Exploring Fathers' Opinions of Parenting Research: A Focus Group Study

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Rationale

- Fathers play a crucial role in promoting children's mental health, physical health, cognitive functioning, and overall well-being^{1,2,3}
- Close relationships between fathers and children are linked to improved mental health for both parties^{2,3,4}
- However, fatherhood has received disproportionately little empirical attention compared to motherhood^{1,5}
- Fathers are typically excluded from parenting research, so their views on child-rearing are often overlooked^{5,6}
- Engaging fathers in research has been challenging for several reasons, such as fathers being disinterested in research, mothers acting as "gatekeepers," and fathers not being targeted properly^{6,7,8}
- Yet the reasons behind fathers' lack of participation remain unclear, as they have yet to be directly asked^{5,6}
- This is especially problematic because family composition is changing (e.g., increases in single-father families and same-sex couples raising children)^{9,10}
- Thus, there is a knowledge gap regarding fathers' views of contemporary father-child relationships; research is needed to reflect their views, especially given changing societal trends and family compositions^{5, 10}

Purpose

- Qualitatively investigate factors and barriers that are affecting fathers' research participation
- Elucidate avenues to overcome any identified barriers

Methodology

- Recruitment occurred through online forums (e.g., Reddit), physical locations (e.g., sports venues), and word of mouth (i.e., snowball sampling)
- Participants included 8 fathers ($M_{\text{age}} = 46$; $M_{\text{number of children}} = 2.22$) residing in the Okanagan, British Columbia
 - 100% heterosexual; 100% male; 66% White
- Focus groups were conducted via Zoom by two male facilitators
 - "What might prevent you from participating in psychological research?"
 - "Why do you think fathers have typically not engaged in parenting research?"
- Inductive thematic analysis¹¹, guided by Interpretive Description (ID)¹², was completed using NVIVO12

Thematic Analysis Identity Marginalization Stigma & Role Masculinity Fatherhood "Men don't bring Judgment Confusion to life a lot of things we deal with. We bottle it up, hide it, bury Role Models **Emotionality** it, put a house on "Why is it that everybody is top of it, and going to look at the single dad pretend it's not at the park surrounded by there." mothers and children...most dads stay away from it like the Evolution Provider plague, because they know what's going to be assumed." Ineptitude Community "You're not prepared for parenting stuff. No one tells you about these things. So when you go in there, you're blindsided, because everyone says it's not even difficult for you, when it can be." Research "One of the things stopping me from participating is concern I'll say the wrong Motivation Recruitment Barriers thing...and [the researcher] thinks I'm a bad dad" **Material Gain** Fear of Judgment Targeted "My experience with parenting resources and research is that they're always geared almost entirely towards moms." Personal Gain Indirect Access Comfort Placement Interest Time Children Role Models "The world's moving very quickly. The way were were raised by our dads is Responsibility not the way we need to raise our own "Lots of religions leaders are pro-family children now. It continues to shift and and encourage having families. So, change. I think it is very important that religious leaders are...people guys research captures this." look up to."

Conclusions

- Fathers feel marginalized and stigmatized by the psychological community and society in general
- They perceive that they are viewed as secondary to mothers in parenting importance, which adversely affects their participation in parenting research
- Facets of their identity they hold important as both men (e.g., dependability) and fathers (e.g., being a provider), conflict with their perceptions of what research entails (e.g., emotional vulnerability, judgment of parenting)
- Researchers must deliberately address these concerns to increase fathers' participation in parenting research

Recommendations for Research

- 1. Explicitly target fathers in recruitment material¹⁰
- 2. Access dads through both physical and online venues where they are present (e.g., Reddit forums, sports venues, religious institutions); work with institutions to accomplish this when possible
- 3. Ensure that studies are respectful of fathers' time; making research virtual can help in this regard
- 4. Convey the value and importance of their participation; emphasize the potential impact on their children
- 5. Make sure external incentives are aligned with dads' actual preferences (e.g., gift cards to technology stores)
- 6. Communicate that fathers will not be judged nor compared to mothers with respect to their parenting

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