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Hidden fathers: an exploratory study of young single fathers at the margins.

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Hidden Fathers

Supporting Young Single Fathers at the Margins



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1. Introduction

Rapid social and demographic changes have brought about the diversity of family types including the presence of a significant number of lone-parent families. For the state as a whole just over 21 per cent (98,304) of all family units, where there is at least one dependent child under the age of 15, is headed by a lone-parent. For Limerick City the corresponding figure is 39 per cent (2,308). The equivalent statistic, for the parishes targeted by the PAUL Partnership is higher and ranges from 42 per cent in St Munchin's Parish to 63.9 per cent in Moyross Parish (Appendix A).

Poverty is highly concentrated among one-parent families. The most recent poverty statistics (the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2006) released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) show that the poverty rate among lone-parent families rose from 27.2 per cent in 2005 to 32.5 per cent in 2006. This figure compares with a national poverty rate of 6.9 per cent, indicating that the poverty rate for one-parent families is 4.5 times that of the population as a whole. The communities where the young dads interviewed for the present study reside are characterised by extreme levels of poverty and deprivation (kelleherassociates and O'Connor 2007).

Within Irish families women are the primary caregivers. The most recent Irish evidence shows that although there is some shift in the amount of housework and caring work that men do, women spend almost five times longer than men on adult and child caring work and more than twice the amount of time on household work (McGinnity 2007). It is therefore not surprising that within lone-parent families, women too, take the primary responsibility for children. This is reflected in the fact that in Limerick City, of the 2,308 lone-parent families, 94 per cent (2,167) are headed by a woman and six per cent (141) are headed by a man (Appendix A).

Important small-scale research has been undertaken on the role of lone-mothers (McCashin 1996) and fatherhood too is receiving increased attention (Commission of the Family 1998; McKeown et al 1998; Clare 2000; Ferguson and Hogan 2004). However, there is little research specifically on lone fathers, who have the primary care-giving role. More importantly, with the exception of Corcoran (2005) and McKeown (2001) little is known about non-resident fathers who are not the primary care-givers and do not live with their children. Ferguson and Hogan's (2007) qualitative research is one of the few studies on men's perspective on crisis pregnancy.

The PAUL Partnership commissioned kelleherassociates in association with Pat O'Connor of the University of Limerick to undertake exploratory qualitative research on single fathers. The financial resources available limited the proposed time for the research to 24 consulting days. The 24 consulting days was exceeded due to the difficulties outlined below in accessing young fathers for interviewing. The interviewing of young single fathers took 16 days instead of the anticipated four days.

The term single father refers to lone fathers who are the primary care givers, as well as non-resident fathers who do not reside with their children. The study was carried out between March and May 2008. This study builds on the findings of Uncertain Futures (kelleherassociates and O'Connor 2007), a study concerned with the lives of young men living in marginalised areas of Limerick City. The current study explores in a more in-depth way, the challenges of fatherhood for young single fathers and the strategies to respond to their needs.



1.1 Brief of Study

The study aims to answer three primary questions:

1. How do young single fathers in Limerick City experience fatherhood?
2. What barriers do they face in becoming active and effective fathers?
3. What supports do they need in order for them to overcome these barriers?

The study also:

- Documents the views of young single mothers
- Identifies targeted responses proposed by organisations and agencies which have a brief for young single parents
- Identifies the action to be taken to support young single fathers

1.2 Research Methodology

Single Fathers

Selection criteria for the young men for the study included that they were:

- Between 18 and 29 years (initially the upper age limit was 25)
- Were non-resident fathers, or lone fathers living with the child(ren)
- Resided in the disadvantaged areas targeted by the PAUL Partnership

In order to identify young single fathers, the PAUL Partnership displayed posters inviting young fathers to participate in the research in family resource centres, action centres and community development projects, city centre internet cafes, the Citizen's Information Centre, and in two adult education centres. These initiatives failed to enlist a response.

Twenty voluntary and statutory organisations working in Limerick City were also asked to identify young single fathers for the study (Appendix B)¹. However, there were no community groups/ service providers working specifically with or targeting young, single fathers. The identification of young, single fathers for the study was therefore largely dependent on individuals who 'happened' to be aware that an individual within the target age group was a father. Many young fathers approached in this way were reluctant to participate in the study, despite assurances that the research would respect confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

The upper age limit for the target research group was initially 25 years. This was subsequently increased to 29 years following feedback from members of youth, lone parent and other community groups that it might be possible to source some participants between the ages of 25 and 29 for the study.

Although the response of organisations to the study was positive, the identification of young single fathers was protracted, with only three of the 20 organisations/agencies able to identify young single fathers for the study.

Direct contact was made with the Probation Service, who agreed to request young single fathers to participate in the study. This was the only organisation identified by the researchers, which specifically elicits and records information on whether or not young single men are fathers.



All of the 12 young men identified for the study were non-resident fathers. No lone-father, who had primary responsibility for his child(ren) was identified, despite determined attempts to source lone-fathers.

Because of the difficulty accessing young single fathers including many failing to turn up for interview, it took the research team four times the time allocated in the research proposal to carry out interviews.

Interview questions are outlined in Appendix E. The interviews were semi-structured using probes and follow-up questions where relevant. On average, interviews lasted three-quarters of an hour. The researchers took hand-written notes, which were transcribed following the interview.

In undertaking the interviews with young single fathers, the researchers felt it was important:

- To explain the purpose of the research to each participant
- To emphasise to each participant that he should not feel under pressure to take part in the interview
- Inform each participant that he could choose not to answer particular questions and that he could withdraw from the interview at any time

Prior to the interview, the researchers read out a consent form to each young father and he was asked to sign a written consent form (Appendix D).

Single Mothers

A focus group interview was held with seven lone mothers who were attending projects in the Limerick Social Services Centre and the Limerick Youth Services (Chapter Three). The purpose of the focus group was to elicit the views of young mothers on the role of young fathers and the difficulties regarding that role from the perspective of mothers (Appendix F).

Statutory and Voluntary Organisations


Twenty organisations from the statutory and voluntary sectors were contacted and requested to fill out a form (Appendix B) in relation to the following:

- General brief of agency
- Specific brief of agency or any written policy for young single fathers
- Work, if any being undertaken with young single fathers
- Gaps in service provision and targeted responses needed

Only one organisation responded. This organisation responded by email, stating that the organisation did not have any specific projects for young single fathers and no organisation filled out and returned the form. A Teen Parenting Programme, organised by Limerick Social Services, that targets young single fathers as well as young single mothers, was the only specialised programme identified during the research. This was identified during a focus group discussion (see below) with service providers.

Twenty-one organisations² from the statutory and voluntary sectors were invited to a focus group meeting. The purpose of the focus group was to ascertain the views of service providers on targeted responses needed for young single fathers. Personnel from five organisations attended the meeting and apologies were received from a further three organisations.

² This included the 20 organisations listed in Appendix B plus the Probation Service.



The researchers presented the aims and objectives of the research, an outline of the issues arising from the interviews with young single fathers and issues of concern to young lone mothers raised in the focus group discussion. Despite the relatively low turn out there was a very useful and informed discussion on issues relevant to young fathers and the targeted responses that are needed (Chapter Four).

1.3 Hidden Fathers

Young non-resident fathers are a "hard to reach" group. In the words of one project worker they are the "hidden fathers", a term used in the title of this study. Non-resident fathers remain hidden for a variety of reasons:

- They are under-represented in census statistics as by definition they are not "head of the household" or "head of the family", and "non-resident father" or an equivalent term is not a term used in compiling census data
- Many services and agencies in contact with young men do not specifically ask if the young men have children and thus the parental status of these young men is invisible to these services. This in part reflects the fact that the parental role is more associated with a mothering role

Also, what emerged in the current study is that the "cohabitation rule" is a disincentive for non-resident fathers to self-identify as young dads, if the mother of their child(ren) or current partner is in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP)³. Women in receipt of OFP experience extreme poverty and many of the fathers are in low-paid employment or unemployed (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs 2000). If identified as being in receipt of a maintenance payment from the father of the child, the mother could have her OFP reduced.

2. The Challenges for Non-Resident Fathers



2.1 Profile of Young Men

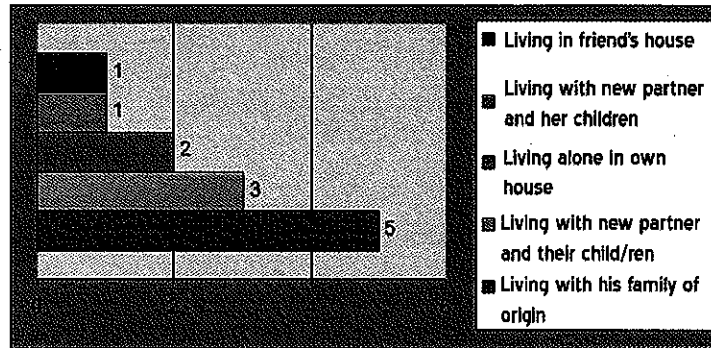
All 12 young men interviewed are "non-resident" fathers. None of the twelve fathers is living full-time with his child/ren or has sole custody. It was intended that lone fathers who have primary responsibility for their child(ren) be included in the research. However as is outlined above, no lone fathers were identified for the study.

The ages of participants in the study range from 20 years to 29 years, with the average age being 25 years.

³ The One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) was introduced by the government in 1997 and is the main income support measure for one-parent families. Two of the main features of the OFP arrangements are that a person must be parenting alone without the support of a partner and have "main care and charge" of a qualified child in order to qualify for the payment. This means that a recipient cohabiting is disqualified from receiving the payment.



The current living arrangements of the young men are outlined in the chart below.



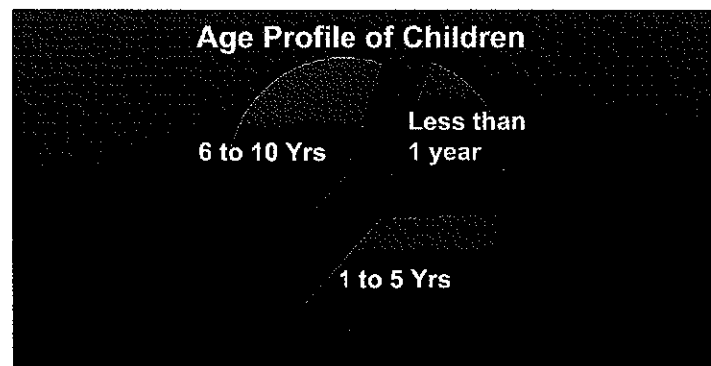
Two of the young men were at work, one was in receipt of a disability payment and nine were unemployed.

2.2 Fatherhood

Between them the young men interviewed had 16 children: four had two children and eight had one child.

The age at which the young dads fathered their first child ranged from 15 years to 27 years, with the average age being 19 years.

The current age of the children ranges from seven weeks to ten years. Three of the children are under a year. Six are between one and five years and seven are between six and ten years.



Fourteen of the 16 pregnancies were unplanned pregnancies. However only three pregnancies were the result of a "one-night stand". The time period in these cases which had elapsed before the father became aware that he was a father ranged from eight months to five years. In all three cases, the father had a paternity test.



The remaining thirteen pregnancies were conceived while the mother and father were "going-out" with each other or living together. None of the fathers had been married to the mother at the time of pregnancy.

In all of these cases, the father had contact with the mother during the pregnancy. Eight of the twelve fathers were present at the birth of their child/ren. Seven of the eight reported that it was a difficult experience for them as the following quotes illustrate:

"I nearly got ill. Her mother did not want me there so I left. I was not able for the blood, it was gross"

"I found the hospital difficult. I am not good at blood and those things"

"I was in the hospital in and out of the room but could not face it. Her mother was there for the birth"

For some it was an overwhelmingly experience:

"I started crying with the shock of it. I could not eat for a week, my stomach was upset from the blood. When you see your child first, it is great"

One young dad just did not want to be there:

"It was 10.55 in the evening. The pubs were closing. I just wanted to get to the pub"

Many men had difficulty responding to the question - what does it mean to be a good father? Nevertheless ideas around a good father were linked to concepts such as – "responsibility", "being there for his child" and "being a good role model". For them, a good father means to:

"Be there for the child. A good father is someone who looks for the best for the child"

"Take responsibility and equal care of the child"

"Put the child first. Give a good impression (example) to the child and let the child know that you are not a scumbag"

All men expressed a commitment to playing a role in their child(ren)'s lives and acknowledged the positive impact becoming a father had on them. For some men, children can be seen as a source of stability in an uncertain world:

"It is the one thing that you can have that no one can take away. It is important to have someone to carry on the bloodstream"



Some men mentioned their determination to "stay out of trouble" because they now have children:

"Before, I was a crook. I have now stayed out of trouble. The child 'copped' me on. What is the point in going to prison and leaving her crying while I am banged up? It makes a difference – you can have a life of crime or go the high road"

"I have a child. He keeps me busy. He keeps me out of trouble"

2.3 Caring for Children

Lynch and Lyons (2008) point out that not having to do care work is the way masculinity is constructed in our culture and is part of what Connell (1995) calls the patriarchal dividend. When men take on caring responsibilities, they are challenged to develop a range of skills. These include housework and communication skills and the ability to relate emotionally to their children (Ferguson 1998; kelleherassociates and O'Connor 2007)

Only two of the twelve men are of the opinion that men are as reliable as women when it comes to caring for children. One of these men was Eoin who had little difficulty caring for his child:

"I am the eldest of nine kids. It was never an issue of not being able to look after her"

The majority of the young men see women as having the main responsibility for children:

"Men can f... off. Women are more responsible"

"A lot of men want to be with their mates. They want to be the man. Children don't come first"

"It is a big change for women - the mother bonding experience. They (women) have no life of their own. It is 24 x 7. It is a life changing experience for them"

It was also evident that men have few skills when it comes to emotional competence:

"Men are not as good as women. Girls have the confidence. They are just able to get it. Men are not good at handling the emotional stuff"

"At a young age, boys are not responsible for caring. They don't understand it, there is no one telling them, helping them to understand. Child care is seen more a woman's responsibility. Young men need a belt of reality. If the father has a match at 7 o' clock they don't think about the child. They are much less likely to take responsibility if it is a one-night stand"

"Taking responsibility requires a change of attitude for men"



Many fathers rely on relatives, mainly women, to support them with the care of their child:

"My mother loves the child. She is a great help"

"My mother is a legend. When I have access, the children are dropped around to the house about 12 in the morning. I would be in bed and she would look after them"

Even though Paddy has his own accommodation and has his five-year-old daughter overnight, he relies on his mother to do a lot of the caring:

"My mother washes the clothes and does the cooking"

The idea of men "doing a runner" was mentioned several times. This was also a theme with young men in *Uncertain Futures* (Kelleher Associates and O'Connor 2007). Jim, in the current study, sums it up as follows:

"Many (men) do a runner. Some don't want anything to do with the children. My own cousin gave the child to the woman – job done"

One man pointed out that many men perceive that the financial needs of lone-parent families are met by the State, and this relieves men of responsibility:

"Young men are not faced with the reality. They don't see that they have to support the child as the mother has the Book and is financially independent"

Despite the fact that men see women as having the main responsibility for children, all men interviewed wished to retain an involvement in the care and rearing of their children. However this was not without difficulties.

Many pointed to the considerable anxiety and fear, which men can experience in relation to physical caring, such as caring for a young baby when s/he was crying. There was also considerable disquiet in regard to undertaking intimate tasks such as bathing a child or bringing a child to the toilet:

"When I am stressed out and the child is crying I cannot handle it. I give her money to stop her crying"

"I would be too frightened to have the child overnight on my own when she is she is so young (1 year old). I am no good at changing nappies. I would not bath her"

"I would not change nappies. I would not bring them to the toilet"

There was general consensus that the majority of men need improved skills in caring and household tasks:

"I don't have some skills. I can't cook. My mother and sister help out"

"I cannot clean. I am not good at cooking. When I have her at the weekends I bring her to restaurants"



Men can be subjected to disparaging remarks in public when seen to be doing what has traditionally known as "women's work" and being involved in "women's work" embarrasses some men:

"When doing the shopping I would hide my face"

One man made the point that it was difficult for him, as a very young father, (he was only 15 years when he became a father) to be seen in public:

"If you are only fifteen it is hard to be seen pushing a pram as you are only a kid yourself"

Interestingly, some men, such as Jim, who admittedly avoids doing housework and sees himself very much as a "macho lad", has no problem pushing a pram and displaying publicly his affection for his child:

"I love being with my daughter. A lot say "nancy boy" when they see you pushing a pram, but I don't care"

2.4 Access Arrangements

In the present study:

- Six of the 12 young men interviewed perceived that they had satisfactory access arrangements
- Four perceived their access to be unsatisfactory
- Two had no access

Satisfactory Access

Three of the six men who have satisfactory access, have their children overnight at least once a week and one of these men has equal access arrangements:

"My girlfriend drew up an agreement. We both have equal access. I have him (his son) three nights a week"


On average these men have access to their children almost three times a week and one man collects his child from pre-school every day.

Five of the six fathers have good relationships with the mother of their child. In the sixth case, the relationship between the mother and father could be considered as "hostile". In the interests of the child, the parents resist arguing in front of the child.

In all six cases there was no court involvement in regulating access arrangements.

Unsatisfactory Access

In all four cases where access is considered by the father to be unsatisfactory, relationships between the mother and father are "hostile" and trust between the mother and father has broken down. In three of the four cases the court is involved in regulating access arrangements. Eoin was granted access through the court eight years ago. Although he is now dissatisfied with the access arrangements, he is reluctant to go to the court again to change the access arrangements:



"I had to go to court to get access. The reason for this is that the mother was telling me I could have the child. She would then ring me demanding the child back. I went to court to get it straightened out. I got pretty much what I asked for. I applied for guardianship as I thought that I needed guardianship for access. I see the child every second week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday and every second Saturday for three hours. I would like as much time with the child as possible. I would like to sort out more access now, but I would have to go to court and I don't want my child to think that I am bringing her mam to court. You give in to arguments rather than have the child upset. I want to be defined as her father (the child's mother is now married.) My child definitely likes being with me"

When relationships break down, women can use access to the children in disputes with the father. Mark feels that the mother of the child has a great deal of power over him through her control of access arrangements. His access to his child is on the terms set by the mother and these terms can be difficult to negotiate when he is "seeing" another woman:

"She stopped me having access when I was seeing someone else. If I meet someone else, I will probably have to go to court to get access to see my child. I hate her for denying me access and breaking up my relationship with another women"

In two other cases, the fathers have only occasional access. In one case, the mother has taken the child to England without the permission of the father and the father only sees the child three times a year. In the other case there is very little communication with the mother and the father is seeking access through the courts:

"Anytime I phone she (the mother) will not put him on. I love having him. There is nothing I would not do for him"

No Access

In two cases the fathers have no access to their child and are seeking access through the courts. The relationship between parents is severely damaged in both cases and in one case the grandmother is involved in applying for access. Niall states:

"She gave me back all the clothes and toys I had given to the children. My mother (the children's grandmother) misses them terribly. She loves having them around"

Other Factors

As well as the quality of the relationship between the parents and their capacity to forge a pragmatic solution to their difficulties, accommodation difficulties, distance and finance were cited as obstacles to having quality access. Jim explains:

"I would like to have my daughter overnight but I have no proper accommodation. You have nowhere to go, nowhere to bring the child. I walk by the lake feeding the ducks"

Eoin also felt that lack of a separate room for his daughter influenced the court's decision regarding overnight access:

"I would have been given one overnight visit per month provided I had a separate room for my child"



Geographical distance between the child and where the father is living was a further factor that exacerbates the quality of the access arrangements.

2.5 Maintenance

The most recent poverty statistics (the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2006) show that the poverty rate among lone-parent families was 32.5 per cent in 2006. This figure compares with a national poverty rate of 6.9 per cent. This means that the poverty rate for one-parent families is 4.5 times that of the population as a whole.

The additional financial costs involved for young single fathers was alluded to several times:

"Babies don't come free. When you have the child you have to buy food, nappies, wipes. If you are on the dole or on a minimum wage, it is very difficult to pay for an apartment, food and children"

"Because we spend so little time together she wants to do things like going to the pictures and eating out. This is expensive and petrol costs a lot"

In the current study, the young men interviewed did not perceive a link between the payment of maintenance by the father and quality of access, as suggested by Corcoran (2005). None of the twelve fathers had formal arrangements for paying maintenance to the mother of his child. Fathers made contributions in a variety of ways and in some cases this was seen as a way of circumventing regulations relating to possible deductions from the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP). Buying food and clothes, paying for special activities and giving the child money directly were all mentioned as a form of maintenance:

"I don't pay maintenance as such. I put money aside each week. If she needed something for the kids I would give it to her"

Even when mandated by the court to pay maintenance, one man with the agreement of the mother of the child, did not pay maintenance:

"The court said I have to pay maintenance. She told me not to send the money but to buy clothes for him when he is with me"

Although men did not perceive a link between paying maintenance and access to children, some men were reluctant to pay maintenance because they did not want the mother of the child to have money to spend on herself:

"I think men should have a savings account for his child for special occasions like a 21st or college. Giving money to the mother leads to arguments. She uses it for herself, gets all 'dolled up' and goes out. The mother gets welfare and gets extra for the child"

This attitude was perceived by women (Chapter Three) as men not wanting women to have a life of their own.



2.6 Birth Certificate

Thirteen of the 16 children had their father's name on the birth certificate.

In one of the three remaining cases, the father of the child did not know that he had fathered a child until the child was five years of age. The mother of the child had gone to England soon after the child was born.

In two cases, the father even though he had a conciliatory relationship with the mother of the child, did not have his name on the birth certificate. However this was not a concern to either of these fathers.

In general, men were unsure of the legal implications or advantages of having their name on the birth certificate.

2.7 Cool Dads: Sexuality and Young Men

Ten (involving 14 children) of the twelve men did not plan to become a father. What came across strongly in the interviews is that the men interviewed do not take responsibility for having sex:

"Everyone thinks that pregnancy is not going to happen to them. You don't think about it. Then – oh no, what have I done"

"I didn't think the child could have been mine. It was a one-night stand"

The reaction of fathers to the news that they had fathered a child ranged from "shock" to "delight":

"It was shock. At another level I was delighted. It was cool to become a father. Looking back at it, there is nothing cool about it"

"I was terrified telling her mother and father. It was a great shock. I was living with my girlfriend"

Four men used what McDowell (2003) refers to as "predatory discourse" embracing a "macho lad masculinity" when describing how many men assert their sexuality:


"Men are like jack the rabbit. They 'do the job' and go on to the next one. The next fine thing that comes around, you jump into bed with. Then you boast about it"

This discourse displayed a "so what" attitude towards pregnancy:

"On a one-night stand, they would still have sex, even if there was a chance the girl would get pregnant. They have a 'so what' attitude"

"When young lads hear first, some don't give a shit – 'so what' attitudes"

As illustrated by Holland et al (1998), heterosexual sex can be very much about men's pleasure, without responsibility, and "lust" on the part of men was mentioned several times as a major reason for unplanned pregnancies. Niall explains:



"It is pure lust and alcohol fuelled. It just happens. It happens in the heat of the moment"

There was also evidence of risky sexual behaviour:

"Most men would not wear a condom, unless they were told that they had to. When you are young, a condom is the last thing on your mind. You don't give a shit"

Also, young men give little attention to contracting or transmitting sexually transmitted diseases:

"I don't think about STDs. I would not have a clue"

"A lot of sex takes place when we are drunk and you don't care about protection"

However there was also general embarrassment about talking about sex and about the need to take precautions. Several men stated that they would be ashamed or "mortified" to be seen to be buying condoms in a shop or chemist. Talking about sex was also seen as distasteful:

"You don't talk about it (sex) – him putting it in there, like in her body"

There was a general view that it was a woman's responsibility to prevent pregnancy:

"They don't think about pregnancy, not really... if she gets pregnant it is up to her"

In absolving themselves of responsibility, some men have convinced themselves that young women want to get pregnant:

"Many girls want to get pregnant – to show the baby off like a new doll. Some girls at a young age, 15 or 16 are not taking the Pill. The boy may not know"

2.8 Difficulties Encountered by Men

Men were invited to outline difficulties faced by single fathers and the following issues were discussed:

- The absence of adequate accommodation to facilitate overnight access and/or the preparation of a meal
- The need for sex education and much greater public awareness on sexual health
- Appropriate provision and support for access to children
- Appropriate access to pre-natal classes
- Legal advice and advocacy on access, paternity and joint custody
- Information on whether or not fathers have a right to have their name on the birth certificate
- Legal advice on whether or not single fathers have to be consulted in regard to passports being issued for their child(ren)
- Advice on free legal aid

Notwithstanding the difficulties identified by men only two of the twelve men interviewed would join a parenting group for single fathers. Reasons for this included that "men would not share their feelings in a group". How to engage and empower men to collectively address their difficulties is a major challenge for service providers.



3. Views of Young Single Mothers



A focus group interview was held with seven lone mothers who were attending projects with the Limerick Social Services Centre and the Limerick Youth Services. The purpose of the focus group was to elicit the views of young mothers on the role of young fathers and the difficulties regarding that role from the perspective of mothers.

3.1 Fatherhood



The young women felt that men varied in their willingness to take their responsibility as fathers seriously. The point was made that some men whose fathers were absent during their childhood now understand the importance of the role of the father in a child's life. Other men, according to the women, lack the willingness or ability to take on the role of father and "want someone to cook, clean and to jump into bed with".

Reliability and responsibility were key factors in how women define the traits of a good father. A good father is someone who:

- Is reliable
- Takes responsibility for turning up to see his child when he says he will
- Takes responsibility for supporting and maintaining his child
- You do not have to ask repeatedly to take responsibility

Young women had similar views as the young men interviewed regarding the unreliability of many men in terms of their commitment to parenting:

"Some men just come and go as they please"

"If they (lone fathers) have nothing to do they come and see the child"

"The child gets disappointed when he does not turn up. It is heart breaking to see him disappointed. I have to make excuses. He is now five years of age and says that he doesn't want to see his dad anymore"

"Men get away with not taking responsibility because no one challenges them"

"The father never rings to see how the child is"

What came across from the group is that women feel that many men have a romantic and unrealistic view of what it is to be a father:

"They can play mind games with you, 'lets get married'. Many men like the idea of having a family. They like the idea of getting someone pregnant. Then they run. They have a romantic view of having children. They play with your head"

"A lot of men's idea of fatherhood is in the brain. They are not practical"

The view was expressed in the group that men only "step-up" to be fathers when they make a commitment to get married.





3.2 Caring for Young Children

The women reiterated many of the difficulties, outlined by men in regard to caring for children. While some men take responsibility for the child, few men have the skills to care for the child:

"He (father of the child) cannot deal with a child crying. He runs screaming 'what does the baby want?'"

"He (father of the child) visits the child everyday and takes him out walking. If the child cries he is straight back in the door. He feeds her but cannot change nappies"

"While women learn over time to parent and care for children, most men find it difficult to mind children"

In addition, women are of the opinion that many men are unable to cook, clean and are embarrassed to bath a child.

The role of grandmothers is important and the paternal grandmother in one instance took responsibility for the grandchild:

"My boyfriend denied that the child was his. I asked him to have a DNA test and he refused. I told his mother (the grandmother of the child). The child goes to her house on a Sunday. He does not really mind the child. He leaves it up to the grandmother and aunts. I have a good relationship with the grandmother"

There was general agreement that grandparents should not take sides when there are children involved.

3.3 Sexuality, Contraception, Pregnancy, Child Birth

Women are in agreement with the men who were interviewed that men do not take responsibility for contraception and leave the responsibility for preventing pregnancy to women. The male discourse regarding condoms as inhibiting male pleasure was reiterated by the women. The reluctance of men to use condoms was repeatedly voiced:

"Contraception for men is like going to bed with their socks on"

Holland et al (1998) point out that within such a discourse, women find it difficult to assert their own needs around safe sex by insisting on condom use and diminishing male pleasure. Skeggs (2003; originally published in 1997) indicates that the lack of assertion relates to the maintenance of a "respectable" identity.

General embarrassment around sexuality and contraception also emerged for women:


"I would be mortified buying sanitary towels not to mind condoms"

Women feel that many men have irresponsible attitudes towards getting women pregnant. Some men boast about it and some are unsure how to react:

"The father of my child has children by two other women. He brags about this"

"When he heard I was pregnant he said, 'I need a bit of time to get my head around it'"





The general view was that men expected women to take responsibility for contraception and the most effective way to do this is for women to take the contraceptive pill.

Women however were concerned about the health implications of being on the contraceptive pill in the long-term. One woman, as part of a training course studied the side effects of the contraceptive pill. Side effects ranged from headaches, swelling, and tiredness to increased risks of cancer. Also one woman who is using Depo Provera (a long acting contraceptive, given by injection which lasts on average for three months) was concerned about the amount of weight she had gained which she associated with Depo Provera. Women also felt that it was not that easy to access contraceptives.

The general view was that, as yet, there is no satisfactory contraception for women:

"If men had babies there would be safe contraception without health consequences"

Giving birth to a child is a time where women need support, calmness and encouragement. Women spoke about the lack of understanding and feeling that men have of what is involved in childbirth:

"The father of my child said when my waters broke 'you are drowning me'"

Women's experience is that many men are unable to cope with the birth process:

"Men are not able to cope with the blood and all that"

Embarrassment was also a factor for women:

"Men know very little about childbirth. I would be embarrassed to have them there"

Many of the women stated that their preference was to have a female relative supporting them when giving birth.

3.4 Birth Certificate

There was disagreement among the women in regard to whether or not the father of the child should have his name on the birth certificate. One viewpoint was that where fathers had good relationships with the mother of their child and were reliable as parents, they should have their names on the birth certificates of their children.

However, having the father's name on the birth certificate, women felt can lead to difficulties such as the need to have the consent of the father to take the child out of the country. They were of the opinion, if the father refuses consent, the mother of the child is required to apply for a court order.

An added difficulty perceived was that the 'social welfare' would pursue the father for maintenance. Some of the maintenance would then be deducted from the OFP. Also, in situations where a father does not pay maintenance, there would be pressure on the mother to take the father to court.

Like the young men interviewed, there was some uncertainty among the group as to the precise legal implications of having the father's name on the birth certificate.



3.5 Maintenance

Poverty was a key issue in the lives of women interviewed. Rearing a child on the OFP is a major challenge:

"Poverty is a major issue. It is very hard for women to manage on the Book. I get €230 for two children. Everything is expensive - nappies, baby food, ESB, gas, rent"

"The Book is only €22 more than on the dole"

Women on the OFP struggle to survive financially. In regard to maintenance women were in agreement with the men that it was preferable that the arrangements regarding maintenance were informal. Payments in kind whether it be the provision of clothes or buying groceries can be of enormous importance:

"The father of my child buys nappies and messages (groceries) instead of giving money"

"He buys tracksuits and clothes when I ask him"

The fear of having money deducted if the father paid maintenance was also expressed:

"There is a fear that if the woman gets money from the father it will be taken out of the Book. It is best to have personal arrangement"

Women felt that despite hardships, having the OFP gave them some independence from men:

"Before women had to depend on men. Women are more confident and more independent now"

"There is a big change in the position of women. My mother had an awful life but she would not leave my father. We women get over it and survive on our own. It is very different from the last generation"

In addition, paying maintenance directly to women is seen by some women as men's attempts to control women:

"If you go out at weekends, he says I gave you money for the child not for you to be out and about"

This view was also articulated by one young father (Chapter Two).

3.6 Access Arrangements

All the women participating in the focus group felt that children should know the identity of their father and that fathers should have access, unless there are serious difficulties, such as domestic violence. In such circumstances, there should be supervised access. It is sometimes difficult to get an appropriate place for supervised access.





Although women agree that men should have access to their children, the behaviour of some men make access very difficult. The general view was that when a mother stops access she usually has a good reason for doing so:

"Some men are ok from Monday to Thursday. They are gone at weekends. They like their freedom"

"The child wants to see his father and if the father breaks his agreement it affects the child"

Some women are of the opinion that in some circumstances a court decision in relation to access can be helpful:

"It is better to have court order. If he does not turn up I cannot be blamed"

3.7 Distrust of Women

Women felt that many men are suspicious of women:

"If you go out for a night men ask who were you with"

"Many men although they do not want to be with the mother (of their child) they do not want her to be with another man. They can put you down saying 'no one wants you'"

"Men have a very bad opinion of women – they accuse women – they think that women want to do what they do - meaning playing around"

In this Chapter, women endorsed for the most part the views held by men. Serious issues are raised in relation to male sexuality and their perceived entitlement to sexual gratification, and, their propensity to engage in risky sexual behaviour. Also what comes across is that women take on the main responsibility for the care and maintenance of children. In the following Chapter we look at some of the main issues raised by people working with young people.

4. Key Issues Raised by Organisations

Twenty-one organisations from the statutory and voluntary sectors were contacted and requested to fill out a form (Appendix E) in relation to the following:

- General brief of agency
- Specific brief of agency or any written policy for young single fathers
- Work, if any being undertaken with young single fathers
- Gaps in service provision and targeted responses needed

Only one organisation responded stating that the organisation did not have any specific projects for young single fathers and no organisation filled out and returned the form. Follow-up contact was made with these organisations inviting them to a focus group discussion.





During this focus group discussion, the Teen Parenting Programme, organised by Limerick Social Services, that targets young single fathers as well as young single mothers, emerged as the only specialised programme identified during the research.

Issues of concern to the organisations participating in the focus group, together with their recommendations for responding to the needs of young fathers are outlined below.

4.1 The Invisibility of Men

There was a wide-ranging discussion on the invisibility of young single fathers at community level. Several reasons were put forward for this:

- The invisibility of young fathers is related to the fear that identifying as young fathers can result in the One Parent Family Payment (OFP) being discontinued to the mother of the child. Their invisibility makes these young men the "hidden fathers", "the forgotten fathers" and a very "hard to reach" group
- The co-habitation rule, which prohibits young lone parents from co-habiting is a condition of eligibility for the OFP. This contributes to the invisibility of young fathers and should be discontinued
- The fact that many community based projects such as community development programmes and family resource centres are staffed by women, are perceived by many service providers not to be men-friendly and this results in the low participation rate of men in many of the programmes including parent support programmes. This contributes to the invisibility of young fathers. There is need to ensure that men as well as women are employed in these projects

There was a general view that an individualised payment should be introduced and the OFP discontinued. In this regard it was felt that there is need for clarification regarding what secondary benefits i.e. medical card, rent allowance, are discontinued if a lone mother participates on a training or employment scheme. There is need to ensure that there are no disincentives to accessing schemes.

4.2 Response of Mainstream Programmes

The point was made that many young fathers have difficulty managing their own lives and have issues around drugs, alcohol and crime and this makes engaging with them difficult.

It was felt that mainstream service providers need to be up-skilled and resourced to respond to the needs of young fathers. Parenting, sexual health and relationship programmes should be integrated into mainstream programmes that are addressing such areas as recreation, crime diversion, and education and training. For example recreation projects involved in sports can be a vehicle for informal sex and health education.

There are "moments" in young peoples' lives when they are ready to engage and services need to be prepared to facilitate this engagement. Important moments include:

- The pregnancy of a partner. If young potential fathers can be communicated to in the appropriate way, it may be possible to support them to attend pre-natal courses and prepare them to attend the birth of the child
- The "birth" of the child
- Prison can be a good place to get men to think about children and concern for children can be an incentive to stay out of crime



In such situations frontline workers should be supported to maximise opportunities to engage with young fathers and to encourage them to take opportunities to acquire parenting skills and to take responsibility for their relationships with women and children.

4.3 Sexual Health and Education

The irresponsibility of young men in relation to sexual health and pregnancy received much attention and sexually transmitted diseases were perceived to be on the increase. This indicates not only a lack of respect for women, but also for themselves as young men.

Sex education in the schools was perceived to be insufficient. The point was made that pornography is now available at widespread level. In the absence of sex education many young men learn from pornographic sites on the Internet and this is verified in research carried out by Women's Aid.⁴

It was stated in the group discussion that there is need for specialised teachers/trainers in schools to teach relationship and sexual health education.

4.4 Specific Targeted Responses

It was suggested that there is need for specific responses to young fathers. The PAUL Partnership could establish a two-year pilot project in collaboration with one of the service providing organisations in Limerick City. A number of elements to the project could be considered, such as:

- Provision of an informal place where young people could relax
- A one-stop shop for information relating to, for example community welfare services, parenting programmes, role of the public health nurse. International good practice should be reviewed to determine how best to establish this service
- Legal advice to young fathers on their rights regarding for example access and guardianship
- Provision for supervised access
- Youth or key workers who would interact with the young people to support them to access information and engage with services
- Provision of support for mainstream youth projects to assist them to provide sexual health, parenting and relationship programmes to young fathers

Many of these suggestions are taken up and developed into the specific targeted responses needed for young men in Chapter Five, which follows.





5. Summary and Way Forward



5.1 Summary



The 12 young fathers in this small-scale exploratory study are “non-resident” fathers. None of the twelve fathers are living full-time with their child/ren or have sole custody. All are living in or were reared in the disadvantaged areas of Limerick City that experience extreme levels of cumulative socio-economic disadvantage (Appendix A).

The ages of participants in the study range from 20 years to 29 years, with the average age being 25 years. Five of the 12 men are living with their family of origin and four are living with a new partner. Two of the young men are at work, one is in receipt of a disability payment and nine are unemployed.

Between them, the twelve men had 16 children; 14 of which were unplanned pregnancies.

To complement the interviews with young men, focus group discussions were held with seven young lone mothers and with staff of organisations working with young people.

A number of themes emerged in the course of the project and these are outlined below:


Invisibility of Young Fathers

A theme emerging repeatedly in the study is that non-resident fathers are a hidden, “hard to reach” population. The fact that they are not identified as such means that their issues are not identified as problems to be addressed by social policy. Reasons for their invisibility are complex. The fact that they are not a category in census data means that they do not get counted or categorised. Also, many community projects do not identify them as young dads, suggesting that the parental role of fathers is not on the agenda of these service providers. The exception here is the Probation Service, which does identify young dads, but has not a specific strategy for working with them as young dads. In this regard, the literature on desistance from, and staying out of crime is instructive (McNeill and Whyte 2007; Healy and O'Donnell 2008). This literature points to the importance of social capital, including positive relationships with children in motivating young men in remaining crime free and in the transformation from a criminal to a non criminal identity.

At a community level, many young men are reluctant to self-identify as young dads for fear that they will be pursued for maintenance. In such circumstances, the mother of their child(ren) could have her OFP payment reduced. This was not considered to be in the interests of men or women. Financial maintenance from fathers, who for the most part are unemployed or in insecure low-paid jobs, could not be relied on to subsidise the mother. Also, women value the financial independence from men that the OFP gives them.

Information Deficits

The lack of accurate information across a whole range of areas, or knowledge of where to access this information, was a key concern of many young fathers. Information deficits included:

- 
- The advantages or disadvantages of having the father's name of the birth certificate
 - Paternity testing
 - Access rights
 - Caring for children
 - Birthing process and maternity hospitals
 - Sex and health education

Skill Deficits

All men interviewed expressed a commitment to playing a role in their children's lives, but are constrained by a skills deficit. How to engage and empower men to address this skills deficit is a major challenge for service providers.

The practical reality for many lone mothers is that the declaration of fathers to be involved with their children can stem from a romantic, unrealistic view of children. Factors, which constrain involvement are complex and include insufficient practical and caring skills, quality access to their children and difficulties with accommodation, distance and finance.

Young men and young lone mothers agree that men face extensive challenges not only to develop skills relating to parental and domestic competence, but also to develop the capacity to be able to emotionally relate to their children.

Access to Children

Good relationships between the father and mother of the children, where both parents were able to negotiate pragmatic conciliatory solutions were central to men having quality access to their child(ren). Lack of satisfactory access to their children was an issue for half of the young men. The relationship with the mother of the child(ren) in all these cases could be described as "hostile". Other factors, which impinged on quality time with their children, were difficulties with accommodation, distance from the mother's home and finance. There is insufficient community based good quality facilities where young men can be supported to be with their children.

Hostile relationships with the mother invariably led to using the court to regulate access, with five of the six men who did not have satisfactory access going to court to regulate access arrangements. None of the men whose relationship with the mother of his child could be described as "conciliatory" used the court.

Income Maintenance

The general view coming across from the young men and young women was that contributions from the father in the form of clothes, groceries or payment for leisure activities was the preferred form of contribution. This was to avoid any possibility of deductions from the OFP. The payment of maintenance and quality access were not linked.

Sexual Health and Education

There was general agreement among young men themselves, among lone mothers and among service providers that young men in disadvantaged areas engage in significant risk-taking sexual behaviour and in particular when alcohol is involved. Little attention is given to unwanted pregnancies or to contracting or transmitting sexually transmitted diseases.



In such situations, men's sexual pleasure is privileged and invariably, it is up to women to "go on the pill" to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. What McDowell (2003) refers to as a "predatory" attitude, was evident among a significant number of men with "lust" on the part of men given as a repeated rationale for unprotected sex. Also, there is general embarrassment and silence among young men and women about matters of a sexual nature and to be seen publicly to be buying condoms. These findings are compatible with Layte et al (2006) who provide comprehensive analyses on behaviour and attitudes towards sexual health and which illustrates significant deficits in sexual health knowledge in the Irish population. A disturbing pattern was articulated by one project worker who outlined that in the absence of accessible sex education, many young men learn from pornographic sites on the Internet.

5.2 Going Forward

Central to working with men is making men feel valued, respected as men and helping them to communicate assertively, not aggressively (Featherstone, Rivett and Scourfield 2007). As pointed out in the group discussion with service providers, pregnancy or the birth of a child are "moments" in young peoples' lives when they are ready to engage and services need to be prepared to facilitate this engagement (Chapter Four).

However, in working with fathers, the main concern must be to put the rights of children first and to deliver good outcomes for children. Work should not be underpinned by the assumption that joint custody is always best for children. Such an approach fails to consider the dynamics of parental and partnering relationships and the many issues outlined in this study (Featherstone, Rivett and Scourfield 2007). In particular, equal access arrangements requires broad based cultural transformation in the construction of masculinity from a care-less identity (Lynch and Lyons 2008) to one where caring, empathy and nurturing become defining features of what it is to be a man.

Going forward, the PAUL Partnership should take a lead role in establishing a project to specifically target young dads. The project should be funded by a cross-departmental budget.


Because of the difficulty of engaging young men to participate in formal programmes, the project could be located in an informal setting where informal contact work with young dads is piloted. Access to a computer bank, a kitchen and a pool table could be useful in this context.

The methodology of work and the building of relationships between the worker and the young dads will be key to the success of the project. Young dads need support to develop self-confidence, encouragement to up-skill and support to acknowledge a sense of achievement. Service providers should be encouraged to meet these young men in the project environment and to deliver information on: services; education/training programmes; and rights and entitlements of young single fathers.

A number of elements to the project could be considered:

- Support in working out their roles and responsibilities and where relevant the provision of access facilities and support structures for non-resident fathers so that they can have quality time with their child(ren)
- Comprehensive information for young dads, including legal advice
- Health and sex education within a broad framework of masculinity, male power and heterosexuality
- Support in reflecting on gender socialisation and gender division of labour in society
- Liaising with other agencies and helping to develop a co-ordinated, integrated approach to working with young men and in particular providing training for mainstream youth, community, health and social workers to improve the skill level in their delivery of services to young dads





In establishing the project, project staff should review best international practice and visit projects established in Ireland for single dads, including:

- Health Service Executive West that has developed parenting programmes for young fathers
- Men in Childcare located in the southeast of Ireland that is supporting men to take up work in childcare
- The New Ross, Community Development Project, Wexford
- St Therese Nursery, Belfast, which has had positive outcomes to their programmes for young dads

At a broader level, comprehensive sex, health and relationship education is needed in primary and secondary schools taking into consideration the age appropriate needs of pupils. There is need for specialised teachers/trainers in schools to teach relationship and sexual health education.

Also, as is indicated in The Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships, Crisis Pregnancy Agency (Layte et al, 2006), public education campaigns need to be strengthened to alert young people in particular that unprotected sex carries with it the double risk of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV.



Appendix A

Target Areas of PAUL Partnership

PAUL Partnership's primary operational area is Limerick City Borough. Within this boundary, PAUL has traditionally targeted five specific areas or parishes, where forms of disadvantage and social exclusion are particularly concentrated:

- Moyross
- St. Munchin's Parish (Ballynanty, Kileely and Thomandgate areas)
- St. Mary's Parish
- Southill
- Our Lady of Lourdes Parish (Ballinacurra Weston)

PAUL now also targets the following three areas of the city:

- Garryowen
- Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish
- St. Saviour's Parish

The Electoral Divisions that make up these parishes are listed below:

Area	Electoral Divisions
Moyross	Ballynanty (and part of Limerick North Rural)
St. Munchin's Parish	Kileely A Kileely B Castle A Castle B
St. Mary's Parish	John's A John's B John's C
Southill	Galvone B Rathbane
Our Lady of Lourdes Parish	Ballinacurra B Prospect A Prospect B Glentworth C
Garryowen	Singland A Abbey D
Our Lady Queen of Peace	Galvone A Glentworth B
St. Saviour's Parish	Glentworth A Shannon B



Population

The population of Limerick City is 59,790⁵, with a further 34,459 people living in the Limerick Suburban Area. The population of each of the five parishes is presented in the following table.⁶

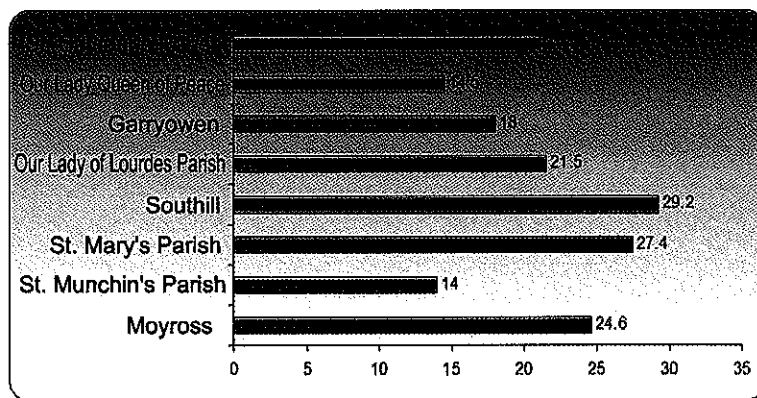
Area	Population 2002	Population 2006
Moyross	4,110	3,468
St. Munchin's Parish	4,288	4,236
St. Mary's Parish	2,760	2,702
Southill	4,006	3,276
Our Lady of Lourdes Parish	4,377	4,091
Garryowen	3,476	3,257
Our Lady Queen of Peace	3,107	2,783
St. Saviour's Parish	1,396	1,113
	27,520	24,926

The parishes targeted by the PAUL Partnership have a population of 24,926. Between 2002 and 2006, the population decreased 2,594, a decrease of 9 per cent.

Unemployment

While the unemployment rate in 2006 for the country as a whole according to the census of population was 8.5 per cent and for Limerick City was just less than 15 per cent, unemployment was heavily concentrated in PAUL's target parishes. Unemployment ranged from 14 per cent in St Munchin's Parish to 29.2 per cent in Southill, which is three and a half times the national average

Percentage Unemployed



⁵ Limerick City is made up of 38 Electoral Divisions (an Electoral Division is the smallest geographic area for which Census data is publicly available). A further 4 EDs, located within Limerick County Council, make up the Limerick Suburban Area.

⁶ Statistics presented are drawn from Gamma, 2008. PAUL Partnership Baseline Data Report – 2006. Dublin: Pobal





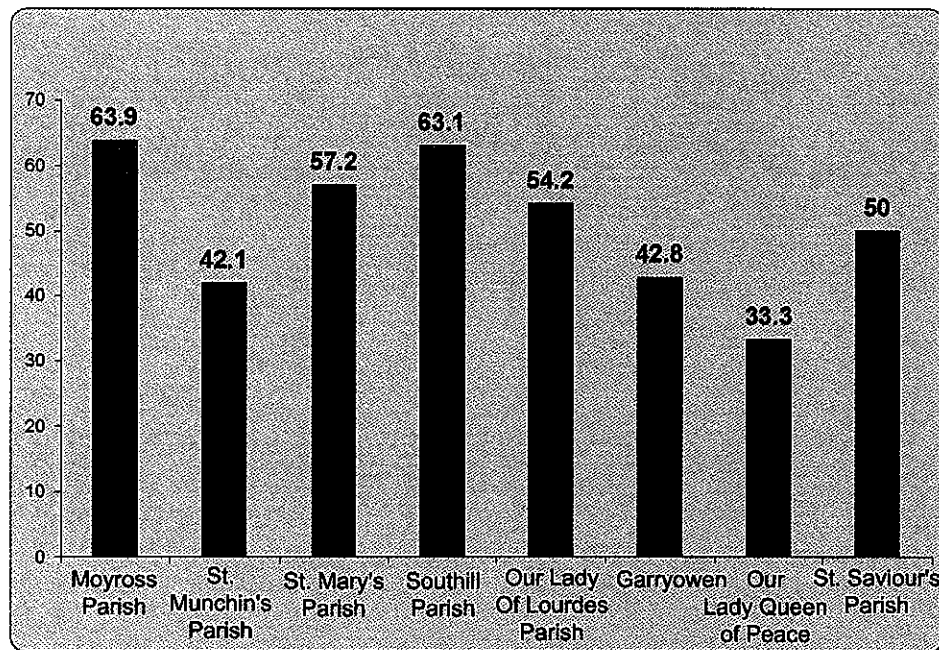
Family Units and One-Parent Families

The 2006 Census of Population recorded a total of 10,111 family units (with children)⁷ living in Limerick City, 5,986 of which comprised at least one dependent child under the age of 15. However, 38.6 per cent (2,308) of all family units in Limerick City where there was at least one dependent child under the age of 15 was headed by a lone-parent. For the state as a whole the corresponding figures was 21.3 per cent (98,304).

Of the 2,308 lone-parent families in Limerick, 94 per cent (2,167) are headed by a female and six per cent (141) are headed by a male.

The traditional areas targeted by the PAUL partnership have high concentrations of lone-parent households:

Percentage of Lone Parents



The most recent poverty statistics (the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2006) show that the poverty rate among lone-parent families was 32.5 per cent in 2006. This figure compares with a national poverty rate of 6.9 per cent. This means that the poverty rate for one-parent families is 4.5 times that of the population as a whole.

⁷ A family unit is defined as either a husband and wife or cohabiting couple; a husband and wife or cohabiting couple with one or more children (usually resident, never married, or any age); or one parent with one or more children.

Appendix B: ---

Service Providers/Support Groups/Stakeholders in Limerick City Contacted

Limerick Youth Service	Lower Greenwell St Limerick
Cemara Choir	101/102 SPADCO Units, Knapakill Road, Moyross Limerick
Southill Outreach	101/102 Knapakill Road Industrial Estate, Killakill Road Limerick
Limerick Social Services Centre	Helm St Limerick
Limerick Best Project	Tail Centre, Dominic St Limerick
Were OK Youth Initiative	100 St Munchin's CDP, St Munchin's Community Centre, Killybeg Limerick
Citizen's Information Centre	54 Catharine St Limerick
Moyross Action Centre	100 Moyross Community Centre, Moyross Limerick
Moyross CDP	100 Moyross Community Centre, Moyross Limerick
Southill Action Centre	Southill House, Roxboro Road Limerick
Southill CDP	200 Woodlands Court, Valley Park, Southill Limerick
Southill Family Resource Centre	107/108 Aungley Court, O'Malley Park, Southill Limerick
St Mary's Action Centre	14 St John's St Limerick
St Mary's CDP	150 St John's St Limerick
Our Lady of Lourdes Action Centre	Great Wall, Cross Road, Limerick
Our Lady of Lourdes Community Development Project	19 Clonacrow, Ballinacoma West, Limerick
St Munchin's Action Centre	St Munchin's Community Centre, Killybeg Limerick
St Munchin's Community Development Project	St Munchin's Community Centre, Killybeg Limerick
St Munchin's Family Resource Centre	100 St Munchin's CDP, Ballinacoma West, Limerick
Bedford Road Project	100 Bedford Road Limerick





Appendix C

Questions for Young Single Fathers

ID number:

Current age:

Number of child/ren (for whom he is a single dad):

Ages of child/ren:

Gender of child/ren:

Employment status:

Current resident status:

lone father living with child/ren

non-resident father living with family of origin

non-resident father living with partner, no children

non-resident father living with partner and other children

non-resident fathers living alone or sharing with others

1. Context of Fatherhood

What age were you when you first became a father?

Did you plan to become a father?

If more than one child: Are there different mothers?

What was your relationship with the mother when she became pregnant?
(one night stand; steady relationship; long-term relationship; other: specify)

How did you feel when you found out you that you were responsible for
the pregnancy/ies? that you were to be a father?

Were you in contact with the mother of your child/ren during the pregnancy?

Were you living with the mother of your child/ren at any time?

Did you attend prenatal classes?

Were you there for the birth and or immediately after the birth?

Is your name on the birth certificate? Do you have guardianship?
If no: Have you even applied for guardianship?

How would you describe your relationship with the mother of
your child/ren now?



2. Contact with Child/ren

If non-resident father: Do you live close to your child/ren?

Do you have contact with your child/ren: Yes/No.

If no, Why not? Would you like to have contact?

If yes: How often? (daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly).

How long do you see them for at any one time?

Do you have your child/ren overnight?

What did you do with them last time? Was that typical or not really?

What do you most enjoy doing?

Have you a place where the child/ren can stay overnight?

Is there anything that makes contact difficult?

(not enough time, not enough money, attitude of mother, denied access by courts, distance, attitude of current partner, have other child/ren/step children, other)

What would make things easier for you?

If you had more contact with your child/ren, would effect would it have on them?

Do you pay maintenance for your child/ren?

Do you see a link between men paying maintenance and having access to child/ren?

Do you think it is reasonable or not to expect unemployed men to pay maintenance?

For resident and non-resident fathers who have access

Do relatives help you look after your child(ren)?

Who is the main person you rely on to help you?

If unemployed and unable to be the main provider for their children:

Does this have implications for you as a father?

If have contact now: Has this changed over time?

How did this happen?



3. Type of Involvement in Child/ren's Lives

What is most the difficult thing for men in dealing with their child/ren?

For non-resident fathers

Do you have any involvement in important decisions affecting your child/ren?
(treatment in relation to illness, clothes, education, pocket money)

If no: Would you like to be involved? Are there supports that you would need?

Would you like to have total care of your child/ren? (for how long and why)

For resident and the non-resident fathers who have child/ren at school:

Do you have contact with their teachers?

Do you attend parent teacher meetings?

Do you know how they are getting on at school?

Do you help with their homework?

Are there any situations that you feel awkward? (e.g. waiting at the school gate?
birthday parties for daughters, buying clothes?)

If your child/ren had emotional difficulties would you be able to deal with this?
(e.g. if they were in rows; isolated; or being bullied?)

Can men can handle these situations as good as women?

Is there anyone you see as a good father?

What do you most admire about them?

4. Supports and Skills

What does it mean to be a good father?

What do you think are the responsibilities of a good father?

What are the main obstacles to them being involved with their child/ren?
(e.g. services not supportive, money, time, other?)

Are young men responsible when it comes to sexual relationships?
(contraception; stds; unplanned pregnancy)

Did you have sex /relationship education in school? What did you think of it?

Are there pressures on men to have sex at an early age?





What kinds of pressures? (to demonstrate their maleness? capacity for sexual conquest?)

Do you see fatherhood as coming naturally or are there skills involved?

What skills do men need to be a good father? (e.g. housework, planning meals, cooking, shopping, providing emotional support? other?)

Are men as reliable as women when it comes to looking after child/ren?

Do they put their child/ren first? (above going out with friends/to pub/ football?)
If yes: Why do you think they do this?

Are lone fathers more likely than lone mothers to do a runner?

Is there a tension between being a father and being a MAN?

Are some men embarrassed about being seen to do childcare?

Are you in contact with other men in similar situations to yourself?

If yes, How did you meet them?

If no, Have you thought about joining a group for single dads?

If fathers are teenagers: Would you like to participate in a teen parenting programme?

Are you concerned about the legal rights of single fathers?

Have you joined an advocacy group? Why? Why not?

Overall then what supports would help single fathers? (in order of importance)

Details of interview

Name of Interviewer:

Date of interview:

Comment:



Appendix D

Consent Form

- I consent to participate in the study on The Experience of Fatherhood for Young Single Fathers.
- I understand that the study is about young men's experience of fatherhood.
- I understand that no details that reveal my identity will be used in any publication or report following on from the study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I may refuse to answer any question and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
- I have had sufficient time to read and consider this consent form
- I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to the study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and to get clarification on any additional details I was concerned about

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Appendix E

Questions for Organisations with a Brief for Young Single Fathers

1. General Brief of Agency

2. Specific Brief of Agency or any Written Policy for Young Single Fathers

3. Work, if any being undertaken with Young Single Fathers

4. Gaps in Service Provision

5. Targeted Responses Needed

Name of Agency:

Contact Name:

Contact Telephone Number and Email:



Appendix F



Themes Discussed in Focus Group Interview with Young Single Mothers

Based on the interviews with young men, several themes for discussion were outlined by the research team at the beginning of the meeting. These included:

1. The role of, and issues involved for young single fathers in caring for children
2. Sexuality, contraception and pregnancy
3. Income maintenance and poverty
4. Access of young single fathers to their children

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