

Mellow Dads: Paternal Mental Wellbeing & Child Outcomes

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Introduction

During the perinatal period new fathers are at risk of suffering from depression¹ and anxiety². This risk is increased for low income and non-residential fathers³ and can lead to negative effects on the quality of interaction and relationship between the father-child dyad.

Insecure father-infant attachment is associated with later internalizing problems⁴ and early onset conduct problems⁵, whereas secure father-infant attachment has been implicated in the subsequent development of fewer behaviour problems⁶, greater social competence⁷, greater sociability^{8,9}, higher quality peer interactions¹⁰, improved conscience development¹¹ and fewer internalizing and externalizing problems.^{12,13} Meta-analyses relating to father-infant attachment have also found relationships between paternal sensitivity and father-infant attachment¹⁴.

In 2013, the Scottish Government's National Parenting Strategy recognised the importance of the role of the father in child development and highlighted the need for improved service delivery specifically for fathers.

With funding from the Scottish Government via Big Lottery's Third Sector Early Intervention Fund, Mellow Parenting is examining the feasibility and effectiveness of the Mellow Dads Programme with vulnerable fathers.

The Mellow Dads programme has been developed to support families with additional health and social care needs who are experiencing relationship problems with their children. The groups use a variety of interactive techniques and draw on the psychological theories of attachment and cognitive behavioural therapy. We allow parents to reflect on their own life stories and think about how past experiences and current life stresses can get in the way of building the best possible relationship with their child. Videos of interactions with their children and the group help the fathers identify what they do well and what they might do differently.

Methodology

Participants: The project is being delivered between March 2013 & March 2016 across 15 regions throughout Scotland and with 17 partner bodies, including Barnardo's Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland (US Together) and Sure Start. It is expected to have data from 25 groups reaching approximately 125 fathers.

Inclusion criteria: Fathers must have at least 1 child under the age of 5 and the child must be able to attend the group with the father.

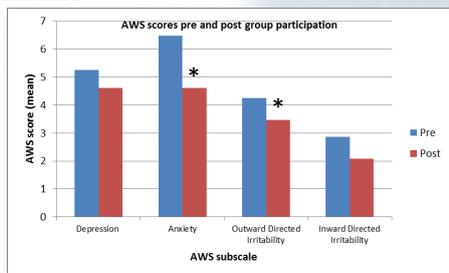
Design: A mixed method design is being used. We are collecting continuous qualitative feedback from participants and facilitators.

Quantitative data are being collected at 3 intervals: pre group, post group and 4-6 weeks follow up. Parent, child and relationship focused outcomes are being measured using the Adult Wellbeing Scale, Karitane Parenting Confidence Scale, Strength & Difficulties Scale, Crnic Parental Hassles Scale, Richman Behaviour Problems Checklist and the Mellow Parenting Observation System.

Preliminary data

We are currently 18 months into the 36 month project. To date 7 groups have been completed with the majority of fathers being unemployed, having no qualifications and additional social care needs. The current attrition rate is 22.5%.

Paternal Wellbeing



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Child Outcomes

Richman Child Behaviour Checklist (n=20)											
Mean Pre (S.D)		Mean Post (S.D)		p = .053							
2.25 (2.20)		1.25 (1.48)									
Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (n=20)											
Emotional Problems		Conduct Problem		Hyper-activity		Peer Problems		Pro-social		Total	
Pre (S.D)	Post (S.D)	Pre (S.D)	Post (S.D)	Pre (S.D)	Post (S.D)	Pre (S.D)	Post (S.D)	Pre (S.D)	Post (S.D)	Pre (S.D)	Post (S.D)
2.15 (1.69)	1.65 (1.53)	3.7 (2.17)	2.85 (1.69)	6.0 (2.03)	4.4 (2.16)	1.9 (1.62)	1.4 (1.54)	6.6 (2.09)	7.55 (1.61)	13.8 (5.12)	10.3 (5.13)
p = .200		p = .016		p = .010		p = .493		p = .111		p = .017	
Parental Hassles Scale (n=14)											
Frequency		Hassle		Parental Tasks		Challenging Behaviour					
Pre (S.D)	Post (S.D)	Pre (S.D)	Post (S.D)	Pre (S.D)	Post (S.D)	Pre (S.D)	Post (S.D)				
34 (7.59)	27 (7.52)	43.14 (10.63)	34.29 (11.17)	16.36 (3.57)	13.86 (4.62)	17.29 (5.64)	13.21 (5.15)				
p = .005		p = .046		p = .157		p = .080					

Wilcoxon signed-rank tests showed that attending a 14 week Mellow Dads programme elicited improvements on all domains of the Adult Wellbeing Scale; significantly so for anxiety and outward-directed irritability. There were also significant improvements on many domains of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, and the frequency and hassle ratings of the Parental Hassles Scale.

Case Study

Roger is 34 years old and has 3 children aged 3, 7 and 11. Roger was imprisoned for an assault on his wife that took place in the family home with the children present. All 3 children were placed on the Child Protection Register and supervised contact was put in place for all 3 children and their father. The children remained in the family home with their mother; Roger has his own accommodation as he was deemed a risk to the children. Supervised contact was 3 times per week for 2 hours in a family contact centre.

Roger and his youngest child attended the group for 13 of the 14 weeks. Roger spoke for the very first time about some issues that have had an impact on him. He appears to have made huge progress in his relationship with all 3 children and demonstrates a greater understanding of the importance of his role in the development of his children. During the course of the Mellow Dads group, contact was changed to unsupervised and took place in the family home. Within 3 weeks of the end of the programme Roger had returned to living in the family home full time.

Conclusion

In line with Scottish Government policies and child development research the Mellow Dads programme comes at a time when it is recognised that the role of fathers is crucial for the infant's development and wellbeing.

Data from this feasibility study show the programme is engaging for fathers with deprivation and social work service involvement. Outcomes are positive and attrition rates are comparatively low.

During this study it is expected that practitioners within 17 services throughout Scotland will be trained in engaging and working with these vulnerable fathers. As a result they will be better placed to continue promoting positive father-infant interaction.