WHAT DO MOTHERS WANT FROM FATHERS?

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Chaired by Stuart Valentine
‘Sharing of care and domestic responsibilities: What factors influence ‘equity’ in parental practises?

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Setting the changing Western context

• Contemporary practises of caring/involvement in the domestic sphere and notions of equality require us to consider social, cultural and historical change
‘it is literally 24 hours a day’ (James)
What’s hard about ‘equally’ sharing caring – and the domestic sphere?

• Fathers are more ‘involved’ than at anytime in recent history
• But historically this has been a maternally etched arena
• Fathers less involved in ‘domestic chores’
• Policy changes (paternity leave and shared parental leave), but policies can only **signal** change
• Lessons to be learnt from other countries e.g. Sweden
• Broader changes e.g. gender & ‘caring masculinities’
Anticipating first-time Fatherhood: Intentions

“Initially the only thing that I think that I probably can’t do is breastfeed [but] I don’t see myself as not doing anything and in real terms Ella wanted to express (breast milk) anyway, so at some point I’ll be able to feed … But I don’t see that there’s going to be anything particularly that I won’t do. Obviously Ella hopefully will be having nine months (maternity leave), so there will be far more that she’ll be doing anyway, just because of time. [But] changing nappies and bathing, I’ll try and have a go and get involved and do these things”

(Sean)
Early Fathering experiences

“I thought I wouldn’t settle into it as quickly as I have … because I see babies as so delicate I thought I wouldn’t necessarily know what to do with it. But it’s kind of instinctive … Yeah I think we take it pretty evenly, I mean until Susan starts expressing (milk) I can’t do the feeding but I do everything else” (Chris).
‘men can’t do practical things’

“I’m doing plenty of childcare [but] Ros is taking responsibility for the baby’s future orientation of where we will be going next … It’s not that I couldn’t do that but I’m not doing that … men can’t do it because men can’t do practical things, actually it is easy to feed the baby but knowing what to feed her tomorrow is difficult” (Richard, Late postnatal interview)
‘You know with hindsight, you think oh did I do that right. Like with the responsibility thing that is the first thing I said to you I think maybe I’ve taken too much responsibility, maybe I could have shared the responsibility more …. I think that is probably my nature and with hindsight I think there probably were people around. I’m sure [husband] would probably have taken more responsibility if I made him…if I was doing it again…I would have given away some of that responsibility…because I think that weighed me down in a way that I felt was essential at the time…I don’t know why I did not just share it, but maybe that was just me, **maybe I just needed to take 24 hour responsibility**’ (Gillian)
Patterns of care are established in early weeks/months – and can be difficult to disrupt. Factors facilitating more equitable sharing include:

- Levels of pay, child-care, workplace flexibility, employer support, visibility of male caring, less ‘task-based-only’ father involvement, male involvement in domestic chores, societal valuing of caring.
Further reading:


MEN CAN DO IT!

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