

Transition to parenthood for fathers in pre and post natal care. assignment

[Sociology](#)



Transition to Parenthood for Fathers in Pre and Post Natal Care. Table of Contents Introduction¹ Pregnancy² Birth³ Postnatal⁴ Conclusion⁵

References⁶ Introduction One of the greatest sources of stress for Australian couples is the societal shift from a clear-cut, gender-based division of labour to an expectation that both partners should have a part in all aspects of their lives together. In short, men and women are now sharing roles that were once consigned to one sex or the other.

The old ideas have been hard to overcome, but as women have sought equal rights in regards to employment and social status the transition has eased, and both men and women are shedding their old roles. The role of the father has been dramatically changing as society continues to be more accepting of the dad's role in the birthing process. Diamond (1992) argues that becoming a father is "not when their partner has given birth to a baby and is not the beginning of the paternal instinct; rather it is within a male in childhood just as being a mother is for young girls".

In this current climate fathers are looked down upon socially if they miss the delivery of their baby's birth, yet often fathers still feel quite unwanted or not entirely needed during labour. Their role is often relegated to the important yet more distant job of overseeing their partner's wellbeing and offered token jobs such as "cord cutting". Sanderson and Thompson (2002) argue there is a change in the culture of fatherhood. Men have begun to express their desire to be seen as intimate and involved in the day to day rearing of children.

Interestingly it is the older fathers who seem less tied to the stereotypical role or behaviour opting for a style considered traditionally maternal with adolescent fathers more likely to expect traditional roles in child rearing. (Parke, 2004) With this in mind it is important to examine the role of fathers in the same way as we do the role of mothers. By looking at the three separate stages early on in a mans involvement with his child we can begin to understand the basis of a new kind of father-child relationship. Pregnancy It is the lucky man who can find constructive ways to express his fatherly ties during the time of “ wait” while simultaneously protecting his partner (and child’s) health and privacy in serving as a source of strength and support. ” (Herzog, 1982) Men often felt in limbo by their inability to directly experience the physiological aspects of the pregnancy. In my experience with talking to men about how they felt during their partner’s pregnancy, many men speak of their lack of knowledge about the process, their feelings of isolation and their inability to engage in the reality of the pregnancy.

Women’s passage to motherhood is a more clearly structured transition and the visual outward signs of the pregnancy mark her changing status. Men’s inability to experience pregnancy means that their biological encounters are by proxy, thus they rely on ‘ second hand’ accounts of theirs partner’s experience (Draper 2002). Men frequently expressed frustrations at not being able to directly feel what their partners were feeling. The issue for most emerging fathers concerns the ways in which their instinctive ties are to the yet unborn child might be developed.

Many men freely report that the process does not seem real to them until the actual birth when they can see, hear and touch their child (Herzog, 1982). Roopnarine and Miller (1985) believe that the transition to fatherhood is not just a one off event, but rather a continuous passage. They make the distinction between the state of fatherhood, which happens once on the birth of the first born and the practice of fathering. Their transition theory suggests that fatherhood does not end at the birth of the child but is a continuous process as the new or new again father negotiates the complexities of fathering practice.

In a recent UK study of new fathers, 78% of those men who were present at the birth of their child would be happy to be there again, compared to 22% who believed it was the beginning of the bonding process (Johnson 2002). Therefore early intervention is crucial for fathers to understand the value they can add before birth. Birth There is a number of conflicting opinions on the value of fathers in the birthing process. Johnson's research (2002) suggested that there is little evidence that a man's presence at a birth impacts on father/child bonding, although it is clear that the experience added to their feelings toward their child.

Those present at the birth 70. 7% believed that they were there to offer support to their partner, 17. 1% believed their presence was to help the bonding process, the remaining 12. 2 % stated that they did not know why they were present. Add to this the revelation that for some attending the birth of their child was not wholly voluntary exercise, but rather a result of

coercion (Antle- May & Perrin, 1985) and it is easy to see why men are in such conflict about their role.

Though there is a body of evidence to suggest that women appreciate the presence of their partner and attendance is enough despite men's deficiencies in dealing with the situation, many men felt under actual pressure to be present (Bowen & Miller, 1980). This pressure appears to stem from health professionals' belief that their presence would encourage them to become " better" fathers. If it were so it would perpetuate the view that non-attending men may be faced with the prospect of being seen as " bad" fathers (May 1982).

This pressure to be a good father can load men with high expectations of their instincts for parenting. For many men the gap is widening between the kind of father they hoped to be and the role they end up fulfilling in their children's lives. When these expectations are not met it can bring great disappointment for the whole family. There is a need for childbirth educators to be explicit as to the reasons for men to be present. Clarification of their role and tasks at the birth will give men some connection to the process and also provide an opportunity for them to express their feelings and anxieties about the birth.

Chandler and Field (1997) believe that men need to play an integral part in the birth, but their evidence suggests that fathers found themselves being moved or placed on the periphery. The experience for many of these men was that in physical attendance they were still excluded psychologically and had little clear direction as to what was expected of them. (Chandler & Field

<https://assignbuster.com/transition-to-parenthood-for-fathers-in-pre-and-post-natal-care-assignment/>

1997) Postnatal The “distant father” common up until 20 years ago has made way for a new breed of dads; a cultural trend noted by a number of theorists. Griswold, 1993; Pleck, 1987) This new father is no longer content to be delegated to being just the bread winner; he wants to play an active part in the rearing of his child. There have been two significant studies of fathers’ expectations in the early weeks after birth. In a qualitative study Henderson and Brouse (1991) examined the experiences of 22 Canadian couples in the first three weeks after birth. They identified that couples commonly experienced three separate stages: expectation, reality and transition to mastery. In the expectation stage couples expressed how they felt the pregnancy would be for them.

The reality stage is where couple come to terms with the changes in their relationship after the baby is born which then becomes a transition to mastery when they feel confident enough to independently care for their child. This research provides evidence that fathers feel they are poorly prepared for their new role and suffer a reality shock followed by a period of significant adjustment when their children are born. In the second study Anderson (1996) examined 14 first time fathers in the first two months after birth. They identified themes of commitment, becoming connected and making room for the infant.

The area of commitment men expressed how dedicated they were to keeping their family healthy and safe. Men talked about their interactions with their child as becoming connected and described their role with in their new situation as making room for all the infant represents including changes

in their relationship with their partners. This study further confirms that men's attitudes to the birth of their children and parenting are complex and deserve more dedicated attention than is currently being provided in the Australian healthcare system.

In my work with new fathers I have found that anecdotally, most men find the early weeks of new or expanding fatherhood challenging and stressful though ultimately very rewarding. They are committed to their families and want to do a great job of being a father. These studies illuminate the fear and uncertainty felt by most fathers and emphasised the need for further education for new fathers before, during and after their children are born.

Conclusion The transition to parenthood can be difficult for all mothers and fathers.

Sleep deprivation, postpartum depression, interrupted schedules, dirty nappies, are just some of the many stresses that new parents face.

Newborns seem to have endless demands and every parent worries that everything they do will affect their child's well being. The pressure of becoming a parent is especially hard on the couple's relationship once the newborn arrives home. Despite these hardships fathers are often expected to balance being the " helper" and the worker who completes long hours outside the home with limited access to paternity leave.

Therefore it is not difficult to see why some fathers find it so hard to know how to feel about their role as a parent. The studies outlined in this assignment suggest that early intervention for fathers is the key to helping couples cope with their new child. Therefore moving beyond tokenism to

<https://assignbuster.com/transition-to-parenthood-for-fathers-in-pre-and-post-natal-care-assignment/>

genuine understanding of the complexities of contemporary fatherhood is more likely to create a meaningful dialogue with fathers about their perceptions and experience of fatherhood, which in turn will support the intentions of fathers to be equal partners in the birthing process and parenthood.

Although midwives are well situated to play a significant role in supporting men as they attempt to become involved partners and parents, they must discover new ways of preparing men for their fatherhood role. Midwifery led education programs could be the answer in exposing men to a variety of possible paternal role models and encourage them to make choices about how they can manage their new roles. In addition further research is needed to help expand our perceptions of fathers not perpetuate narrow definitions.

As research in this area develops so will our understanding of fathers from their role in the child birth experience to the development of their children.

References Anderson, A. M. (1996). The father-infant relationship: Becoming connected. *Journal of the Society of Paediatric Nurses*, 1(2), 83-93. Antle-May, K. , & Perrin, S. P. (1985). *Prelude, pregnancy and birth*. Beverly Hill: Sage. Chandler, S. & Field, P. A. (1997). Becoming a father. First time fathers' experience of labor and delivery. *Journal of Midwifery*, 42, 17-24. Diamond, M. J. (1992). Creativity needs in becoming a father. *Journal of Men's Studies*.

Vol. 1 pg. 41. Draper, J. (2002). It was a real good show: The ultrasound scan, fathers and the power of visual knowledge. *Sociology of Health and Illness* 24 (6). Griswold, R. L. (1993). *Fatherhood in America: A history*. New York: Basic
<https://assignbuster.com/transition-to-parenthood-for-fathers-in-pre-and-post-natal-care-assignment/>

Books. Henderson, A. & Brouse, J. (1991). The experiences of new father during the first 3 weeks of life. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 16: 293-8.

Herzog, J. M. (1982). *Patterns of expectant fatherhood: A study of fathers of a group of premature infants*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Johnson, M. P. (2002). *An exploration of men's experience and role at childbirth*. *Journal of Men's Studies*. Vol. 10. pg. 165.

May, K. A. (1982). Three phases in father involvement in pregnancy. *Nursing Research*, 31, 337-342.

Parke, R. D. (2004). *Fathers, families and the future: A plethora of plausible predictions*. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 50 (4), pp. 456-470.

Pleck, J. H. (1987). *American fathering in historical perspective*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Roopnarine, J. I. & Miller, B. C. (1985). *Transitions to fatherhood*. CA: Sage Publications.

Sanderson, S. , & Thompson, V. L. S. (2002). Factors associated with perceived paternal involvement in childrearing. *Sex Roles*, 46 (3-4), 99-111.