in parenting programmes and to explore potential barriers and solutions to engaging with fathers. The research explored the subjective experiences of registered social workers in Aotearoa from a range of different Government and non-Government agencies. This chapter presents the findings from the interviews with the six social workers. Semi-structured interviews supported the participants to offer detailed thoughts. This involved both open-ended questions and follow up questions as appropriate to seek clarification or find further information. The chapter commences with participant profiles and then sets out seven main themes arising from the interviews: Fatherhood, structured barriers, gender barriers, motivation of dads to attend, practical barriers, skills of the social worker and supporting fathers' engagement. The final section outlines potential solutions identified by the social workers to support father engagement.

Participants

Interview participants were registered social workers with experience delivering a parenting programme as a part of their role. The social workers had worked alongside fathers either through home visiting or group setting. Social workers had at least three years' experience in a role where they had undertaken this work. Some of the social workers had worked alongside whānau where the parenting programme was designed for under-fives. The researcher wanted to understand whether social constructions of parenthood effected father engagement when children were small.

Six social work participants were recruited from around Aotearoa. Participants had a range of experience from four to twenty years with the majority having worked with families with an element of parenting for most of their careers. All met the requirement of a minimum three years in a role that featured parenting programme delivery. Social workers were given pseudonyms.

Eva only worked with individuals in their homes, while the other five participants were primarily involved in group work with some individual practice. Out of the six participants, two identified as male (John and Simon) and four as female (Mary, Julie, Kelly and Eva). Below is a table outlining gender, years of experience and the type of work they primarily participate in when delivering a parenting programme.

Table 1.2 Participant Information

Social Workers	Identified Gender	Experience	Type of work
Mary	Female	15 years	Group work
Julie	Female	4 years	Group work
John	Male	9 years	Individual & Group work
Kelly	Female	17 years	Group work
Simon	Male	10 years	Group work
Eva	Female	20 years	Individual work

This section has presented the participant profiles. The next section will discuss the first of seven major themes arising from this study: Parenting programmes.

Parenting Programmes

The participants were involved in delivering parenting programmes with a mixture of clients. While all parenting programme clients were voluntary, those referred by the Department of Corrections or Oranga Tamariki - Ministry for Children, had more of an obligation to engage, although they were not mandated. Five of the social workers delivered parenting programmes in groups, where parents would come to a session once or twice a week. Simon and Kelly had an observation element to their programme, where they would observe the parents with their children to check whether they were applying the skills learnt in the group. A report could then be written, often going to Oranga Tamariki. All of the social workers delivered their programme during the day. Social workers delivered a range of programmes including Triple P, Incredible Years and Government parenting programmes.

How often social workers engaged with fathers varied. All social workers spoke of their different experiences over the years. This included both individual and group work. Five of the social workers chose to answer most of the questions about their group work experience. Eva who delivered a parenting programme described how often she spent engaging with fathers: *"30-40% of the time when there is an available dad"* (Eva). Kelly described how many men would attend the groups *"Sometimes it's half, sometimes it's a third"* (Kelly). Mary also described the ratio of men to women in the groups *"We've got six participants now, just one is a dad and as the ratio, it is always more women"* (Mary). Participants said they would engage with men weekly and sometimes twice a week.

Both of the male social workers said that men were often referred to them if individual support was needed as it was thought that a father would feel more comfortable interacting with a male social worker, as illustrated by Simon, *"I engage with more fathers than a lot of the other social workers in the team because I am the only male"* (Simon). Simon shared his personal and professional view on being male and how he thought this impacted on his engagement with fathers:

"I think I can use my personal experience, and then I can use that I am a male to support other males to enhance their own parenting so they feel comfortable doing more of that stuff as a male" (Simon).

The parenting programmes that were being delivered by the social workers shared common goals of building attachment, the parent's relationship with their children, parenting strategies, positive parenting, managing behaviour, education and building confidence. Mary described her programme as *"a relational programme that helps parents to manage their children's behaviours and build relationships"* (Mary). Julie also described the goal of their parenting programme noting a goal of non-violence, *"The goal of the parenting programme is to equip, encourage and establish positive parenting without violence"* (Julie). Simon spoke of building the confidence of parents, *"Building confidence, because you are getting a better understanding of how to respond or how to manage with situations"* (Simon).

All the social workers felt that their work involved the use of their social work skills alongside the prescribed delivery of the programme. Participants described how their practice involved

skills in relational, ecological systems and strengths-based practice. Five of the social workers mainly spoke about their experiences delivering parenting programmes in a group setting. The sessions involved participants sitting together an educational group discussion. John discussed how he had used activity-based interventions to engage with males and this had been effective, *“I worked with a teenager who got court order to do painting of community fences and they got me to supervise him... I was doing with him but at the same time talking”* (John). Eva also spoke about how in her role she has activities for the babies or toddlers and involved the parents *“He really did hook into it, here’s the material, you get down and play and I talk about it”* (Eva).

Fatherhood

Understanding how participants described a father was central to this research to gain clarification around their perceptions of a father’s role. Mary and Eva equated being a father (dad) with having a relationship with a child. They expected parents attending the parenting programmes to be engaged in parenting. The absence of fathers they felt reflected the role the male played in a child’s life. Both had encountered many instances where the male parent had opted out of their child’s life. They referred to this person simply as a “sperm donor”. Mary explained: *“A father is a sperm donor (laughing) and has a child... A dad is a person who is in relationship with their child so an effective dad...”* (Mary). Eva also mentioned the idea of the sperm donor versus a dad, *“They don’t even necessarily need to be the sperm donor or provider who made the baby but they need to be in”* (Eva).

Both male social workers discussed slightly different interpretations of what the parenting goals of a father may be, highlighting perhaps that female dominated groups did not align with fathers’ goals for their parenting and children. John discussed the different goals that fathers may have for their children compared to women,

“If I ask the question, what do you want your child to be that can go from an answer based on their career to sporting achievements, it is very rarely a dad will talk about “I want him to be generous with his time” or “I want him to be thinking of others”. In

terms of father daughter, it's more generic "I want her to be a good girl" or "I want her to be good at school", I want her to do what she really wants to do" (John).

Most of the participants described the traits that they would see in the "ideal" father or dad. Julie said:

"If I was looking at the most perfect dad, I would think he would be emotionally aware, he would have strong emotional intelligence, he would have a strong understanding of age and stage of development, he would be participating as a nurturer" (Julie).

John also highlighted the need for co-parenting, where both mum and dad were involved, and the need for understanding of their child's development saying: *"Ideally it would be to co-parent" (John).* Kelly also described the ideal father and his impact on his children's development, *"A father's role is to teach his son or his daughter, that they are loveable, that they are wanted" (Kelly).* Several of the participants discussed the struggle many fathers faced when thinking about their role as parents. Mary explained the absence of a strong father role model often left men struggling for where to turn to find out how to be a father: *"Do I go by my own definition from my own childhood? Do I go by my definition of my colleague who's a father?" (Mary).* Simon discussed a possible reason for lack of engagement might be how fathers may perceive themselves and that they may lack confidence when their children are small saying: *"I think a lack of confidence in their ability as a dad" (Simon).*

Several of the social workers spoke of the need for positive portrayal of fathers in society to offset potential negative stereotypes. John discussed the normalisation of the dad staying home with the children and the use of images to show fathers as the nurturer, *"I think they could be doing targeted father baby images, we have got to get it into a more normalised view that dad can be portrayed holding a new born" (John).* Eva talked about the need for empowerment of fathers to see the value of their role *"...that empowerment, that "hey don't think all you need to do is go to work and come home, you are part of this family, you are a part of this baby and you can have a huge impact on who your baby is" (Eva).* Mary spoke about the need for campaigns to highlight a father's role as valuable. *"To build the guys up to know that they're dad that their input is so valuable and so needed and their children are crying out for that... campaigns, advertising" (Mary).* Julie discussed the need for dads to be

celebrated in society, *“I think at the heart there is a different conversation that we need to have as a society about how we all fit together... Maybe I do see that sometimes that men aren’t celebrated as much” (Julie)*. Eva also thought there was a need for positivity around Dads, *“Positivity for dads at a societal level, it’s really about being pro men and pro father parenting and pro male involvement in kiddie industry whatever that may look like” (Eva)*.

Only Julie explored the idea of gender neutrality or fluidity and what this means for male or father identity, *“I’m all about gender fluidity, I’m not saying stop that. Let’s celebrate what’s really great about men” (Julie)*. Julie also thought gender identity and roles should be discussed more in the parenting programme. *“Support in the group and discussing gender identity. Discussing what it is to be a dad, what it is to be a father” (Julie)*.

This section explored social workers’ perceptions of fathers. The results highlighted above illustrate the social workers’ perceptions of fathers. The idea of the “ideal” father was discussed by three social workers, with other social workers describing positive traits in fathers.

Structural barriers to father’s involvement in parenting programmes

The participants thought that there were structural barriers to men attending and participating in parenting programmes. They described how mothers are regarded as the primary caregiver and nurturers, especially when children are infants or toddlers. Mary’s view was typical of others when she commented on this saying fathers were: *“not being seen as a nurturers. Because that [child rearing] is a woman’s job” (Mary)*. The participants found this stereotype prevalent across all settings in society and a view often held by parents. They thought that this often meant mothers were expected to attend parenting programmes and fathers were not. Julie thought this manifested in an unconscious bias towards men in terms of how nurturing they could be to their own children,

“I think there is still a strong narrative, this is just my gut feeling over the past few years that there may be an unconscious bias that men can’t be nurturing and if we are to solve family violence, then there needs to be some communication that men are just

as much nurturers as women in a different way perhaps. Otherwise we are sending a split message-only women go to parenting groups” (Julie).

Building on Julie’s point about unconscious bias, the participants discussed how fathers may be perceived in society in a negative way. Simon spoke about gendered roles in society and how this impacted on whether a father would attend a parenting programme.

“If you went to many families it would be the mother who did the primary caregiving role most of the time, I think there is a real stereotype that prevents or makes men less confident to engage in parenting stuff. For a man to ask for help or to show affection to a child is again less socially accepted. I think just overall there is that perception, if a man shows affection to a child that there is something, that they are weak or there is something deviant. So I think asking for help is a big thing for males” (Simon).

Eva shared this sentiment and believed there was societal pressure for males to work rather than staying home with their children. She also believed there could be systematic stereotypes that reinforced this idea:

“even if you just look at the Work and Income system, it’s men, get back to work, women, we will fund staying home a bit longer, so in society there is pressure for the men to work, bring home the money” (Eva).

Eva also felt that these structural perceptions were reinforced by services provided to women. Noting that women tended to get the most attention after birth, which meant they were more likely to engage with professionals and are then most likely to be referred for a parenting programme. Eva observed, *“Yeah, mums do get all the attention, and dads often probably do feel left out and bringing them on board, understanding who they are as different” (Eva).* She also discussed that fathers can experience peri-natal depression *“I think they feel helpless most of the time because it is so intense with mummy and baby for a start, we know post-natal effects men as well as women” (Eva).* Kelly also spoke about how, in her view, father’s engagement was not an issue with the content but wider systemic issues, *“The biggest impact I experienced on the programme were the systemic ones. They weren’t about the content” (Kelly).*

Mary explained that these stereotypes were even evident at her workplace, where there was an expectation for the mother rather than the father to attend a parenting programme. *“From my workplace, the subtle discourse that again, the females have to do the work...maybe there needs to be more of an expectation if there is a male involved with the children that he comes as well” (Mary)*. Mary also talked about the bias towards women to attend when they have been in a violent relationship and there is less expectation on the father to improve himself, *“It was always the women having to do all the work and having to jump through all the hoops, to help their children” (Mary)*. Simon concurred, saying that due to societal stereotypes in situations of family violence a male may be labelled as perpetrator even if he has changed. This label then led to the male parent not being included in parenting programmes, *“I think in terms of participating in a parenting programme, men are sometimes viewed as perpetrators...it’s like “why bother, people still just see me as a violent man” (Simon)*. Mary agreed having also found herself sharing these sentiments after years of working with women who had experienced family violence. She spoke about the impact of hearing women’s stories about their experiences with family harm saying, *“I spent time working with families around family violence and I realised that I started to develop a bias against men” (Mary)*.

Participants explained that fathers often shared these structural assumptions. Mary described how fathers may feel they are not expected to come to the parenting course as this was not their role *“We often have a lot of females in the group saying, I really wanted my partner to come, but he wouldn't come...I don't need to come, you're the one, you're the nurturer, you're the parent. I don't need to do that” (Mary)*.

Maternal gatekeeping was also thought to impact on the level of involvement a father may have with his baby, which could then lead to less engagement in a parenting programme. John and Simon both thought there was a degree of maternal gate keeping that prevented some dad’s from engaging. John spoke of the need to create space for fathers to have the opportunity to take on the nurturing role, *“In terms of engaging fathers on home visits, especially when you are talking about babies, do you need to be creating a hole for dad to step into, because dad won’t step in till he has to” (John)*.

These results highlight the perceptions of mothers as nurturers and being the primary parent to attend a parenting programme. Participants discussed that this stereotype was prevalent in parents and social workers.

Gender barriers to participation

A common topic explored by the participants in relation to the participation of fathers in parenting groups was gender barriers to participation. Participants discussed this in relation to how safe male participants felt in groups and the potential for males to be marginalised as they may feel uncomfortable in female dominated groups.

Gender safety was a common theme throughout the interviews. John gave an example of how he perceived men to feel in a group setting that was female dominated *“these women are giving me the evil eye if I ask a question” (John)*. Mary also shared this sentiment *“It’s female saturated and from my experience women talk more than guys...maybe can’t get a word in edgeways” (Mary)*. Most of the social workers highlighted that in group work or home visiting that there were generally more females than males. They described the different reasons with males feeling marginalised by the female dominated group, which could make men feel uncomfortable, undervalued and isolated.

Kelly spoke about how a male could feel isolated in the group if there are a lack of males in the group,

“We tried to create an environment where people felt they had found someone they could connect with, especially if it’s a guy on his own and find another male to connect with in the group, not feel so isolated” (Kelly).

Simon also described how a father could feel uncomfortable in a female dominated group *“Because their perception is that it will be a female dominated group and they may feel uncomfortable or out of place” (Simon).*

Participants regarded this as a potential barrier to engagement. Mary described that men may feel unable to have their say during sessions and could feel outnumbered by mothers in the

group. She thought it was down to the skills of the facilitator to support father engagement in the group, *“Last week, we only had that one male in the group...The female-dominated groups say “oh men do this, but it's not all males, it comes back to the skills of the facilitator to be aware of these things going on and the discourse in society about females and males” (Mary).*

The results indicate that gender safety is a factor and potential barrier to father engagement in a parenting programme. The participants explained how there can be a lack of fathers in attendance, which can lead to a female dominated environment. This can be intimidating for males and may impact on their level of comfort, which then impacts on their level of engagement. Potential solutions to this barrier were highlighted by the social workers were to create gender safe environments by having more male social workers in the community or by having all male groups.

Motivation of Dad to participate

A common theme throughout the interviews related to a father's motivation to participate or engage in the parenting programme. All the social workers spoke of family harm or court mandated fathers and how this impacted on engagement. Julie outlined the number of men attending parenting programmes who had been affected by trauma and how this impacted on their parenting, *“I would say 85% of all the men have trauma in their lives and are perpetrators of violence and don't have any idea of what a normal family is like” (Julie).* Participants felt that those who attended from this group were possibly not as genuine in their participation as those who were voluntary and they may attend because they thought it was compulsory. John thought that a father may not be attending a parenting programme for genuine reasons if he was referred by a statutory agency, *“They aren't building a genuine relationship with their child on what they want, they do it on what they believe they are told” (John).*

Mary explained that even though the programme was voluntary some fathers only attended out of fear because there is a protection order in place for him, *“This dad who can't see his children, and he's in the group and he has the protection order against, he attends out of fear”*

(Mary). This she felt impacted on their willingness to engage with the course. Simon agreed explaining how being court ordered can make a difference to their engagement, *"...Unless I was told if you either do this or you don't get your child back, if it was court ordered it might be different. I don't think they are as likely to engage"* (Simon).

Another factor impacting on participation and engagement included the different backgrounds that fathers came from. Kelly talked about the impact of someone coming from a gang background where there was a potential culture clash,

"If there was somebody who's personality who caused a problem for me that would have been an issue for me. We had one man who was a [gang member] and he was a very difficult man to engage with. He wasn't wanting to meet halfway" (Kelly).

As noted in Kelly's reflection this didn't just impact on the participation of the father who was in a gang, but also in the openness of the social workers to work with people who had been part of family harm instances. Lack of engagement wasn't always the case. Eva used an example of a client who engaged well with her until no longer on home detention, *"He was really violent...he was brilliantly engaged while he was on bling...the minute he was off home detention though, we went back"* (Eva).

When asked the question of whether there was a link between a father's involvement with his children and his engagement in a parenting programme, the results were unanimous. The social workers' believed that if a father showed generative traits, such as having positive goals for his children, he would engage well in the programme. Mary used an example to show how if the father is generative, he will take an active role in implementing the strategies:

"Dad he is fully engaged with his kids in fact his wife wasn't able to come to the programme and so he's going back and coaching her with his kids and going through all the strategies and coaching himself and I think it's related to the contact they have with their children. That's one of the avenues that helps with that engagement but just their desire" (Mary).

Kelly believed for a father to be engaged in the programme he needed to be engaged with his children, *"The fathers were generally really wanting to get into the parenting stuff. When we*

taught them specific skills to try, most of them took them up and applied them” (Kelly). Eva also talked about the connection fathers had with their children and the impact this had on engagement, “Yeah definitely, if they are involved and there is already a strong connection and involvement with the kids they are more likely to engage” (Eva).

Simon saw the fathers having to take some responsibility for being open to parenting programmes and to their roles as father. He discussed the needs of fathers to step into the parenting role saying “... the reality is that some fathers just need to step up, it’s very easy to sit back and “oh mum will do it” and that’s just the way we have been raised. It is about fathers becoming more comfortable to become parents and becoming confident to think yip I can handle this situation” (Simon).

These results explore the potential barriers to the motivation of the father to engage. The social workers identified that family harm was a barrier to their level of engagement throughout the programme as fathers thought they must attend. Fathers that displayed generative traits, such as being engaged with their children and having positive goals for their children, were thought to be more likely to engage in the parenting programme.

Practical barriers to fathers’ engagement

Practical factors to accessing the parenting programmes were discussed by all the social workers these included childcare, environmental setting, cultural appropriateness and access to children.

Finding someone to watch the children while they attended was discussed by Simon and Eva. As Simon explained the practicalities of who would care for the children if both parents attended a course was an issue for a number of families, *“It might be that one has to stay home to take care of the children” (Simon).* Most of the social workers spoke of how fathers were often working, and parenting programmes needed to be more accessible. Eva linked this to the availability of courses for men to attend *“I actually think scope for being able to work out of work hours...because one of the barriers is that they are not there during the day” (Eva).* Many of the social workers thought that one barrier to males attending the groups or being available for home visits was that programmes were set during the day and that they

were usually working. Mary identified that men were generally working through the day when most courses were run, *“The father was the main income earner so to access the group, it’s harder than for the woman”* (Mary). Kelly also highlighted the lack of fathers in attendance due to work commitments, *“I can’t remember any men coming along, because they were usually working during the day, so mainly single parents or the dad was working”* (Kelly). Simon, *“Often [parenting programmes] are during the day so will clash with work commitments...the reality is they can’t just take a few hours off during the day”* (Simon).

Several social workers highlighted how the setting or environment of parenting programmes could be a barrier to engagement, with activity-based learning thought to be a solution to this. Julie talked about the environment and how men may need more of an activity-based type of parenting programme as opposed to a group where the emphasis is on talking *“I think there are big gaps in how the parenting programmes are run, I think it would be better if they were all out doing physical work, men love physical”* (Julie).

John also gave examples of where he had worked with males and had better progress when they were engaged in an activity together,

“There are a whole heap of ideals, but I don’t believe counselling, parenting or any of that type of work should be done in a clinical office...it is about setting and it’s about making sure you are on the same level. You’ve got to follow where the client is happier” (John).

Eva detailed how the location of courses could be an issue and discussed a need for a different type of delivery saying: *“I think they like things in more succinct, “here’s how it is, here is what we are learning about”* (Eva).

Simon and Julie discussed culturally appropriate parenting programmes. Simon gave an example where because he was male he was considered more appropriate to work with a father from a different ethnicity, *“I’ve just seen a recent referral where culturally it may be more beneficial for a male to work with this particular father and that was primarily the reason I was asked to do it”* (Simon). Julie agreed and thought a range of targeted population programmes would be effective to supporting father engagement, *“I think we have to look at*

more culturally appropriate programming...understanding ethnicities that are being migrated into New Zealand such as the large Asian, Indian, understanding that there are cultural aspects to parenting and they can be different to when they turn up here” (Julie).

Julie and Kelly discussed the need for the referral process to be simplified, with Mary identifying that vulnerable fathers may have difficulty with many forms. Mary identified that other professionals, may not include the fathers name in the referral *“We get referrals through all sorts of places...maybe there needs to be more of an expectation if there is a male involved with the children that he comes as well” (Mary).* Julie and Kelly also spoke about the need for easier referral processes for men seeing this as a barrier to men’s attendance and participation in parenting programmes. Julie explained that some of her male clients struggled with writing, and this could be a barrier in the beginning but also a need for the adoption of technology given the younger generation of fathers, *“I have met a lot of men that are dyslexic. I don’t like forms so let’s look at, right from the word go identifying who our target audience is and creating a group for that and making sure that any administration skills are not more trauma informing” (Julie).*

Kelly talked about the assumption of the mother being referred and the father not being contacted in the referral process, *“It depends on how the referral comes in. If the referral comes in because the mother has taken her kids to the Doctor and if she says “oh this has gone wrong, or this has gone wrong”, and then the Doctor makes the referral and we might only have the mothers contacts, so dad never went to the Doctor” (Kelly).*

A lack of access to their children impacted on the father’s relationship with their child and their desire to participate in parenting programmes. Julie explained, *“There is a lot of shame...A lot of these guys are on supervised contact so they don’t get to see their children in the normal way and that in itself is their frustration” (Julie).* Simon agreed expressing how limited access to children was a barrier to engaging in parenting and therefore in parenting programmes, *“If a father is not having contact with a child, they are less likely to want to engage in a parenting programme, they kind of think, what is the point?” (Simon).*

These results highlight several practical factors that may impact on fathers attending parenting programmes. A lack of childcare was identified as a possible barrier. Environmental

factors were considered by the social workers, with a need for activity-based learning to further engage fathers. The availability of parenting programmes is thought to be a barrier to fathers who are working. The need for culturally appropriate parenting programmes and changes to the referral process were seen as solutions to potential barriers for fathers.

Skill of the social worker

The social workers were unanimous in their belief that it was the skill of the social worker rather than the content of the parenting programme that could create potential barriers to father engagement. The social workers interviewed had years of experience and had refined their skills as social workers with flexibility in their work and using a strengths-based perspective to engage fathers. The social workers all believed more male social workers were needed to facilitate parenting programme groups or in the community sector, with one social worker offering a solution to this through pay parity with Statutory agencies.

Mary explained that it was down to the skill of the facilitator to engage men and include them in conversations *“I think it's about the facilitators, engaging men as well” (Mary)*. Julie agreed stating the way in which language was used could impact on the rapport building with whānau. *“We talked about the “crap box” depending on who I had, you know what language. I think you need to be flexible in your language style as well. Let's be authentic” (Julie)*.

There were slightly different approaches between the male and female participants involved with this research. Simon and John, the two male social workers, shared an emphasis on teaching children skills for life as opposed to the female participants who emphasised emotional support and nurturing. Simon said, *“Ensure their overall safety and well-being but also teaching them the skills to function in life” (Simon)*.

John highlighted the need to work alongside and support clients rather than a prescriptive programme telling them how to parent *“I guess that is the biggest issue, getting them to understand there is no right way. There is the better way, the right way is the one that works for them” (John)*. He also talked about the need for flexibility in the programme delivery and this comes down once again to the skills of the facilitator to manage what is on top for the participants in the group. *“I think over time, with the pre-planned parenting programmes we are starting to lose that - (sic we are) dealing with the problem” (John)*.

Eva talked about the need for a pro-equity approach, going beyond to engage fathers. She thought this pro-equity approach was needed to engage fathers as they may not been treated as important by others in relation to their role as a parent *“And find the strength as quickly as possible to get that vibe thing... make them feel important and once you have got that, I think you can grow” (Eva)*

The participants explained that the gender of the facilitator influenced father’s engagement. John explained that he thought it was important facilitators were aware of these gender differences saying:

“I think any parenting practitioner who because of their own gender cannot be completely gender neutral. That could be quite a confronting view, but those of us that are in there working with these parents can’t lose track of who we are because then we don’t become genuine” (John).

Julie agreed, commenting on the benefits of having a male facilitator, *“Absolutely. I think it would have been great to have a male and female facilitator” (Julie).*

These results show the impact of social work tools that are used to engage fathers in a strengths-based way. The social workers did not believe it was the content of the programme, but rather the skill of the facilitator or social workers on an individual level. A lack of male facilitators of social workers in the community was thought to be a barrier to engagement and one social worker pointed to pay parity to the statutory sector as a solution to this issue.

Supporting fathers’ engagement

The social workers discussed potential solutions to father engagement in parenting programmes. As noted in the previous section male facilitated groups or male social workers engaging with fathers, empowering fathers on a societal level and normalising parenting programmes were highlighted as potential solutions.

All of the social workers discussed that having male facilitated groups was a potential solution to supporting father engagement in parenting programmes. Mary spoke about the benefits

of having a co-facilitator who was male when she had fathers attending a course explaining “... that connection there, that they can talk the man talk sort of stuff” (Mary). Kelly had similar experiences noting how it could create a balance having a male facilitate the group, “Maybe it’s a good idea to have male facilitators in there, rather than a woman’s environment. Because we having a lot of women as facilitators, and this could be a massive trigger for men” (Kelly). Eva agreed saying there was generally a need for more male social workers and explained the impact saying:

“That perception “hey, here is female worker, mum, it’s a female things, leave them to it...actually employing as many males whānau workers as possible I think is really important. Higher pays. I just really think that would hold men....My hope is when that is achieved and the NGO sector is in line with the statutory services, then hopefully that is going to attract more men and keep them longer and I suspect there will be a snowball effect. Once we have got more blokes on board and they are enjoying the work and making a difference and they are getting passionate about it, they are going to start talking to talk to their networks and it will flow” (Eva)

Having a male co-facilitator was also offered as a solution to gender safety issues. John described how men may feel they do not have the same knowledge as mothers in the group and that this may be a barrier to engagement, “You probably need a bit of a mix between facilitators who can pick that hey these men don’t really know... be honest I wouldn’t ask a question” (John). John also commented on male only groups and how this would be beneficial to fathers, “I don’t see why you couldn’t be running a course just for men...” (John). Julie shared this sentiment and spoke from her experience about the benefit of having an all male group, “I think it would be nice to have an all men’s group, that’s what I was advocating for strongly. I did notice there was a shift...I saw that men were becoming the predominant gender in certain groups” (Julie).

Eva highlighted the need for pay parity and it was discussed that higher rates of pay may attract more men to the profession, “It comes down to that basic, getting parity with the statutory sector, it could be a really good step forward for getting men involved for this kind of work” (Eva). As discussed earlier, this aligns with the notion that fathers will feel more comfortable being supported by a social worker of their own gender.

John thought normalising parenting courses could de-stigmatise needing support and was a potential solution to father engagement *“I also think we as a world don’t normalise parenting training as often as we need to” (John)*. Simon agreed saying fathers may not know what is available to them and this could be through a lack of targeting towards men. Simon believed more targeted advertising was needed to engage fathers in parenting programmes *“I think, because men sometimes just don’t know about what programmes are available... often a lack of knowledge of what is available for parenting support” (Simon)*.

The social workers explored different solutions for the future engagement with fathers. The need for more males in the industry was explored, with potential solutions, such as pay parity with statutory agencies, thought to be a solution to recruitment and retention. Raising a father’s value in society was also perceived to be a potential solution to include fathers, which could lead to further engagement. The idea of normalising parenting programmes was seen as positive to destigmatising those who attend and had the potential of recruiting more fathers and supporting engagement.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has identified the results from the interviews with the six social workers. A brief outline was given to the nature of the parenting programmes that social workers delivered. Fatherhood was explored to understand the social workers’ perceptions of fathers. Structural barriers were identified which highlighted particularly how father’s roles are perceived on an individual, social worker and societal level. The social workers discussed several gender barriers with gender safety being a prominent theme throughout as fathers were often in groups that were female dominated. This impacted on their level of engagement due to their level of comfort in the group. The motivation of fathers to attend, impacts of family harm and how generative traits may impact on their motivation to attend and engage, were detailed. The social workers identified potential practical barriers that may impact on father engagement such as access to childcare, environmental factors, availability, cultural appropriateness and the referral process. The skills of the social worker were perceived as crucial to father engagement in parenting programmes with the social workers highlighting

different skills. Finally, solutions that were identified by the social workers as potential solutions to father engagement in parenting programmes were explored.

The following chapter is a discussion of the findings. Each theme will be compared and contrasted to the literature review to find meaning in the data.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The aim of the research was to explore social workers' perceptions of father engagement in parenting programmes. The previous chapter presented the results from the data collected during interviews. This chapter discusses how the findings from the interviews with the social workers compare to the literature review, exploring similarities and differences to find meaning in the data. There are three main themes to explore to determine barriers and solutions to father engagement in parenting programmes; the social construction of parenting, the gendered nature of social work and factors related to accessibility and participation.

The first theme of the social construction of parenting, explores how the construction of motherhood and fatherhood impact on engagement in parenting programmes. The second theme discusses the gendered nature of social work and highlights a female dominated industry as a barrier to father participation and engagement in parenting programmes. The third theme discusses practical factors impacting father recruitment, such as accessibility and participation, as well as potential solutions. These themes have been discussed through a social constructivist lens as explained in the methodology chapter (see page 28). Social constructivism requires researchers to be critical of the data they have collected and to acknowledge what societal constructions could be impacting on observations from the social workers (Burr, 2015). During the analysis stage the researcher has analysed data through this lens to critically understand what social constructs may be impacting on the findings from the data.

Social construction of parenting

The social construction of gender has created masculine and feminine roles which impact on parenting in society (Amato, 2018). Gender bias is prevalent in society and impacts both men and women negatively. Fathers may face challenges in terms of how they are perceived in a more traditional sense as the breadwinner, whereas mothers may be perceived as the primary caregiver of their children (Mattila, 2020). The social construction of parenting is changing and is still in a transition stage where traditional stereotypes may be prevalent

(Amato, 2018). Gender roles are socially constructed where society has invented rather than discovered these roles. For example, nurturing traits in the parental role have been traditionally associated with mothers (Kukla, 2000). Gender roles continue to be constructed through the context of time and culture along with different individual perceptions of these roles (Amato, 2018). Fatherhood is socially constructed and impacts on father engagement in parenting programmes.

Fatherhood

The social construction of fatherhood is evolving due to gender role changes in society (Dolan, 2014; Goldberg, 2014; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Molloy & Pierro, 2020; Owens, 2018). Fathers can struggle with their identity in the parental role with traditional masculine norms still prevalent (Molloy & Pierro, 2020; Petts et al., 2018). New fatherhood promotes an engaged and nurturing father which contrasts with traditional masculine traits (Petts et al., 2018). Three of the interviewed social workers describe the idea of the “ideal” or “perfect” father which was an interesting choice of language as it highlighted how they socially constructed fatherhood. The social workers were all describing aspects of generative fathering, such as the level of engagement or attachment they had with their child and how nurturing they were.

Generative fathering is a theory used to determine a father’s capacity as a parent (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998; Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019; Pratt et al., 2012, see page 19). Generativity in fatherhood, means a father has positive engagements with his child and meets the obligation to support their development (Pratt et al., 2012). From a social constructivist lens, generativity is both an individual and societal construct, but it requires individual awareness to overcome prevailing stereotypes about gender (Elder-Vass, 2012). The fluidity of generativity and potential for all fathers to develop these positive traits is something that the social workers in this study were aware of, but as is ever present in social work, the father needs to want to change.

Generativity may be developed as a natural part of entering fatherhood (Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019). Due to the individualist nature of generative fathering, if they have less of

these traits then they are less likely to engage. The social workers in the study were describing new fatherhood traits as their ideal (Pett et al., 2018). Fathers who have a high level of generativity display traits such as having empathy for others, setting future goals that are pro-social and a positive mindset (Pratt et al., 2012). Fatherhood can strengthen and grow generativity. The social workers were using their experiences of working alongside fathers to socially construct their ideal of a father and fatherhood (Crotty, 2020). This social construction is formed through societal norms and the social workers valued these traits in fathers and promoted the idea of new fatherhood in their work (Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

Co-parenting is becoming normalised and is another aspect of new fatherhood (Luketina et al., 2009; Petts et al., 2018; Pryor et al., 2014). Fathers may face more pressure to co-parent than that of their fathers (Owens, 2018). The idea of a father being a role model and co-parenting was also discussed by the social workers in this study. Interestingly, there were differences between the social workers in the way they described the father's role. The female social workers emphasised the nurturing or feminine traits the ideal father should possess. While the two male social workers also mentioned these traits, they emphasised teaching children practical skills for life as an important component of fatherhood. While all the social workers discussed co-parenting and new fatherhood traits, there were some gender differences which shows how the social worker can be influenced by their own gender norms and this may impact on how they engage with fathers (Volling & Palkovitz, 2021). How social workers individually perceive, and construct fatherhood reveals an aspect of how fathers are perceived by society.

How a social worker constructs fatherhood impacts on service delivery and whether father engagement is encouraged or restricted (Molloy & Pierro, 2020). If a particular father's behaviour does not align with the individual social workers' perception of fatherhood, the social worker may engage less with the father, in turn lessening the father's engagement in the parenting programme (Molloy & Pierro, 2020). The social workers in the study discussed 'ideal' father traits, such as co-parenting, which had aspects of generative fathering and new fatherhood. The social workers were aware of the negative professional and personal social constructions, such as the idea of the father seen as a risk or absent but were able to see beyond these and have positive engagement with fathers.

The absent father

The paradigm of the absent father can impact on how social workers perceive fathers and service delivery (Brewsaugh & Stozier 2016; Hanna, 2018; Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019; Symonds, 2020). The idea of the absent father is a prevalent social construction that has negative implications for how fathers are perceived (Brewsaugh & Stozier, 2016). A father may not be present in the child's life for various reasons, but the participants indicated a negative connotation with this description which could indicate bias, which may have been informed through the experience of social workers seeing many absent dads. This is an example of a social construction that has been developed through witnessing a phenomenon, in this case, through the workplace, which may impact on engagement with fathers (Burr, 2015). This research found that social workers used different language to describe "father" versus "dad" and the paradigm of the absent father. An interesting insight from two of the social workers, was the description of a father as a sperm donor and a dad as a someone who is displaying generative fathering traits.

Negative perceptions of fathers that have been socially constructed appear as early as during social work training (Brewsaugh & Stozier, 2016). This reinforces personal and professional social constructs and impacts on engagement with fathers. A social worker could be less likely to engage with a father because of a superficial initial negative assessment, instead of considering the individual circumstances of the father (Brewsaugh & Stozier, 2016; Burr, 2015). All the social workers in this research stated that they took an inclusive approach to engaging fathers, so it is inconclusive how widespread this potential bias may be. The negative social construct of absent fathers may impact on their engagement with social workers (Canuto et al., 2019; Leath, 2017; Scheibling, 2020; Weber, 2020).

Generational change

Generational change is also impacting on the social construction of fatherhood due to social and economic pressures (Fine-Davis, 2018; Flouri, 2005; Myers, 2015; Zoch & Schober, 2018). A common theme presented by the social workers throughout the interviews for this study was the idea of a generational change where they described aspects of new fatherhood or

generative fathering, such as where a father is engaged with his children and has positive goals for their future. Gregory & Milner (2011), explained that fatherhood and father identity is in a transitional period where there is a shift in domestic arrangements in the household, including parenting. The social workers in this study compared the arrangements they see currently to their own personal childhood experiences, and some observed what they had witnessed throughout their time working alongside men. This aligns with the idea that social constructs are ever evolving, and services may not be completely appropriate for clients, and in this case fathers (Gregory & Milner, 2011).

The role of the father is changing in an Aotearoa context and aligns with the idea of new fatherhood (Owens, 2018). It was highlighted by the participants that every generation would have multiple understandings of a father. The social workers also believed that this was a transitional time for men with greater awareness of mental health for men in the community and changing work conditions. The results show that there is a shift towards co-parenting within households due to generational changes. However, several social workers also mentioned that a number of their clients still exhibit traditional family views, specifically that women were the primary parent and ultimately had the responsibility of the children.

The paradigm of new fatherhood or generative traits in fathers is where western constructions of fatherhood are evolving from a provider role to that of an engaged nurturer (Podnieks, 2018). Individual fathers may perceive their own role as traditional, modern or a transitional mix of the two as discussed by the social workers. This is important to the research, as how men are perceived by social workers and how men perceive the fatherhood role will influence how they engage with parenting programmes (Molloy & Pierro, 2020).

Traditional gender roles still prevalent

When fathers are not seen as capable nurturers, it can impact on their engagement with their children, especially when the child is younger, as well as impacting on their engagement in parenting programmes (Molloy & Pierro, 2020). Although gender roles may be evolving, the idea of nurturing in parenting is still generally placed on the mother, which can be because of the association early care for the child, such as breastfeeding (Roskam & Mikolajczak, 2020).

Five of the social workers spoke of the idea of nurturing in parenting. The social workers discussed that fathers may not feel it is their role to be as involved when their children are very young. Women give birth and breastfeed, and this along with societal norms appears to make them the default parent for nurturing (Roskam & Mikolajczak, 2020). Whether a father perceives himself to be in this role is dependent on individual factors, and potentially some pressure from his social peer group of other males, in terms of how his masculinity will be perceived (Gul & Uskul, 2019; Sicouri et al., 2018). Understanding what their role and identity is as a father with small children may need to be explored further in parenting programmes, so fathers know that they are valued at this time (Sicouri, 2018). John discussed a need for the mother to create a space in the terms of nurturing for the father to “step into” when the child is very small. Mothers may take over the nurturing role entirely and not allow the father any responsibility, known as maternal gatekeeping. This is an example of fathers being perceived as secondary helpers, especially when the children are small (Owens, 2018; Roskam & Mikolajczak, 2020).

In agreement with literature, the social workers in this study discussed how the importance was placed on the mother in terms of parenting. More education may be needed for mothers to explain the importance of interactions with the father, which can be more play based, and the benefits of rough and tumble play when the infant is reaching the toddler stage (Olsavsky et al., 2020). These types of messages impact on how a father sees himself in his role when his child is small and will impact on whether he feels he needs to attend a parenting programme.

[Expectation on mothers to attend parenting programmes](#)

Although a transitional period is taking place where co-parenting is becoming the norm, women are generally the primary person in the caregiving role with their children (Su & Dwyer, 2020). Many of the participants identified that fathers may not attend parenting programmes as they do not feel it is their role as a parent. They outlined that many fathers felt that the mother is the primary caregiver so the mother should be attending sessions alone. This prevailing social construct impacts on how some fathers perceive themselves and this impacts on their perceived need to attend a parenting programme (Sicouri et al., 2019).

The participants in this study identified this as a barrier to attendance and further engagement in the programme, as they believed that sometimes fathers did not see the benefit in attending. The participants felt this may also impact on fathers' engagement when involved in a group, especially if they had been told to attend by Oranga Tamariki.

A father's perceptions may be changed by micro or macro influences (Lock & Strong, 2020). This social construct is still prevalent, which reinforces widespread gender stereotypes that only mothers are expected to attend parenting programmes (Sicouri et al., 2019). Individual factors, such as whether co-parenting takes place, influences conformity to this stereotype. The social workers in this study highlighted the different micro and macro influences on this social construct, having witnessed scenarios in their own work experiences. The social workers also thought that at times, professionals perceived that fathers were not nurturing. It appears gender bias is widespread, particularly in the academic field as father engagement is very under researched (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). This is an interesting notion as research informs practice. Because this is under researched, social workers may not be trained to overcome the discrimination that fathers face, while also perpetuating the idea that mothers are the primary caregiver, with more pressure in this role.

Perceptions of other professionals

Parenting interventions are less likely to be adopted if a co-parenting focus is not implemented by the social worker and exclusion appears to be prevalent in parenting and family services (Burn et al., 2019; Pfitzner et al., 2017; Symonds, 2020). One social worker pointed to the attention that mothers get shortly after birth, in terms of the Midwife and Plunket Nurse. If the mother is generally home and the father is not, then naturally she would be engaged with services more than the father. In the case that the father is also present, professionals may not make the same effort towards the father. Both parents' perception on who should attend the parenting programme will impact on the level of engagement from fathers in a parenting programme. Social workers and other professionals need to reflect on their own practice to ensure they are challenging stereotypes and not excluding fathers from their involvement in parenting programmes (Hibberd, 2005). It appears that marginalisation

of fathers in terms of their abilities when their children are small occurs on many levels and could be a barrier to father engagement with parenting programmes and social workers.

This section has explored social constructions of parenthood and has highlighted the expectations that are put on mothers and how these impact on the levels of participation of fathers in parenting programmes. Fathers' perceptions of themselves in relation to their partners' role also influences whether they feel they need to attend the parenting programme. Other professionals can also push this stereotype where mothers are considered the primary parent and therefore are more likely to be referred to the parenting programme.

The next section explores the gendered nature of social work and how a female dominated industry impacts on father engagement in parenting programmes.

The gendered nature of social work

Social work is a female dominated industry and this can impact on the participation and engagement of fathers in parenting programmes. Female social workers may consciously or unconsciously devalue the voice of the father, leading to less engagement in discussions. Fathers may be less likely to attend a parenting programme if they are the only male or one of few as they may feel uncomfortable (Grundekiva & Stankova, 2019).

Social workers may place more value on the mother's voice either consciously or unconsciously (Grundekiva & Stankova, 2019). There could be a conscious or unconscious bias where the father may not be included as his opinions may be thought not to hold the same value as the mothers. Haworth (2019), explored the idea that because social work is dominated by females that female narratives are mainstream in terms of social services, which does not allow the space for male perspectives. This may further marginalise fathers and could be another potential barrier to their engagement. There is no immediate solution to this, as social work is a female dominated industry and it may not always be possible to have a male co-facilitator or a male worker in the home (Haworth, 2019). As most social workers are female, this could be an obvious bias that workers hold, and depending on their skills as a social worker, this bias could impact on their interactions with fathers. If a father

does not feel valued, whether in a group setting or during a home-based intervention he may be less likely to engage. McHale & Negrini, (2018), highlight that although social workers know that fathers need to feel valued more and training may be required to support this engagement. The social workers interviewed felt they had the skills to engage with fathers, but did not receive specific training for this.

Social work is a female dominated industry and this may be one factor as to why males do not choose to go into this industry (Rogers, 2013). In agreement with the literature the social worker participants identified that more males were needed in the community sector and that there was a need for male only parenting groups. One social worker identified a possible reason for a lack of males coming to the industry was the pay compared to male dominated industries. Male dominated industries are predominately paid higher than female dominated industries (Faulk, 2013; Lane & Flowers, 2015; Lewis, 2018). Her solution was pay parity for community social workers with those working in statutory or health social work. It was believed this would attract more male social workers to the working in the community, delivering parenting programmes and could address the issues of a lack of father engagement.

As discussed earlier, gender traits are social constructs and require individuals to examine whether they are influenced by societal stereotypes (Crotty, 2020). It could be an explanation for the lack of male social workers in community social work and another factor as to why fathers can be difficult to engage. It has been discussed that the reason for this could be that there is gender bias towards females and that males are more likely to be put in this position before a female (Lane & Flowers, 2015; Lewis, 2018; Rogers, 2013).

There is a lack of father engagement in parenting programmes due to the gendered nature of social work which is female dominated. Female narratives dominate and this may be intimidating to fathers attending parenting programmes. The reasons for a lack of males has been explored to understand potential solutions to this barrier for fathers.

Factors related to accessibility and participation

Practical barriers such as timing and location impact on fathers attending parenting programmes (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Koerting et al., 2013; Tully et al., 2018). For example, it may not be practical for a father to attend a parenting programme running through the day if he is working, particularly when their children are small with only one percent of fathers taking paid parental leave (Duff, 2021). Many of the social workers highlighted the practical factors that may impact on fathers attending, such as childcare. If both parents are invited to attend, often the mother would attend while the father stayed at home with the children, which may further encourage the stereotype that mothers should be attending the course over fathers. These types of barriers need to be removed as often vulnerable whānau may have a lack of support around them, and organising childcare is challenging (Brand & Jungmann, 2014; Connolly et al., 2018). Finding solutions, such as offering day care on site, to address this so that both parents can attend could be a way to engage more fathers in parenting programmes (Koerting et al., 2013).

Basic social work skills, such as building rapport is vital to establishing a relationship and engaging people in interventions (Pithouse, 2018). All the social workers discussed that the skills of the social worker were a factor in determining the level of father engagement. Most of the social workers worked in a group setting and discussed that the skills of the facilitator needed to be inclusive of fathers, particularly when there was a female dominated group. Many discussed the need to include fathers in the conversation especially when stereotypes of fathers were being discussed. This is another example of how a social construct of fathers and making assumptions may impact on the level of engagement if the social worker has developed a bias towards fathers. Social workers need to challenge these assumptions of traditional fatherhood and create space for generative father traits (Hermans, 2002).

Setting and environment

The setting or the environment can impact on father engagement in a parenting programme (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Koerting et al., 2013; Lucas et al., 2021). The setting or the environment where the parenting programme takes place was discussed by several social workers. Activity-

based learning for fathers, such as fishing, in a men's shed⁶ or some type of outdoor activity was deemed to support positive engagement. Social workers talked about the success they had while completing an activity with a male. According to Lucas et al. (2021), a study examined a parenting programme group which had structured discussion but also informal group activities, including outings and craft activities. It was a successful way to engage fathers as the activities put the men at ease with each other, which meant they were more likely to talk about their experiences during structured discussions. Sharing food also provided a way to have informal discussions about parenting (Lucas et al., 2021). This could be an area that requires more exploration. This could lead to greater engagement from men, as it may be a better suited model and a way to build rapport to support engagement in parenting conversations.

Social work is a nurturing and caring profession. These are traditionally predominately feminine traits and to succeed a male social worker must form an identity that has feminine qualities as well as masculine (Roger, 2013). Low numbers of males attending parenting programmes is a common occurrence worldwide (Sicouri et al., 2019). The participants reflected that males may not feel safe in a female dominated parenting programme where there were often low numbers of males attending. The social workers felt that men may not feel it is their place to give their opinion if there are primarily females in the group. This aligns with the literature where groups where it was female dominated needed to be mindful of the father's comfort level (Luketina, 2009). In this study the two male social workers spoke of the comfort level of men in a female dominated setting and how this can impact on their attendance and engagement during sessions. They thought that fathers may be judged if they have a different opinion from a female perspective. Males may be more likely to share in a group where there are all males (Glynn & Dale, 2015). This could be an area that requires further exploration to decide how to support the level of comfort of fathers when engaging in a group setting.

How social workers facilitate and include fathers in a female dominated environment will impact on whether a father feels valued and how he engages in the programme (Shapiro et

⁶ 4 A men's shed is a shed that brings men together in the community to share skills and work on projects individually or with others.

al., 2020). It appears that groups with a large majority of women are engaging with parenting programmes due to being at home with children and being the primary caregiver of smaller children (Sicouri et al., 2019). Offering opportunities for fathers to connect is a way to foster support and a sense of belonging (McGirr, 2020). Social workers discussed male only groups, where men are involved in activities such as fishing, as this was thought to encourage men to discuss parenting as they would feel they had a safe space to talk without judgement from females. The social workers thought that this was a significant factor in the retention of fathers in the group. This aligns with literature that found that men are more open to sharing with other men (Glynn & Dale, 2015). Groupwork could be considered to create a supportive environment that is less intensive than home visiting.

Timing

Practical factors, such as the timing of the programme needed to be addressed to ensure that fathers can engage in these programmes (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Tully et al, 2018). The social workers in the study spoke of how most of their programmes were run during the day and that most of the fathers they knew worked. Some of the social workers discussed the need for work friendly hours to accommodate fathers, but also talked about the potential risks of this to social worker self-care, or risk in terms of home visiting at night alone. Timing is a significant barrier to why fathers may not attend parenting programmes and work friendly hours may need to be introduced by agencies to remove this barrier so fathers can engage in parenting programmes (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Koerting et al., 2013; Lucas et al., 2021).

Access to children

Women are more likely to have day to day care of their children over the father (Bradshaw et al., 2002; Crowley, 2008; Milchman, 2018). Parents who do not have day to day care of their children or have limited access are less motivated to engage in parenting programmes (McWey, 2015). In agreement with the literature the participants talked about the lack of access to their children being a factor that could contribute to a reduction in generative fathering traits, which in turn could lead to the father being less likely to engage in a parenting

programme. This potential bias can impact on how they engage with parenting services. This is another barrier to fathers attending parenting programmes and engaging with social workers (McWey, 2015; Symonds, 2020). If fathers only see their children on weekends or must have supervised visits with their children, it appears to be less likely that they are willing to develop generative fathering skills, such as motivation to develop parenting skills and are therefore less likely to engage with a social worker.

The referral process and initial engagement

The referral process and recruitment of fathers was an important factor related to whether fathers attend and therefore engage in parenting programmes (Burn et al., 2019; Pfitzner et al., 2017; Symonds, 2020). Social workers discussed that initial contact between social worker and father impacts the father's meaningful engagement during the programme. If a mother is attending visits with other professionals, they may not mention the father for referral to a parenting programme, which is a form of maternal gatekeeping which impacts on the referral process and father attendance (Maxwell et al., 2012; Pfitzner et al., 2017).

Social constructs around gender roles again impact on whether a father is involved in the referral process (Crotty, 2020). Father-targeted advertising of parenting programmes, through social media for example, could diminish the social construct barrier (Burn et al., 2019). The professional must also assume co-parenting is taking place and invite the father to attend at time of referral to ensure father inclusion in parenting programmes (Brewsaugh & Stozier, 2016).

Family harm

Fathers may be labelled negatively if there has been an incident of family harm (Sarker, 2018). The language used in social work textbooks can label fathers as a risk in their child's life and not focus enough on the impacts of a positive father figure in their child's life and the importance of this (Brewsaugh & Stozier, 2016). In terms of parenting interventions, if a father is deemed a risk he may be excluded, particularly in a child welfare setting (Brandon et al., 2019; Shadik, 2020). One social worker remarked on this, saying that it appeared that often

care and protection social workers recommended the mother attend the programme, but did not ask the father to attend. This social worker believed this was prevailing gender bias, but it could also be the factor of risk determining who gets support.

According to Zhang et al., (2018), a factor for lack of engagement from social workers with fathers is that typically it can be a gendered issue with men being more likely to abuse their partners. This impacts on who is seeking support, which may typically be the mother, who then engages with the service (Zhang et al., 2018). This is another example of the social construction of fathers, with bias towards them as a risk and being less likely to be referred for parenting support (Burr, 2015). It appears fathers may be excluded by child welfare if they are perpetrators (Brandon et al., 2019; Shadik, 2020). Social workers also identified that many of the fathers who attend parenting groups may attend out of fear as it has been recommended by the family court or Oranga Tamariki. The social workers had experienced that men were less likely to engage in conversations if they felt they were being strongly advised to attend, rather than attending by choice. The social workers also discussed that, if they did engage, the engagement may not be genuine as they feel pressured to attend by the statutory agency.

Engaging with involuntary clients, such as those who are perpetrators of family harm, can be a challenge for social workers (Symonds, 2020). Pruett et al., (2019), discussed the need to have a mix of mandatory and statutory referred clients with voluntary community clients at parenting groups. A mixed group could possibly alleviate some of the stigma that parents may endure. It could also support more genuine engagement as those who have come seeking support may create a dynamic of learning for the group. One social worker did discuss the idea of mixing groups and having those from different socio-economic backgrounds come together to support and possibly role model to those who may be finding parenting extra challenging.

Solutions to improve father engagement

Several solutions are explored to improve father engagement. Empowerment was a common theme throughout the interviews with more value placed on father's voices on a micro and

macro level by a range of people in society. Culture also needs to be considered to ensure that parenting programmes are culturally appropriate and are meeting different ethnic needs.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a form of social justice, which gives marginalised people a voice (Coulshed & Orme, 2012). Empowerment of fathers on a societal level was a common theme throughout the interviews. All of the social workers felt there was a need to improve the outcomes for fathers by having more presence in the media, for example positive images of fathers with their children, with some social workers discussing the need to have men portrayed in a nurturing light to promote change perceptions of nurturing in parenting. Father targeted advertising encourages fathers' engagement and supports the empowerment of fathers (Gregory & Milner, 2011; Sicouri, 2018).

A common word that was used by the social workers was the idea of highlighting the "value" of fathers. Owens (2018), explained the idea of the devaluation of the father's role when he is described as the helper of the mother. This stereotype is not only harmful to fathers but also puts pressure on the mother's role to be the primary parent. Through the lens of social constructivism, social workers need to challenge their own assumptions about the role of fathers, and how these could be impacting on their interactions with fathers (Hermans, 2002). This could be achieved through reflection of personal and professional interactions with fathers and how this influences the social workers' perceptions of fatherhood.

Empowering fathers on a macro level may improve the numbers of fathers attending and engaging in parenting programmes as they may feel more valued in their role as a parent (Sicouri, 2018). Several social workers discussed possible solutions to this issue. One social worker suggested normalising parenting programmes with an early intervention approach to support whānau, and fathers in particular, for healthier and stronger whānau. The findings are in agreement with Coore et al. (2017), who recommended that parenting programmes become engrained in existing systems as a tool to minimise family harm and improve the lives of whānau. This aligns with the goals of parenting programmes that the social workers

outlined, healthy families, this could also support further father engagement in parenting programmes.

Cultural Considerations

Understanding the Aotearoa bi-cultural and multi-cultural context is crucial to social work practice (Connolly et al., 2018). This was not a prominent theme throughout the study and requires further research. Only two social workers talked about the need for culturally appropriate parenting programmes. It was thought that targeted programming, that acknowledged cultural norms may be more appropriate and effective to encourage change. Eklington (2017), explored how Māori youth showed signs of their pre-colonial ancestors and displayed nurturing traits. Those who identify as Māori may need kaupapa Māori designed programmes to further support their role as a father. It is interesting this idea of traditional roles pre-colonisation being what would be considered the modern ideal. It appears that Māori concepts should be brought into the mainstream to support the idea of the nurturing father as the social workers discussed the need for this to be normalised on a macro level.

The impacts of colonisation have impacted on a Māori father's role with his tamariki (Edwards & Ratima, 2014). It appears that Pākehā could also learn from traditional Māori concepts of fatherhood to potentially support generative fathering. There does not appear to be substantial research in this area to support the idea of developing parenting programmes that are bi-cultural. In fact, as discussed earlier, the main parenting programmes available in Aotearoa, such as Triple P and Incredible Years were developed in Australia and the United States of America respectively (Superu, 2014). This may be an area that requires further development on a macro level to mainstream bicultural parenting programmes that are more appropriate for Māori but also benefit Pākehā fathers. However, a decolonised approach would also support a 'by Māori for Māori' approach to parenting programmes.

One of the male social workers discussed how he was called to work alongside a father in situations where culturally it was more appropriate that he had a male worker working alongside him. As discussed earlier, it appears there is a need to recruit more male social workers, and it appears in terms of being culturally appropriate there is a need for more male

workers. As outlined earlier in the literature review, Aotearoa is a multi-cultural country where there will be multiple needs for different ethnicities (Corey et al., 2014). The concept of male social workers being needed to support fathers from certain ethnicities was not explored earlier in the study. Further exploration may be required in terms of ethnicity to ensure parenting programmes are appropriate and will have positive outcomes for participants (Patel et al., 2011; Ruiz et al., 2017).

These multiple individual and societal factors need to be explored to better determine what the specific needs of certain communities were to ensure participation and engagement in parenting programmes. It appears that there is a lack of research in this area which indicates that this may not be a priority area. It is interesting to see a lack of research for this in an Aotearoa setting, and how fathers from ethnicities other than European, such as Māori, Pasifika may be marginalised due to the development of parenting programmes not considering the diversity of fathers.

Chapter Summary

The aim of this research was to uncover possible barriers and solutions to father engagement in parenting programmes by interviewing social workers regarding their experiences. This chapter has analysed the themes drawn from the interviews and has compared the themes to the literature that was discussed earlier.

Three major themes were discovered from this investigation. The social construction of parenting was explored to understand both how the social workers constructed fatherhood and motherhood. The gendered nature of social work was explored to understand how the female dominated industry impacted on father engagement. Factors related to accessibility and participation were discussed to understand the potential barriers of timing, childcare, facilitation and the referral process. Lastly, solutions to improve father engagement were explored. The next chapter provides a summary of the thesis along with recommendations to barriers identified and areas of future research.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore how social workers engage with fathers in parenting programme delivery. The aim was to identify potential barriers and solutions to fathers' engagement in parenting programmes by understanding social workers' experiences. This chapter outlines the study design, key findings and implications of the research.

Four key findings were uncovered from the research; how perceptions of gender norms impact on father engagement in parenting programmes, how gender safety impacts on fathers attending parenting programmes, various practical factors create barriers to father engagement in parenting programmes and empowerment of fathers to improve attendance in parenting programmes. Each key finding is summarised in relation to literature and research findings. Implications for social work are profound and require social workers to practice reflexivity to understand their perceptions of fathers. Solutions are then explored to encourage father engagement in parenting programmes. Future research and recommendations are identified from the key findings. The limitations of the research are also explored.

Study Design

The key aim of this research was to explore how social workers engage with fathers in parenting programme delivery. The purpose was to identify potential barriers and solutions to father engagement. The research utilised a qualitative exploratory approach involving semi-structured interviews with six social workers who had experience in the delivery of parenting programmes. The data was analysed using thematic analysis to establish themes. Social constructivism informed the data analysis which was appropriate given the subjective nature of the data.

The objectives of the research were to:

- To examine potential barriers that may hinder engagement with fathers when delivering a parenting programme.

- To examine potential solutions as outlined by social workers that have supported engagement with fathers when delivering a parenting resource.
- To add to knowledge about the solutions that empower fathers.

Key findings

Four key findings were identified from this research; perceptions of gender norms impact on father engagement in parenting programmes, gender safety impacts on fathers attending parenting programmes, practical factors create barriers to father engagement and empowerment as a solution to father engagement. These key findings were considered against literature and through the theoretical lens of social constructivism.

1. Gender norms impact on fathers' engagement in parenting programmes

The social construction of gender impacts on parenting roles in society (Amato, 2018). These stereotypes can have negative implications for both men and women when they transition into motherhood or fatherhood (Mattila, 2020). Parenting roles are in a transition stage, but some traditions are still prevalent as identified by the participants. The idea of generativity or new fatherhood was prevalent throughout the research, where social workers identified co-parenting, nurturing and engagement as ideal traits in a father (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998; Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019; Petts et al., 2018; Pratt et al., 2012). If a father is absent from their child's life this had negative connotations and could impact negatively on how a social worker engages with fathers. This is an example of a social construction of parenthood where societal perceptions may limit a father's engagement in parenting programmes (Canuto et al., 2019; Leath, 2017; Scheibling, 2020; Weber, 2020).

The social workers highlighted that fathers who displayed generative traits, such as positive future goals for their children, were more likely to engage in the programme, which is congruent with the literature (Pratt, 2013). There is a link between a father's perception of himself as a father and whether he will attend and engage in a parenting programme. Whether a father is then influenced by traditional societal discourses in relation to parenting roles will impact on his level of engagement. The participants identified different aspects of

this, such as individual perceptions from the father, the social worker, the mother and also the wider community or society. Perceptions of gender norms impacts on who attends the parenting programme, with the social workers identifying the mother was often thought of as the primary parent. Traditional societal discourse about parenting roles is still prevalent and this impacts on the participation and the engagement of fathers in parenting programmes.

2. Gender safety impacts on fathers attending parenting programmes

Gender safety was identified by the participants as a potential barrier to father engagement in parenting programmes. Gender safety, in relation to this study, is the level of comfort a father feels about being male during a parenting programme session. Social work is a female dominated industry and this is a potential barrier to father engagement with social services (Haworth, 2019). Female narratives may be dominant, and this can lead to an environment where men may feel excluded. Gender safety may not be considered by agencies when delivering parenting programmes which can lead to lower numbers of fathers attending. In terms of parenting programmes social workers may consciously or unconsciously value the mother's voice over the fathers (Grundekiva & Stankova, 2019). The participants believed that this was an issue when delivering parenting programmes and believed the facilitation skills of the social worker to include father's voices would encourage engagement. Female dominated groups for parenting programmes was identified as a barrier to father engagement (Glynn & Dale, 2015). How social workers facilitated these dynamics impacts on the level of engagement from the father (Sicouri et al., 2019).

Recruiting more male social workers was identified by the participants as a solution to create a more inclusive environment for fathers. Potential barriers to this were identified as the industry is already female dominated, men may not feel as comfortable to go into the industry (Rogers, 2013). Another barrier identified was that female dominated industries, such as social work are paid significantly less compared to male dominated industries (Faulk, 2013; Lane & Flowers, 2015; Lewis, 2018). Gender bias in the industry was considered another factor to the lack of males in community roles where they may be delivering a parenting resource. Male social workers are more likely to be working in statutory agencies, where pay is

significantly higher or are in a managerial position (Rogers, 2013). Gender bias is prevalent in the social services and this impacts on the level of male social workers in the industry. Subsequently fathers are less likely to attend if groups are facilitated and female dominated.

3. Practical factors create barriers to fathers' engagement in parenting programmes

A key finding from the research was how factors, such as setting and timing, impact on father engagement in parenting programmes which was congruent with the literature (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Koerting et al., 2013; Tully et al., 2018). Access to child care was identified as a barrier to attendance by the participants, and it was believed that often a father would stay at home with the children so that the mother could attend, once again highlighting the social construction of gender stereotypes influencing father attendance. Basic social skills were required to engage fathers, such as relationship building, which the social workers believed they had, but that others may not and this could hinder engagement.

The setting or environment was also discussed as a barrier and solution by the social workers. Activity based learning was identified as a solution to improve father engagement. Social workers spoke of the success they had had with males when engaging in an activity together and highlighted a difference in gender preferences for learning. This type of learning environment supports fathers to engage in conversations with social workers (Lucas et al., 2021).

Timing was identified as a significant factor, as the participants shared that most of their parenting programmes were during the day and they had witnessed fathers working during these hours. Timing appears to be a factor that impacts on father attendance of parenting programmes (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Tully et al., 2018). There was a consensus among participants that if a father had limited access to his children, he would be less likely to attend a parenting programme. Fathers are less likely to have day to day care of their children (Bradshaw et al., 2002; Crowley, 2008; Milchman, 2018). This limitation of access appears to impact on their motivation to attend parenting programmes (McWey, 2015).

The referral process and initial engagement was highlighted as a potential barrier to father attendance. The social worker indicated a bias towards fathers when a referral was made, signalling to the fact that mothers were generally more engaged with services such as health when their children were small and were therefore referred to attend the parenting programme without adding the father to the referral (Maxwell et al., 2012; Pfitzner et al., 2017). Fathers may be labelled a risk whether there has been an incident of family harm or not (Brandon et al., 2019; Brewsaugh & Stozier, 2016; Shadik, 2020). This is another potential bias, which shows how social constructions of parenting impacts on access to parenting programme for fathers. All of these factors were identified as barriers to father attendance and engagement in parenting programmes.

4. Empowering fathers to improve attendance and engagement in parenting programmes

A key finding of the research was the idea of father empowerment. Empowerment was identified by the participants as a way of valuing and meeting the unique needs of fathers to ensure inclusion in parenting programmes. There is a role for social workers and the general wider society to empower fathers. Participants identified this as a potential solution to improving father attendance and engagement in parenting programmes. Advertising of parenting programmes that was father specific was thought to encourage father attendance and portray the value of fathers as a parent, which was seen as a form of empowerment as it was a strengths-based focus on fatherhood (Gregory & Milner, 2011; Sicouri, 2018). The normalisation of parenting programmes was identified as a solution to the attendance of fathers in parenting programmes (Coore et al., 2017). Culture was another area that was not explored too deeply by social workers which highlights a potential barrier to engagement of fathers who may be of an ethnic minority. It was suggested by two participants that parenting programmes may need to be designed to be culturally appropriate and individualised for different ethnicities to improve engagement and this aligns with literature (Patel et al., 2011; Ruiz et al., 2017). Empowering fathers, through recruitment and engagement is a solution to further father participation in parenting programmes.

Implications for social work

The implications of these findings for social work practice are profound and require social workers to reflect on their practice and examine practical practice elements to ensure they are not creating a barrier to father engagement in parenting programmes (Connolly et al., 2018). Reflective practice is required to ensure that being exposed to many incidents of family harm is not creating a professional bias towards fathers and labelling them as a risk in future interactions (Connolly et al., 2018). Further discussion may be required during supervision and peer supervision on perceptions of parenting traits. Social workers also need to be aware of how their own gender impacts on their perceptions of ideal parenting traits, as the male and female social workers had slightly different interpretations of ideal traits for fathers (Volling & Palkovitz, 2021). Social workers' perceptions of fatherhood can encourage or discourage father engagement in parenting programmes (Molloy & Pierro, 2020). Social workers need to challenge themselves during initial assessment if they identify a father is absent. If this is often identified during their work it can create bias towards fathers which may impact on engagement in parenting programmes (Canuto et al., 2019; Leath, 2017; Scheibling, 2020; Weber, 2020).

Exercising reflexivity and understanding individual circumstances could create a more inclusive environment for fathers. To improve fathers' engagement social workers also need to be aware of the generational change in parenting and how this may impact on their delivery of a parenting programme. Perceptions of gender roles in parenting will be influenced by this through personal and professional experiences (Molloy & Pierro, 2020). Traditional gender roles are still prevalent in society and social workers should strive to challenge these. Mothers may be perceived as the primary parent when children are small and further education may be required in parenting programmes to highlight the importance of fathers when their child is an infant (Olsavsky et al., 2020). Social workers implementing this as a part of the parenting programme would challenge this discourse as empowerment of fathers would be at the forefront of their practice.

Gender safety needs to be considered by social workers when working alongside fathers in a parenting programme. As social work is a female dominated industry there is no immediate solution to create a widespread change where male social workers take groups specifically

for fathers (Haworth, 2019). Social workers need to keep the value of inclusivity at the forefront of their practice and acknowledge that fathers may not feel safe in a female dominated setting (SWRB, 2021). Secondly, social workers having good supervision to discuss potential bias that may impact on how they engage with fathers should be discussed regularly, particularly in the setting of parenting where gender stereotypes are prevalent (Connolly et al., 2018). Social workers being aware that the father's voice has the same value as the mother's voice is another aspect of inclusivity and will impact on father engagement (Grundekiva & Stankova, 2019).

Social workers may require additional education in their training that is specific to fathers or potential ongoing training to ensure engrained social stereotypes are not impeding on engagement (McHale & Negrini, 2018). A solution to engaging fathers in parenting programmes is to recruit more male social workers to the industry and in particular the community sector where most parenting programmes are accessed. One participant identified the need for pay parity with the statutory sector as generally men will either go to this sector or will be in managerial roles off the frontline (Rogers, 2013).

There were many practical factors that impacted on father attendance and engagement in parenting programmes that were identified both by the social workers and the literature. These factors have implications for social work. Many of these barriers, such as childcare and setting can be removed to encourage father participation and engagement in parenting programmes. Agencies offering childcare so that both parents can attend is a potential solution that social workers could advocate for at their agency to improve father attendance (Koerting et al., 2013). When parenting programmes are delivered is another barrier that has implications to social work practice. Finding suitable times that cater to working fathers is something that may require advocacy within the agency (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Tully et al., 2018). Social workers could explore alternates to parenting programme delivery that is better suited to fathers through activity-based learning (Lucas et al., 2021).

Facilitation skills in a female dominated group setting may require reflection from social workers to ensure that their work is inclusive of fathers. Social workers may also need to question referrals where the father is not named to challenge other professionals to ensure

fathers are not being excluded from parenting programmes (Maxwell et al., 2012; Pfitzner et al., 2017).

Empowerment of fathers to encourage recruitment and engagement is another implication for social work. Change on a societal level is an aspect of social work advocacy that needs further exploration to ensure inclusivity of fathers in parenting programmes (Connolly et al., 2018). Through social work, fathers can be empowered and may feel better valued in society and this may support co-parenting as the norm. Social workers need to uphold the ethic of social justice to ensure fathers have the same access to parenting programmes. This can be achieved through reflexive practice and taking a pro-equity approach with fathers when delivering a parenting programme. Culturally appropriate parenting programmes also may need to be introduced in the community to ensure that parenting programmes are not homogenous and are appropriate for different ethnicities (Patel et al., 2011; Ruiz et al., 2017).

Future research and recommendations

The research has highlighted areas that may require further research in future. The research aim was to understand the barriers and potential solutions as suggested by social workers who deliver a parenting programme to engage fathers. A larger cohort, talking with fathers, exploring language used to describe fathers, research into current teaching in social work around fathers, and studies that have a kaupapa Māori approach or multi-cultural element were all identified as areas where future research could be undertaken.

Talking to fathers about their experiences with social workers, and possibly with other professionals would be an interesting area to explore to determine whether there is any correlation between the social workers' perceptions of fathers and what their perceptions were of themselves, particularly in the father role and when they have an infant. Being able to hear the fathers voice would be valuable to be able to understand the barriers that impact on their engagement in parenting programmes.

Specifically looking at the language that social workers or other professionals use to describe fathers would be a study in itself. This question was quite revealing and led to more questions about perceptions that social workers may have of fathers. There appears to be literature to

support that there are negative perceptions of fathers from professionals and identifying possible bias in social workers could create room for the profession to grow and support fathers (Molloy & Pierro, 2020). This type of research could also apply the theory of generative fathering or new fatherhood to contrast what are negative and positive traits that social workers identify (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998; Mitchell & Lashewicz, 2019; Petts et al., 2018; Pratt et al., 2012). Language gives an important insight into how social workers may perceive fathers and this will then impact on how they engage with fathers.

One area of future research could be training of new social workers and how fathers are portrayed in textbooks. Fathers can be labelled a risk particularly when there were care and protection issues (Brewsaugh & Stozier, 2016). Exploring whether fathers were seen as a risk early in training would be an area of further research, if social workers are taught early in their career to screen for this risk, they may miss the value that fathers have to their partner and children (Brandon et al., 2019; Shadik, 2020). Specifically exploring care and protection social workers' perceptions of fathers from their training may bring to light possible reasons for this potential bias.

Kaupapa Māori research in this area would be beneficial given the Aotearoa context of this research. It was not mentioned during the interviews whether social workers had a bi-cultural element to the parenting programmes they delivered, although it was mentioned some practiced bi-culturally. Two of the most widely used programmes in Aotearoa were developed in the United States of America, so it would be interesting to know whether these are appropriate for Māori parents and in particular fathers (Incredible Years, 2021; Triple P, 2021). This could once again come down to the delivery of the programme and how they integrate the programme into the Aotearoa context. It would be beneficial to have research into kaupapa Māori parenting programmes to see how they compare to European models of programmes. Along with this, Pasifika and multi-cultural communities could also be researched to understand the different needs that they might have (Patel et al., 2011; Ruiz et al., 2017).

A number of recommendations can be made as a result of this research on an individual, organisational and societal level.

- That Government agencies and family service organisations work to normalise parenting programmes to relieve the stigma of fathers seeking support.
- That organisations funding or providing programmes work to remove potential practical barriers, such as timing, access to childcare and the setting of parenting programmes so that they are more accessible to fathers.
- That Government and social service organisations explore pay parity, to support recruitment of male social workers in the community sector.
- That social work educators and supervisors emphasise in social work training and supervision the value of fathers and what they contribute to parenting.
- That funders and providers of parenting services develop culturally appropriate parenting programmes that are unique for the Aotearoa bi-cultural and multi-cultural context.

Limitations

As the research was qualitative the nature of the research is subjective. This was most appropriate for the subject, as the research was conducted to understand social workers' experiences. This research was limited due to the nature of the thesis programme requirements within the Master of Social Work, being limited in resources and time, so only social workers were spoken to. As a small selection was taken, a large-scale research piece involving more participants would be better able to determine whether the themes identified in this research reach a wider consensus with a larger cohort. Due to the systematic approach taken throughout the study, this research could be replicated for further research. The research process has a high level of trustworthiness by adhering to social work ethics and contributes to the current knowledge on this topic in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Conclusion

The final chapter has summarised the research. The research question has been thoroughly explored and recommendations have been drawn from this investigation. Key findings from the research have been identified along with implications for social work. Recommendations for social work practice, social service organisations and macro change have been outlined.

The research examined six social workers' perspectives of potential barriers and solutions to fathering engagement in parenting programmes. The research has highlighted that father engagement is often a forgotten area. Further research is needed in this area to understand potential barriers and solutions to father engagement to support better parenting in the community. The social construction of parenting, the gendered nature of social work, factors related to accessibility and participation and finally solutions to improve father engagement were all key findings from the research. Recommendations include areas of individual professional, organisational and societal change towards removing barriers for fathers in terms of parenting programme engagement.

Social construction of parental roles has a major influence on whether fathers engage in parenting programmes. Change needs to occur on an individual, organisational, community and societal level if these stereotypes are to be challenged. Social work can be used as a tool to create change in the area of father engagement in parenting programmes. The principles of social justice and empowerment should be at the forefront of social work practice to create this change.

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Appendix One: Advertisement on Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers

Criteria:

A registered social worker with at least three years frontline experience in a role where delivering a parenting resource is a part of their role and they are able to work alongside fathers. This can be individual or group work. Social workers do not need to currently be in this role.

How social workers engage fathers in parenting programmes is an under researched area of social work and it is hoped that this research will contribute to provide greater insight in this area. I am hoping to gain understanding of what some barriers could be to engage with fathers but also seeking to hear what some solutions are that have encouraged effective engagement.

This research is being conducted by Melissa Gray, a Registered Social Worker and student at Massey University.

Interviews will require between 75-90 minutes of time and can be either in person if participants are in the Manawatu area or via Zoom.

Interviews will be confidential, and participants will remain anonymous in the findings.

Participation in this research is voluntary.

If you would like to take part in this research or would like further information to come to an informed decision, please email Melissa Gray at graymelissa858@gmail.com

Appendix Two: Interview Schedule

Research Questions

- Research opens with a karakia or participant may wish to open with karakia
- Introduction (of researcher and the topic)
- Read over the information sheet together
- Read over consent form and sign if it is an in person interview or if interview is through zoom this would have been sent through earlier via email before interview takes place.

Questions about the participant

How long have you been practicing as a registered social worker?

What area are you currently working in and for how long?

What gender do you identify with?

What is/was the field of practice where you are delivering the parenting resource?

Are/were clients mandatory or voluntary?

What is the criteria for referral for the service where you delivered a parenting resource?

How would you describe your practice framework as a social worker?

Questions about parenting programme delivery

How long did you work in a role where parenting programme delivery was a part of your role?

Can you describe the nature of the parenting programme you are/were delivering?

Is/was it solely a parenting programme or was your role social work with an element of delivering a parenting programme?

Where did you learn about parenting interventions?

Is/was there a particular model you use/used?

Were there any gaps in the parenting programme that impacted on engagement with parents?

What do you believe is the goal of a parenting programme?

Questions about father engagement

How would you describe a father? What is their role?

How often do/did you engage with fathers when delivering the parenting programme?

Did you have any specific training on how to support fathers with their parenting?

Do you believe there were any gaps in the parenting programme that you delivered that may impact on a father's engagement?

Do you feel there are barriers (if any) to engaging with fathers?

What barriers do you identify for fathers to engage in parenting conversations?

Have you identified any barriers that fathers may have on an individual level to not engaging in parenting programmes?

Do you think you could have bias towards fathers when delivering a parenting programme?

Do you believe there is a link between a father's involvement with his children and his engagement in a parenting programme?

Do you believe there are societal factors that contribute to a lack of engagement?

If you had success in engaging with a father what do you think are the factors that contributed to this engagement? Examples

Have you had success engaging fathers in parenting conversations and if so what did you do? Examples

What do you think is needed on an individual (either the father or social worker) level to support father engagement?

What do you think is needed on an organisational level to support father engagement?

What do you think is needed on a societal level to support father engagement?

Do you have any final comments you would like to make?

- Conclusion of interview
- Explanation of the next part of the process (reviewing transcript)
- Counselling sheet to be given to participant and recommendation of supervision if anything was triggering during the interview.
- Closing karakia

Exploring how social workers effectively engage fathers in parenting programme delivery

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

- I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded. (if applicable include this statement)
- I agree/do not agree to the interview being image recorded. (if applicable include this statement)
- I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me. (if applicable include this statement)
- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Information Sheet

Exploring how social workers effectively engage fathers in parenting programme delivery

Introduction

My name is Melissa Gray and I am a Registered Social Worker in Aotearoa. I am currently employed by Plunket as a Family Start Whānau Worker where I have been employed for the past three years. Parenting programme delivery is a part of my role and this has led to an interest in how social workers engage with fathers. Along with my work I am also a Master of Social Work student through Massey University and I am undertaking research to meet the requirements for this degree.

Project Description and Invitation

I would like to invite registered social workers to be a part of this small research project where I will be exploring how social workers effectively engage with fathers when there is a parenting programme element to their work. In order to be a participant, social workers must be registered with the New Zealand Social Worker Registration Board. Social workers can be in any part of the country as interviews will be conducted via Zoom or if participants live in the Manawatu area, face to face interviews can be an option. All interviews will be conducted in English. Participants should have at least three years frontline experience where parenting has been an element of their work and they were able to engage with both parents within the last five years. Social workers do not currently need to be working in this role.

How social workers engage fathers in parenting programmes is an under researched area of social work and it is hoped that this research will contribute to provide greater insight in this area. I am hoping to gain understanding of what some barriers could be to engage with fathers but also seeking to hear what some solutions are that have encouraged effective engagement.

This research is voluntary. Details of participants will be kept confidential and social workers name will not be identified in the final results.

Project Procedures

I am seeking up to eight participants to be involved in the research, with six being the minimum. This invitation is being circulated by the ANZASW to support recruitment. Participants will be chosen at random in the order they apply to participate. Interviews will take between 75-90 minutes approximately. Permission will be asked for participants to be recorded with audio recording if it is a face to face interview or video and audio if the interview is conducted via Zoom. I will transcribe the interviews. These recordings will be deleted once the research is completed and will only be accessible by the researcher. Transcripts of the interviews will be available after the interview for the participant to check for any inaccuracies. Social workers known to the researcher will be excluded.

Participants rights

Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage before the approval of the transcript. Those participating have a right to ask questions about the study and how it is being conducted. Participants can decline questions they would rather not answer. It is the right of the participant to ask that recording be stopped at any time during the interview. All participants will have access to the project findings once completed. Participants may invite a support person to the interview if they wish.

Data Management

All recordings and transcripts will be kept securely on a laptop that is password protected and only the researcher has access to. Signed consent forms and other files such as notes will be stored securely. All files will be deleted at the conclusion of the research. Participants names and the organisation they work for will not be disclosed in this research and all participants will be given a pseudonym in this thesis.

Project Contacts

If you would like to participate, please contact via email:

Melissa Gray

Master of Social Work Student

School of Social Work

Massey University

Palmerston North

graymelissa858@gmail.com

My supervisors' details are:

Senior Lecturer and Associate Head of School of Social Work

Ms Lareen Cooper

L.Cooper@massey.ac.nz

Senior Lecturer

Dr Michael Dale

M.P.Dale@massey.ac.nz

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix Five: Massey University Ethics Approval



Date: 02 February 2021

Dear Melissa Thake

Re: Ethics Notification - 4000023850 - **Exploring how social workers effectively engage with fathers in parenting programme delivery**

Thank you for your notification which you have assessed as Low Risk.

Your project has been recorded in our system which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

If situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your ethical analysis, please contact a Research Ethics Administrator.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research."

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz."

Please note, if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to complete the application form again, answering "yes" to the publication question to provide more information for one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

Human Ethics Low Risk notification

Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise

Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 350 5573; 06 350 5575 F 06 355 7973
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz W <http://humanethics.massey.ac.nz>