Researching inclusive support for (young) fathers

A community-led study

Full Report

A partnership between

North East Young Dads & Lads

Connected Voice
Connecting People Supporting Action

FUTURE men

University of Lincoln

FYFF
Following Young Fathers Further

UKRI UK Research and Innovation

Diverse Dads

'Diverse Dads' was funded by the UK Research and Innovation QR Strategic fund (University of Lincoln) and the North East Young Dads and Lads Project. Involving an innovative peer and community led approach to research, the project sought to address a community identified gap in knowledge about regional support for young fathers from minoritised communities in the North East of England. The aim of the project was to address inequalities associated with race, ethnicity, religion and culture by developing a better understanding of inclusive support and outreach for young fathers.

The project involved a collaboration between partners in the North East of England including the North East Young Dads and Lads Project, a community support group for young dads; Connected Voice, a voluntary sector support organisation for Newcastle and Gateshead, which champions equality, amplifies voices of individuals and organisations, and inspires positive and lasting change; the Following Young Fathers Further research study (University of Lincoln), and national partners Future Men, a multi-award-winning specialist charity that supports boys and men along the path to becoming dynamic future men. Foregrounding the voices and experiences of young fathers from diverse communities, alongside regional organisations in the North East, this report presents cutting edge findings that address the need to develop more inclusive support and outreach for young men who become fathers under the age of 25 years old.

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Executive Summary

- There is a common assumption among support professionals that young fathers, and especially those from minoritised communities, are either few in number or are 'hard-to-reach'. However, the reason for their lack of engagement with services is often assumed rather than understood.
- Mapping local and regional resources and building new partnerships with community leaders and across services are important steps in identifying young fathers and making services more accessible to them.
- Localities are also often described as lacking in diversity despite limited awareness of population characteristics.
- Understanding local demographics, mapping local and regional resources and building new partnerships with community leaders and across services are important steps in identifying young fathers and making services more accessible to them. Asking mums and female family members about dads may also be an important step in identifying and reaching out to them.
- Many young fathers are experiencing a complex set of challenges and have a diverse set of needs that may be a barrier to their participation in the lives of their children and with services.
- Understanding young men's needs and the barriers they may face can only be achieved by empowering young fathers and through the provision of individualised support that sees them as a resource rather than a risk.
- Some young fathers may be so unaccustomed to support services that as a first step to accessing mainstream services they may initially need a tailored approach or culturally relevant specific services, but always with the long-term aim of inclusion in wider services.
- Central to the effective provision of individualised support is the naming and demystifying of issues around diversity. Addressing these factors within organisations is an important part of the process of demystifying them.
- Listening actively to young fathers enables professionals to better understand young fathers and to develop a tailored and responsive approach that empowers them.
- Where fatherhood is a shared experience it can bring men together around a common identity, while also respecting difference and diversity. The need for more inclusive, rather than new, spaces of support for dads from all backgrounds is therefore essential.

Terminology

We recognise that language and terminology is imbued with complexities and contestations. Despite increasing popularity in public and policy discourse, the acronym ‘BAME’ is subject to some critique and is a term that the team have grappled with throughout the project. Milner and Jumbe (2020) note that it has been critiqued for lacking specificity. It places emphasis on skin colour and many individuals fail to identify with it. According to Rayvenn Shaleigha D’Clark (cited in Milner and Jumbe, 2020; 419), ‘the acronym continues to reduce the identities of victims of White supremacy to a single, three to four-letter abbreviation whilst remaining divorced from the long history of racial subjugation’. The term ‘minoritised’ has been offered as an alternative because it recognises the way that individuals are actively minoritised by others (Gunaratnum, 2003). Minoritisation is not a naturally existing phenomena but is socially constructed and is ‘a social process shaped by power’ (Milner and Jumbe, 2020: 419).

Given these arguments, we avoid the use of 'BAME’ in this report. Instead, we refer either to those who are minoritised or use the full phrasing; Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic to avoid the reduction of diverse experiences, identities and cultural identifications to an acronym. For the purposes of this report, this definition aims to encompass all ethnic groups other than those who identify as White British. We also recognise that minoritisation is intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991, Collins, 2015; 2016) and that young fathers' identities and fathering practices may also be situated at the intersections of gender, class, age, religion, sexuality, and disability.

Selected academic research: Service support for diverse young fathers

In the UK, a range of institutions and public services operate to support or engage with parents and families throughout their parenting journeys. However, a key issue is that many of these services, including maternity, family and child support services often do not routinely engage with fathers. When fathers are routinely excluded, opportunities to improve outcomes for children, mothers and fathers may therefore be lost (Tarrant et al, 2017).

A burgeoning research literature confirms that support is needed and valued by all men when they become fathers, although young fathers are likely to come into the orbit of multiple services across their parenting journeys (Neale et al, 2015; Neale and Davies, 2015). In situations where fathers are vulnerable, effective early engagement can support them to develop their identities as fathers, to build confidence in caring for their children, and feel better able to gain independence in their transitions to adulthood (Cundy, 2016; Tarrant et al, 2017).

Yet, the failure to engage with fathers is both a systemic and cultural issue (Tarrant et al, 2017). Service provision continues to be fragmented and difficult to find (Neale and Tarrant, 2017) and lack of proper financial investment and long-term support means that service provision is often a postcode lottery, making services difficult for young fathers to access. There are other challenges relating to changing models of service provision, resource constraints and ongoing professional training needs. An unconscious bias that identifies the mother-child relationship as being more important than the family dynamic is also apparent in the delivery of family services (Tarrant et al, 2017). This reenforces perceptions among young fathers that services are aimed primarily at young mothers and is hampered by views that help-seeking is antithetical to traditional notions of masculinity whereby young men are expected to adhere to norms of stoicism and independence (Davies, 2016).

While many mainstream services cater predominantly for women, there are examples of good practice nationally. This includes specialist support groups for young fathers like the North East Young Dads and Lads Project and Young Dads Collective. Community-based voluntary and third sector organisations like this sit alongside statutory and other regulatory services like adult social care and demonstrate the value of services that are built around fatherhood as a shared identity.

However, despite notable advances in evidence and academic literature concerning young fathers, we know even less about the experiences of young minoritised fathers (Tarrant and Neale, 2017). Additionally, little is known about their experiences of accessing and being supported by services. In what follows, we consider what is known about fatherhood among minoritised men.

Diverse (young) Dads

According to Owen et al. (2008: 296), 'survey analyses have suggested an over-representation of some minority ethnic groups among UK teenage parents. However, in-depth research has been lacking, both on the perspectives of young parents themselves and on the ways in which policy and professional practice may exclude, include or affect young minority ethnic parents'. Despite a continued lack of 'daddy data' in the UK, or data collected about men who are fathers (Goldman and Burgess, 2017), it continues to be men from low socioeconomic backgrounds and minoritised men that are more likely to father a child in their teens (see Swann et al, 2003; Beggs Weber, 2018). Nevertheless, evidence suggests that factors associated with age, poverty and deprivation are more likely to be predictive factors for young parenthood than ethnicity (Owen et al, 2008).

We do know that studies of black fatherhood are conducted against competing cultural expectations and structural conditions. On the one hand, the norm of father involvement has increased, while the so-called 'crisis of Black fatherhood', posits that Black fathers struggle to fulfil parental roles and duties (Johnson and Young Jr, 2016) reenforcing absent father stereotypes. Willott and Griffin (2004) argue that working-class and black young men are most likely to be stigmatised by representations and policies that operate with a discourse of 'youth in trouble'. Yet at the same time, young minoritised boys are more likely to be subject to 'adultification', whereby they are afforded less protection by professionals than their peers because they are perceived to be less innocent and less vulnerable (Davies and Marsh, 2020). A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2007: 1) has noted that:

> 'in Britain, black and Asian parents have been subjected to particular scrutiny because there have been consistent (but different) concerns about their parenting, educational and behavioural outcomes. At the same time, differences of 'race' have been treated simplistically (Lawrence, 1982) and it is increasingly evident that, while the categories black and Asian continue to be important, they are far too blunt to provide insights useful to policymakers and practitioners (Modood et al., 1997).'

A synthesis of literature by the Fatherhood Institute (2010) over a decade ago also indicates that:

- Black and Black British fathers are twice as likely as White British fathers (and three times as likely as British Asian fathers) to live apart from their children; and,
- High rates of non-resident fatherhood are found where children are of Mixed Heritage (Hunt, 2009a; Platt, 2009).

However, these trends must be read with some caution. Not only do they reflect social class differences but in comparison to White families that are experiencing unemployment and under-education, rates of non-resident fatherhood are comparable (e.g., Amato and Sobolewski, 2004; Maclean and Eekelaar, 1997). Nevertheless, experiences of racism, and institutionalised racism, are key to each of these factors, meaning they are more common in Black families (Fatherhood Institute, 2010). In addition, academic

research rarely explores the significance of the private sphere or the relational, emotional and intimate dimensions of men's lives (Britton, 2018; Tarrant, forthcoming). Noting that the value of caregiving and home life is profoundly under-explored in research with respect to Muslim men, Britton (2018) demonstrates how they instead navigate the pathologising policy approaches that place emphasis on their conservatism, via their investments in caregiving.

As noted earlier (Owen et al, 2008; Tarrant and Neale, 2017), incidences of teenage pregnancy are known to be higher among certain minoritised groups, although incidence overall continues to fall in the UK with regional variation (Nomis Web, 2020). In Newcastle and Durham where teenage pregnancies remain regionally high, around half of the teenage pregnancies arising are among minority ethnic communities (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Given that over 80% of the region's population are White, this indicates a higher prevalence of teenage pregnancies among these communities. Beyond the statistical picture, which does not account for the prevalence of young fatherhood, there is little research that explores the qualitative experiences of young fatherhood or how services currently respond to and engage with young fathers, especially from diverse communities. This includes support provided in the criminal justice system, where, for example, young Black fathers are an over-represented population (Meek, 2007). Meek (2007) argues that there is a need for more culturally sensitive materials to develop support for young father in prison settings.

Based on this relatively limited and in some cases decade old literature, we might conclude that fathering at the intersections of race and class inequalities only serves to act as an additional barrier to the multitude of impediments that young fathers already face in accessing services. Importantly, while professionals may be committed to treating everyone that they support equally, they nevertheless operate within systems that are inherently racist. It is therefore not enough to understand minoritised fatherhoods without understanding the context in which it takes place or without seeking to understand and respond to the experiences of those men.

We note that there are some highly positive examples where the voices and experiences of Black fathers are being celebrated and heard. Dope Black Dads is an important example of community-led and community-based support and activism, which aims to widen understanding around black fatherhoods and to provide a safe space and support for dads to explore the issues they experience. Black fatherhood has an internal dynamism and diversity and it is important that services listen actively to dads in all their diversity to better support them to navigate their parenting journeys and to be the fathers they want to be.

Diverse Dads: The Project

Funded by the UK Research and Innovation QR Strategic fund (University of Lincoln) and the North East Young Dads and Lads Project (NEYDL), the Diverse Dads co-research project involved a national partnership between NEYDL, the Following Young Fathers Further (FYFF) research team, Connected Voice and Future Men UK. The project was driven by a community identified gap in provision as identified by the NEYDL Project CEO and Founder, Kevin Stoodley. He notes:

> 'Whilst NEYDL has made a significant and sometimes life-changing impact in the lives of North East young dads and their families, reaching and supporting over 200 young fathers to date, there has been a marked absence of representation from minoritized groups. In an effort to understand this absence and how we can become more accessible to young men from diverse ethnic communities, we welcomed the opportunity to work in collaboration with the 'Following Young Fathers Further' research study (University of Lincoln), Future Men and Connected Voices on this project, with peer research expertise provided throughout by young dads known to NEYDL. As NEYDL prepares to embark on an ambitious new digital service journey (*DigiDAD*) made by and for young fathers in our region, we will seek to embed the recommendations of this report fully by working harder to identify, reach and involve young fathers from minority groups and ensuring that our service offer is shaped by, inclusive and celebratory of diversity in all its forms.'

Supported by the FYFF team and senior staff at NEYDL, the research was conducted by three young dads and lads from NEYDL who comprised the peer and community-based research team. The work was also supported by an advisory team of local and national experts; Connected Voice and Future Men.

The initiative has comprised four key activities:

- Producing a demographic profile of minority ethnic communities in the Tyne and Wear region, including the prevalence of young fatherhood,
- Establishing new alliances with services who work with minority ethnic communities and young parents to enable outreach, updated training, and the embedding of inclusive forms of support,
- Generating evidence about how and why services should engage with a wider constituency of young fathers, especially those from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds,
- Co-disseminating evidence to professionals and policymakers.

The research also aimed to capture and analyse service provision for young fathers in the region. This project will inform and shape family policy and practice support for young fathers and their families in ways that are sensitive to the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity and religious affiliation.

Peer research

The research activities were led by a team of peer researchers engaged with the North East Dads and Lads project. This approach, which aligns with the participatory ethos underpinning the overall FYFF research, adopts the view that peers are experts by experience. It involves community members at all stages of the research and aims to ensure the empowerment and participation of young people through their involvement throughout the research process. As Smith et al, (2002: 2) argue 'participatory research is beneficial both because of its implicit values (such as empowerment and inclusion) and also because it improves our level of understanding of the substantive subject area'.

Peer research seeks to enhance the value of research through supporting select young men to develop key skills and empower them to affect positive change in their own community. This kind of research has been done before with young fathers and has proven to have multiple benefits particularly for the young fathers who were trained to conduct interviews (Braye and McDonnell, 2012).

A key rationale for the peer research was also that the research problem had been identified directly by the North East Young Dads and Lads (NEYDL) project. It has therefore both emerged from the community and been addressed by the community. The peer research team were supported through weekly office hours by members of the Following Young Fathers Further team, who provided ongoing guidance and support around the ethics and practicalities of research. The peer research team sought to generate demographic information about the North East region and developed and conducted a survey and interviews with professionals and young dads in the North East region (recorded and available to access as videos). The survey was sent to organisations in the North East and had three key aims:

1. to map existing services in the North East with a remit to support either minority ethnic communities, young parents or young fathers,
2. to develop new alliances between services across the North East region; and
3. to identify young fathers and professionals from diverse communities to understand more about their experiences and support needs.

Once professionals and young fathers from diverse communities were identified, the peer research team conducted recorded interviews. These interviews feature in films produced for the study and informed the findings presented in the next section of this report (links are provided at the end of this report).

The peer research team has been engaged at each stage of the research process, from designing and delivering the survey, engaging with participants, and analysing and presenting the findings. They say of the work:

'I feel really privileged to be part of this research. It is something so new and close to me to explore. I myself am part of a minority ethnic community and being able to give people like me a voice about what kind of support we would like to see through things like parenthood. I have always been interested in cultures and what it is like for them day to day. This project is a great way for me to do so.'

- Adam

'I'm really interested in this research as I myself would like to know what there is for the Black, Asian and minority ethnic young dads as I've not heard of anything that involves them and I feel really proud to be part of these findings. I really enjoy doing research work in general as it is very fascinating to understand and explore certain things.'

- Dylan

'I am a young dad of 3 and also a researcher for the Diverse Dads project. I feel like this is really important issue to research because there is such a gap in support services for young dads from ethnic minority communities. I did a lot of work to find data about the demographic profile of the North East. This helped us to understand that the North East is a more diverse region than we thought'

- Will

We now move on to present the emerging findings from the study and to initiate a conversation about how services and support can be developed in ways that are inclusive and sensitive both to the complex needs that young fathers may experience, and to the dynamism and diversity of all young fathers.

Survey and interview findings

One of the main gaps in knowledge that the survey aimed to address was what support is already available to young fathers and minoritised communities in the North East region. Increased knowledge about the local support landscape was sought to establish new partnerships between service providers across the region and to provide improved signposting for young fathers who may also have support needs linked to their cultural or religious identities. In what follows, we combine the interview and survey data generated by the NEYDL peer researchers to draw out key messages and findings and their implications for supporting young fathers.

The service landscape of the North East

Two key activities were conducted to map and understand the existing service offer in the North East for young fathers and minoritised communities. There was a dedicated question in the survey and the peer research team also conducted some desk-based research to identify services that visibly promoted support for specific communities. This sat alongside their work to document and understand local demographics using Office for National Statistics and local government data sources. The survey was shared via existing local professional networks and promoted in the Connected Voice newsletter[1].

Eleven completed surveys were received from organisations based in Newcastle (4), South Tyneside (1), North Tyneside (2), Northumberland (2) and Durham (2). The majority of the respondents were from voluntary sector organisations and the rest represented health services and local government (see Figure 1).

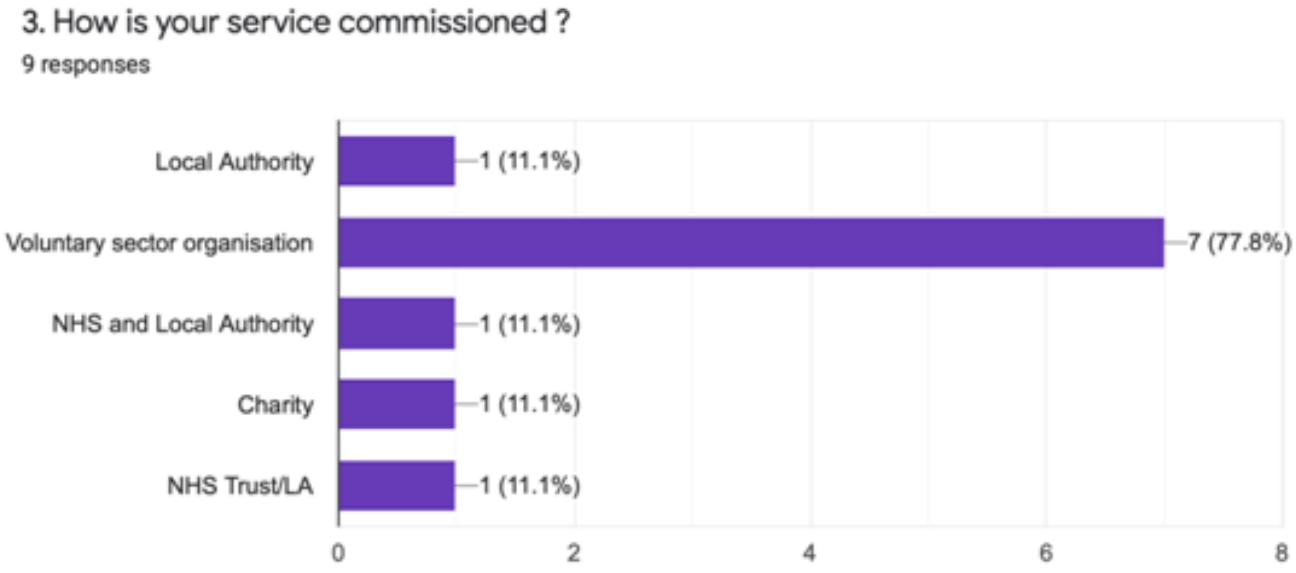


Figure 1: Survey responses

[1]www.connectedvoice.org.uk

As demonstrated in Figure 2, most of the organisations stated that their service worked with, or supported, minoritised communities, even though the more general perception, by professionals and among North East communities is that there "isn't much diversity" (Inclusion and Diversity Officer, young dads support service). This is an assumption that we often hear from professionals working for services that tend to be situated in White, working-class communities.

Challenging this pervasive myth, the survey provided important insights about the nature of the work of services and the support they provide to diverse communities in the region. One respondent said that their work involved 1-1 support for parents-to-be from a number of different communities, including Eastern European, Islamic and African communities. One service provides support to minoritised women and young girls in South Tyneside. Another said that their service supported those aged under 25 and that a dad's worker had had a presence in Newcastle for many years. Although they had worked with minoritised communities, they predominantly supported young men who were White British.

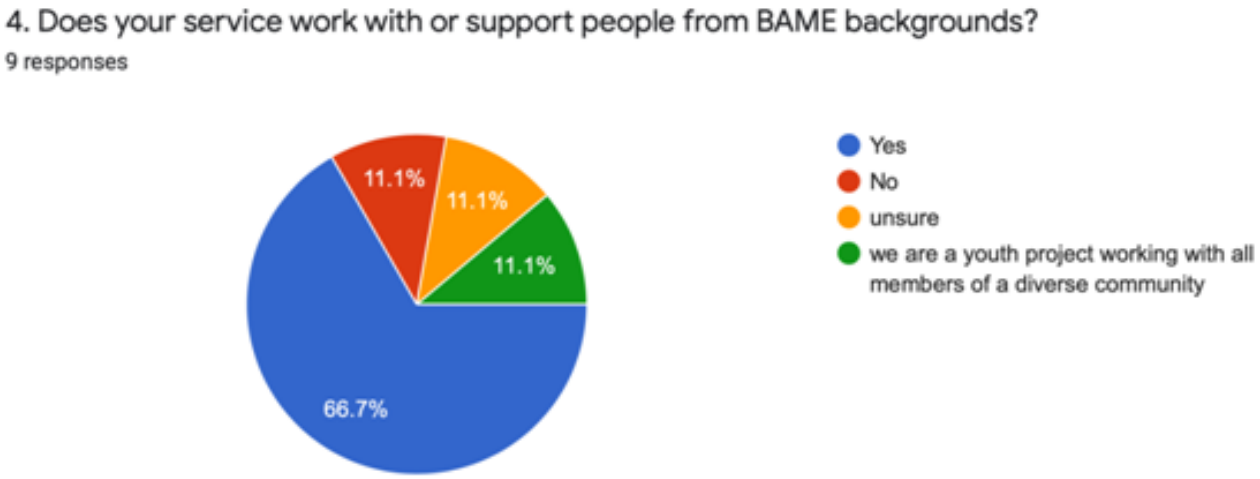


Figure 2: Survey responses to question 4: does your service work with or support people from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds?

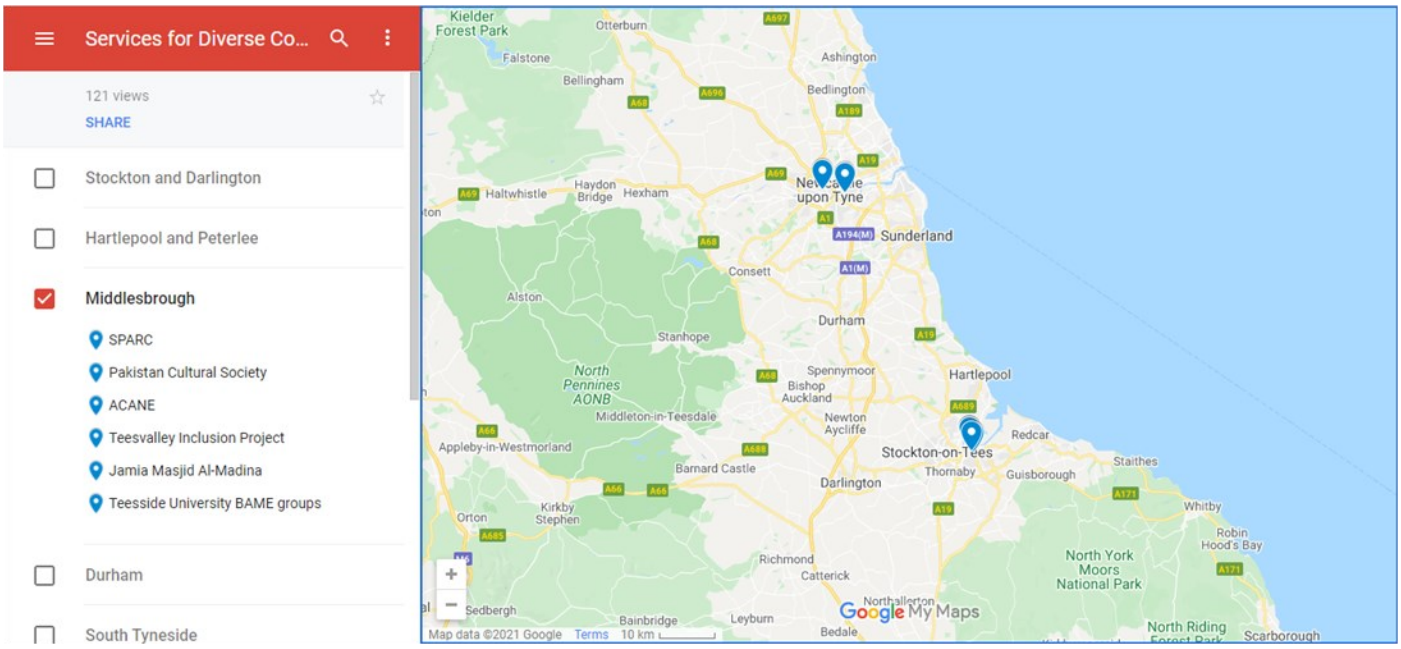
Respondents who answered 'no' to the question of whether they supported Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds (see Figure 2) were asked to explain their answer. One respondent said that this was because population numbers for diverse communities in the region are low. Just over half of the respondents said that their organisation supported young dads, expectant dads or carers but those that said they specifically supported young dads from minority ethnic communities was lower (n=3).

Mapping services

To further map and understand the support landscape in the North East, the peer research team sought to identify whether specialised support services/organisations existed for particular ethnic groups or communities. This exercise was driven by three questions; Who are the communities in the region? Where are they? What is the prevalence of young parents among those communities?

The main finding from this exercise was that there were no services or organisations specifically designed to support minoritised young dads. This would represent a relatively niche offer. Rather there were services designed either to support young dads or services designed to serve particular communities. Several organisations were also identified that had a remit to supporting families more generally but these did not specifically advertise a support offer for young parents or for specific ethnic groups. Where specialised support was provided for minoritised groups, there was no specific offer of support for young parents or dads.

The peer research team also recognised the value of such an activity for enabling regional organisations and support services to establish new partnerships. The map itself is also a useful resource for supporting organisations to signpost to relevant services. Using Googlemaps, the team created a virtual map of the services and organisations that are located in the region. Available to all organisations in the region and as a dynamic, working document that can be updated, this map is the most up-to-date resource currently available for the region: it can be accessed at: [Services for Diverse Communities - Google My Maps]



The view of professionals and young fathers

The qualitative questions in the survey sought to illicit views of the professionals providing services for young fathers, including those from minority ethnic communities. The open qualitative questions provided useful insights into the kinds of support that local services were offering. More generally the respondents identified a variety of factors that professionals may need to provide support for. This included language barriers, particularly in relation to filling out paperwork and registering for amenities (e.g., registering at a doctor's surgery).

Recognising cultural diversity in the support offer

A key finding was the importance that professionals placed on recognising cultural diversity in their offer. One respondent spoke of their service being tailored to the specific needs of the Roma community, for example, as well as generational differences within it:

> We work with Czech and Slovak nationals in the main who are of Roma/Gypsy heritage, as there is a large community in our neighbourhood area. Roma culture in our experience begins families earlier, so women and men are very often parents before they are 20yrs. As such an important element of our work is to enable young women and men to continue to get out of the house and take part in fun and youthful activities that would otherwise be unavailable. Older parents, new arrivals and extended families of those we have worked with for many years often come to us when they need financial help, and we signpost them to citizens advice or other local community projects which offer support including language support.

According to Robson and Berthoud (2006: 1), 'when early fertility is the norm in a minority community, it does not lead to any further disadvantage beyond that experienced by the ethnic group as a whole.' Factors such as poverty, deprivation and age may therefore be more significant as risk factors and should be considered and explored by professionals. In conversation with a young father from the Roma community (see the 'I was a Boy who brought a boy into the world' video), we discovered that being a young parent is not perceived to be troubling in the same way among the Roma community as it may be among other young fathers. The organisation providing support for the Roma community who responded to the survey had therefore usefully tailored their support offer through understanding community perceptions of young parenthood. They nonetheless continued a support relationship through the provision of youthful activities and specific spaces for young people.

[1]www.connectedvoice.org.uk

Several of the respondents suggested that their approach to support was the same regardless of difference and diversity. As one respondent said; 'my offer is the same for all communities', another stated:

> I have supported a father of African-Caribbean descent in a previous role with the same organisation. My support to him did not deviate massively away from the support I would offer any other man.

As illustrated by this point, the ongoing and prevailing policy assumption is that the same measures, messages and support systems are likely to be appropriate across the board (Owen et al, 2008). However, while the framing of support and services as 'the same for all' might be considered as advocating equality across provision, there is a danger that diversity issues are not acknowledged or attended to in the support relationship.

Taking a different approach, Norman, one of the interviewees, a professional with experience of supporting teenage parents including young fathers, said that it is important for services to be assertive when trying to reach young fathers or when reaching out to a high diversity of ethnic groups. He says that is important to:

> 'we'd make sure that we were responsive and sensitive to different cultural needs and work in a way that was bespoke to meet that need.'

This comment emphasises the importance of tailoring a bespoke and individual approach to young fathers to navigate the range of challenges they may face. Being responsive and sensitive to need is also one way that services and professionals can make their offer more accessible to young fathers.

"We'd make sure that we were responsive and sensitive to different cultural needs and work in a way that was bespoke to meet that need".

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Making services more accessible to all

In response to the question 'Are you aware of any gaps in service provision for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young dads in the region?', one respondent explained:

> 'I don't believe there is a 'gap' as such, certainly not one that has necessarily been consciously created. Our service is open to all, for example. I think there is more of a 'gap' in how Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic fathers access services.'

This statement indicates that from the point of view of some professionals, services are not uniformly accessed by young fathers from diverse ethnic communities in the region. Turning this on its head, NEYDL asked how they might make themselves more accessible to diverse young fathers and indeed, the observation that the service was not seeing referrals of young fathers from different backgrounds was what initially prompted the questions explored in the project. In addition, there is evidently an ongoing gap in understanding and knowledge here about why that might be.

So how might services make themselves more accessible? Challenging the notion that young fathers are 'hard-to-reach', by exploring the question 'how might services be hard to access?', is an important starting point (Neale and Davies, 2015). The young dads that were

interviewed for this study suggested that they would value more advertising of services and more emphasis on early intervention work. For example, one young father suggested that support from a community-based organisation for young fathers was invaluable because he did not have his own male role model to look up to and emulate. He also noted that young fathers are only likely to be referred to services when there is enough of a problem that they are perceived to need help. He says:

> 'Some people take to parenting like a duck to water and others struggle…I feel like a dad doesn't really get to be a dad at times.'

The stakes are therefore high for these young men. Our interviews with professionals working to support diverse communities also indicated instead that the onus needs to be on services to work to identify young fathers and to empower them through listening to the barriers they face. Key to this is also understanding what other services might be available. This enables signposting to relevant support before problems escalate. Michael and Fred from the Streetwise Young People's Project study suggested that ongoing partnerships and conversations between organisations are required to ensure that young fathers receive the tailored support they need.

Greater consideration of diversity therefore warrants further exploration and could inform how services tailor their offer and address their accessibility (a point made by one of our interviewees as well, see next section). It was clear from the survey that when young fathers are engaged 1-2-1 they respond well and it becomes more possible to see them as the resource they are. One survey respondent said:

'I find that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young dads will engage really well with me 1-1 with their partners in the home. They have attended baby practical groups for parents to be but maybe only attend 1 or 2 groups not engaging in the group with the other dads. They always attend the tour of the hospital birthing centre and engage well. Most of the dads-to-be work in low paid jobs in takeaway shops or food delivery, back of house jobs with shift work. Some dads will interpret for their partners...'

"Some people take to parenting like a duck to water and others struggle...I feel like a dad doesn't really get to be a dad at times".

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Significantly, this insight highlights the value when young dads are recognised as a resource in the support context, with benefits for women too. Indeed, working directly with mums and grandmothers can also help to bring dads into the support environment in contexts where they may be suspicious, fearful or balancing the demands of employment and breadwinning. When dads understand the nature of support, they are more likely to engage well, may be engaged in the parenting journey throughout pregnancy and birth for longer and may also play a key role in interpreting for their partners (and professionals) if English is not their first language.

Services: Addressing gaps in knowledge and being inclusive

In response to the question 'What information do you need to provide inclusive support for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young dads?' we received a wide range of replies. Taking these as a framework in this section, we combine some of the findings from the interviews to respond to these gaps and to demonstrate how they might be effectively addressed.

Generating information about what services there are in the region;

In this project, dedicated time and resource meant that the peer research team were able to identify and reach out to relevant organisations in the region. This was achieved through the distribution of the survey to local organisations and drawing on existing relationships among services in the region. Building partnerships across communities and reaching out to community leaders is essential for building local and regional knowledge and connections about the kinds of service that are available. This is an ever-changing picture so those conversations need to be ongoing and long term where possible.

Their caring/childcare needs; *further understanding concerning gender roles in different cultures*

Understanding young men's needs and the barriers they may face can only be achieved by empowering young fathers and providing individualised support that sees them as a resource rather than a risk. Listening actively to their experiences of home and family life, being persistent, and signposting to relevant support can also be immensely helpful.

Young dads from cultures where involved fatherhood is less understood can be challenging and support with fatherhood may be perceived with suspicion. Working directly with the wider family, including mums and grandparents to engage and empower dads to be involved can be a useful way of breaking down cultural assumptions around fathers as breadwinners rather than nurturers (see video with Michael and Fred, Streetwise).

Any tips/good practice? Different ways to engage/support young dads?

A range of insights were provided in relation to this question by both the dads and professionals. One participant, who had been a young father himself and is now an advocate for young fathers stressed the importance of seeing young fathers as the resource they are rather than a threat to their child(ren). He advises that professionals:

> 'Take on board the needs of the dad in relation to the child and see dad as a resource rather than a threat, rather than protecting the child from the dad.'

All of the professionals emphasised that many young fathers are experiencing a complex set of challenges and have a diverse set of needs that may be a barrier to their participation in the lives of their children and with services. They highlighted issues with:

- Isolation and loneliness,
- Challenges accessing services either because they are not known to the fathers, they are perceived to be spaces that are 'not for them', or because of geographical and transport barriers (e.g., some fathers may be unable to physically attend services),
- Experiencing mental health issues that make it challenging for them to reach out for support. This is compounded by norms around masculinities and expectations about what it means to be a man (see I was a boy video), where men are expected to act tough and keep their feelings to themselves.

As noted by one of the advisory team, regardless of these challenges and barriers, fatherhood is a commonality that can bring people together around a shared experience. Addressing fatherhood is a powerful way of identifying young men and of developing individualised, person-centred and empowering support in order to address these challenges without contributing to the stigma they may already be experiencing. Creating a community of support and building mutually beneficial partnerships across services regionally has great potential to be empowering while also respectful of difference and diversity.

Any research concerning the areas in which there is lack of support for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic dads?

Research on the support needs of young minoritised fathers is limited and has been identified as a key gap (Tarrant and Neale, 2017), although we have brought some of this evidence together on page 3. However, there have been significant advances in research about young fathers in recent years including Following Young Fathers (Neale et al., 2015) and Responding to Young Fathers in a Different Way (Tarrant and Neale, 2017) (see also suggested resources later in this report).

As well as the key findings from this research, another useful source of information are local community leaders. As 'experts by experience', developing partnerships with community leaders and other organisations that serve different communities can be fruitful. These conversations and perseverance on behalf of professionals, may lead to more positive outcomes for young fathers (and their families) in terms of securing the right kinds of support to address their needs.

Our recommendations for services: Inclusivity for all dads

Think dad! Ask about and talk with dads where possible

Many services often do not routinely engage with fathers meaning opportunities to improve outcomes for children, mothers and fathers may be lost. Research confirms that support is needed and valued by all men when they become fathers. Simply asking about dad and talking to him when possible can open up new opportunities for support.

Actively challenge stigma and pervasive negative stereotypes in practice and organisational approaches

Young, working-class and minoritised men are more likely than any other group of fathers to be subject to negative assumptions that they are feckless, risky and at worst, a danger to the children. Situated at the intersections of class, race and young age, their fathering is perhaps most subject to scrutiny and to assumptions of absence and irresponsibility. We encourage all professionals who engage with young fathers, to challenge these dominant policy and public stereotypes by engaging directly with young fathers with an ethos of support, care and redemption, rather than one of risk and fear (see Ladlow and Neale, 2016). This involves seeing fathers as a resource rather than a risk to their children.

Developing an awareness of external environmental issues that may be impacting on diverse young fathers

Many of the complex challenges that young fathers experience may also be linked to a wider set of external environmental inequalities that effect some minority groups. This includes institutional racism, poorer access to housing, education and/or employment and health inequalities. A combination of some, or all these wider issues, can be so crippling it can be difficult to engage fathers. It may only be by acknowledging and addressing these wider challenges that young fathers can be supported with their fathering and father identities.

Developing an understanding of local and regional demographics

There is a pervasive assumption among services that 'localities are not diverse'. This is often based on assumptions rather than awareness of the demographic makeup and history of a place. Developing an understanding of local and regional demographics and recording that information is one way that organisations can address and challenge this assumption. The Office for National Statistics, Public Health England and local government data are useful sources of information.

Developing confidence through cultural competency and anti-racist practice

Organisations are better able to identify and work with confidence with a diverse constituency of dads if they invest in training that involves encouraging anti-racist practice, developing cultural competencies and identifying unconscious biases in working with ethnic minority people and communities. This kind of training, engaged in both by organisational leaders and those who deliver support also has broader relevance for working across a wider range of diversity including disability, sexuality and a range of gender identities.

Being sensitive, culturally appropriate and assertive with outreach

Services that focus on why they might be 'hard-to-access' are more likely to work effectively with young fathers regardless of how they identify. Taking an individualised approach for each young man means seeing and understanding a young person for who they are while also working with them to understand the barriers they face. This involves being sensitive, responding in culturally appropriate ways (e.g., working through language barriers or nuances and seeking resources or wider support if necessary) and being assertive with outreach. Asking mums and female family members about fathers and demonstrating a clear offer for fathers on external service promotion is also another important route for identifying and reaching out to fathers who may require more support.

Prioritise research and consultation with young fathers in the locality

Local and national organisations are encouraged to prioritise continuing research and consultation with young parents, particularly with young minoritised fathers whose views and experiences continue to be marginalised. Understanding local contexts and individual needs means professionals are able to respond in an informed way.

"Fish in different ponds, rivers or streams": establishing partnerships with other organisations and community leaders

Referral routes are important. If social services are not referring young dads from diverse communities it may be possible to identify them elsewhere. Speaking to community leaders about support that is available for dads and telling them what support is in place may help to develop referral routes within regions before families reach crisis point, while also ensuring young fathers get the support they need. Perseverance on behalf of the organisation can be challenging and time consuming in a context of limited funding and high staff-turnover, but it is also essential. Alongside demographic mapping, this kind of work also helps to challenge the idea that localities are not diverse.

There is value in mapping and understanding local and regional support and how that is changing

Linked to the above and led by the young dads themselves, this project supported an understanding of what kinds of services are available in the local region. This helped to establish new partnerships and support signposting. However, because of piecemeal and short-term funding, and staff turnover, this landscape can change quite quickly. Keeping apace of these dynamics can be useful for increasing support for young fathers over time.

Create inclusive spaces, rather than new spaces

NEYDL Inclusion lead Chris Humba argues that young fathers should be supported to feel part of the wider community wherever possible. The provision of inclusive spaces for support in communities, alongside a tailored and culturally sensitive approach, is therefore not about creating new and separate spaces for dads based on their minoritised identity. Rather, services should strive to harness the power of the shared identity of fatherhood in bringing young fathers, in all their diversity, together. All support should be offered with the long-term aim of their inclusion in wider services.

Visual outputs

In partnership with Jonah York, NEYDL's Peer Education and Training Officer, films have been produced about the study which are intended to prompt reflection and discussion about inclusive practice. These films were launched at our sharing and learning event in April 2021. Jonah and the peer research team met at the North East Young Dads and Lads offices and spoke with young dads and professionals who support young dads from diverse communities to understand more about their experiences. There are also videos featuring the advisory team and the Following Young Fathers Further team who provide their insights about supporting the work.

The first two links are to videos that were played at the webinar to prompt discussion and reflection amongst the delegates. Full, unedited versions of the interviews are also available, as well as videos that feature the peer research team, advisory board and Following Young Fathers Further research team.

Visual outputs

Training videos that featured at the webinar

'I was a Boy who brought a boy into the world' featuring all the young dads interviewed by the peer research team:

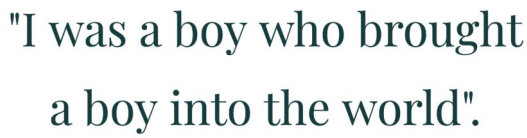
https://youtu.be/Szxb5_kAO_o

Diverse Dads: Interviews with professionals

https://youtu.be/KexWr3s7W6E

The Peer research team

https://youtu.be/78NynAV0gt4



FYFF
Following Young Fathers Further

Individual interviews with professionals working with diverse dads

Streetwise:

https://youtu.be/NJTIErDNma4

Norman:

https://youtu.be/9jGcYilBg54

Ruben:

https://youtu.be/Xp3yH4rvepU

The 'Diverse Dads' team

Hear from the advisory board members:

https://youtu.be/YBJDeQLOxGE

Hear from the Following Young Fathers Further team:

https://youtu.be/v1VlD0Sb0ao

DigiDAD
by dads for dads

Project Partners

North East Young Dads and Lads peer research team

Adam Gorzelanczyk is a Peer link support worker for the North East Young Dads and Lads. He supports young dads to engage in research. He is a peer researcher for the Diverse Dads project.

Will Patterson found out he was going to become a dad at 17 and has three children. He is a peer researcher for the Diverse Dads project.

Dylan Brown is 21 years old and became a young dad at the age of 16. He has one daughter. He is a peer researcher for the Diverse Dads project.

Advisory Team

Kevin Stoodley: Founder and CEO of the North East Young Dads and Lads Project (NEYDL)

Kevin founded NEYDL in 2017 following a 2-year pilot project supporting teenage dads in Gateshead on behalf of a local young women's charity. Four years on and NEYDL is Nationally recognised for its vital and innovative work in supporting over 200 young men facing fatherhood across Tyne and Wear, Durham, and Northumberland. A former award-winning Young Men's Sexual Health Promotion specialist, Kevin has over 25 years expertise working with marginalised and disadvantaged communities on behalf of VCS, statutory and private sector bodies in Birmingham and across the North East. Kevin holds degrees in both Youth & Community Work and Psychology and lives close to the sea with his partner, 2 children and 3 unruly dogs.

Owen Thomas – Head of Programmes (Fathers), Future Men

Owen has over 15 years extensive direct experience working closely with Fathers and Male carers at crucial stages of their lives. He has responsibility supervising a team of Fathers work - project co-ordinators across London, offering direct support and interventions to Fathers, Young Fathers and young men including having oversight of the Future Dads expectant fathers' program,

An element of this role is strategic, - advocating for the needs of Young and expectant Fathers at local and national forums. He is passionate about addressing stereotypes around masculinities, culture and identity, and promoting positive well-being and healthy relationships.

Jack Summerside, Support and Development Officer, Connected Voice

Connected Voice has been supporting charities and communities in Tyneside since 1929. In its 90-year history the organisation has helped to establish well-known charities that are still thriving today, and has paved the way for many national services, including pro-bono services from volunteer lawyers in Gateshead following the Poor Man's Lawyer movement (a predecessor to Legal Aid). Connected Voice is proud of the positive impact they have made and strive to continue offering the highest standard of services we can to the voluntary sector and communities of Newcastle and Gateshead.

Project Partners

Chris Humba, Inclusion officer, North East Young Dads and Lads

Chris is a member of Board for the North East Young Dads and Lads and Digidads projects and has played an advisory role as Inclusion Officer for the Diverse Dads project. He also has a nine-year-old son.

Jonah York, Peer Education and Training Officer, North East Young Dads and Lads

https://www.jonahyork.com/

Jonah is a 27-year-old trained Actor and Director originating from Brighton and Hove. He is currently a creative associate with 'Seven Stories', The National Centre for Children's books and 'Peer Support and Education Officer' at 'The North East Young Dad's and Lads'

Jonah graduated from the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) with a first class honours. Jonah also has trained as part of the graduate program with Tmesis Physical Theatre company and received the Poel Event Prize with The National Theatre and The Society of Theatre Research.

Jonah is committed to creating work across the country and often works with a variety of artists, theatre's, art's buildings and communities.

Following Young Fathers Further team

Dr Anna Tarrant is an Associate Professor at the University of Lincoln and is a UKRI Future Leaders Fellow. Her research interests include men and masculinities; family life; the lifecourse; and methodological developments in qualitative secondary analysis. Her current funded study, 'Following Young Fathers Further', is a qualitative longitudinal, participatory study of the lives and support needs of young fathers.

Dr Laura Way is a Research Fellow at the University of Lincoln on the 'Following Young Fathers Further' study. She holds post-graduate qualifications in both sociology and education and has been teaching across the further education/higher education sectors for the last 12 years. Laura's research interests include gender and ageing; subcultural identities; creative qualitative methods; and punk pedagogies. She is also on the steering committee of the Punk Scholars Network.

Linzi Ladlow is a Research Fellow at the University of Lincoln on the 'Following Young Fathers Further' study. Her research interests include youth transitions, family life, young parenthood and housing. Linzi's PhD research is a qualitative longitudinal study of disadvantaged young parents' housing pathways and support needs.

Other useful resources (open access)

Dope Black Dads:

https://www.dopeblackdads.com/

Following Young Fathers:

https://followingfathers.leeds.ac.uk/findings-and-publications/

Following Young Fathers Further:

https://fyff.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/the-project/

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