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'Navigating in an Uncharted World: How does the Desire for Fatherhood affect Men?'

Robin Hadley MA, MSc

This self-funded MSc study originated from a previous qualitative study into the issues surrounding involuntarily childless men. That study indicated that involuntary childlessness affected men's behaviour, mental health, relationships, and identity. The results reflected the findings of female and male infertility studies. One of the outcomes of that study was the absence of any indication of the level of desire for parenthood ('broodiness'). In order to establish whether it was feasible for further research to be carried out it was necessary to attempt to determine the incidence of, and desire for, parenthood in females and males, both non-parents and parents. I am defining broodiness as the behaviours, emotions, thoughts, and yearning for biological parenthood.

As funds and time were limited a sequential mixed-methods quantitative-qualitative approach was selected. This approach allows the verification of results, generation of new areas of interest, and provides generalisability of results. An on-line questionnaire was designed to measure the influences, motivations, and reasons that may affect the decision to parent. It consisted of twenty-nine questions (dichotomous, open, and scaled), including an item attempting to measure the reactions associated with broodiness, and divided into five modules:

- Introduction: consisting of background information, informed consent agreement, and five demographic questions for all respondents. The respondents were channelled into the relevant questions by selecting either 'Yes' or 'No' to the question 'Are you a parent'?
- Attitudes to becoming a parent for non-parents.
- Attitudes to repeating parenthood.
- A few more facts about you: both non-parents and parents are invited to complete the broodiness item and six detailed demographic questions.
- Finally: Consisting of feedback questions on the respondent's experience of the survey and re-iterates the purpose of the study, ethical issues, and contact details.

Open questions were integrated into the survey to provide detail of the respondent's life experience and, in addition, aid validity by providing feedback on the survey. An in-house

university web interface package was used to design the survey and it was delivered via email with embedded web-link. The survey items were developed from data from pilot studies and other research sources, for example, traditional quantitative terms such as 'Very strong / Strong / Weak', were not used. Instead terms such as 'A Lot/ A little/ Not bothered/Not at all' were drawn from the language of the participants of two pilot studies. The broodiness item drew on the pilot studies and other research studies and consisted eleven items: 'Anger' / 'Denial' / 'Depression' / 'Elation' / 'Guilt' / 'Isolation' / 'Jealousy' / 'Relief' / 'Sadness' / 'Yearning' / 'Withdrawal'.

Respondents were recruited by a snowball technique and over two hundred completed replies ($n=232$) were analysed using descriptive, Mann-Whitney, and Spearman's rho statistical methods. The profile of the sample was formed by non-parents ($n=107$), parents ($n=125$), and composed of females ($n=167$), and males ($n=65$). Central tendency mode was female. The mean age was 41.37 years ($SD=10.83$). The majority of respondents were heterosexual (90.2%), White-British (83.3%) professional (69.8%), degree educated (68.9%), worked full-time (68%), and Christian (52.4%). The sample is not in line with social trends and is possibly more representative of the researchers network and the research environment.

The majority of female and male non-parents ($n=107$) wished to become parents (58.9%) with 48.1% indicating the maximum response level and showed a similar level of desire for parenthood. The analysis for 'Do you wish to become a parent?' ($Mdn= 1.00$ [Yes]), $U= 995.000$, $z=-.688$, $p=.492$ and $r=-0.06$ shows no significant difference between female and male non-parents and a weak effect. 'How much do you wish to become a parent?' ($Mdn= 2.00$ [A little]), $U=817.000$, $z=-1.934$, $p=.053$ and $r=-0.18$ shows borderline significance and weak effect size. The results revealed that a higher number of childless men desired parenthood (51.9%) than did not (25.9%). The majority of parents ($n=125$) indicated they did not wish to have another child (57.6%), with 51.2% indicating 'Not at all'. The analysis for both female and male parents for the item 'Do you wish to become a parent again?' demonstrated no significant difference and a weak effect: ($Mdn= 2.00$ [No]), $U=1479.000$, $z=-1.047$, $p=.295$ and $r=-0.09$. Similarly for the item 'How much do you wish to have another child?' there was no significant difference and a weak effect: ($Mdn= 4.00$ [Not at all]), $U=1561.500$, $z=-.318$, $p=.751$ and $r=-0.02$.

The decision to parent for non-parents indicated economic and social factors as the main influences with females showing 'personal desire' as a major influence. The males indicated 'cultural/societal' and 'family expectations', with an underlying trend of 'personal desire' and 'biological urge'. For the parent group, 'health' and 'age' were the main influences, with few differences between female and male. Common reasons influencing parenthood for both non-parents and parents were 'cultural' and 'family' expectations, and items 'feel parent-child bond' and 'give love and affection'. Parents highlighted receive 'love and affection' and 'improve on my childhood experience'. Non-parents reported 'I do want a child' and 'Children complete a relationship' as reasons.

'Yearning' was the item most associated with broodiness. Compared to parents, non-parents were more affected by 'Yearning', 'Sadness', and 'Depression'. Females from both groups had similar response levels, with non-parent females indicating higher responses in 'Isolation' and 'Sadness'. Male non-parents demonstrated higher responses than both female non-parents and male parents for 'Depression' and 'Isolation'. They recorded higher levels in all items, compared to male parents, except for 'Elation', 'Guilt', and 'Relief'. A broad thematic qualitative analysis of the open questions highlighted common themes for both non-parents and parents in areas such as 'age', 'health', and 'relationships'. A theme of 'motivation' highlighted parent's unwillingness to repeat parenthood compared to non-parents emphasis on 'desire' and 'future plans'.

The small number of male participants ($n=65$), with non-parent males being the fewest ($n=27$), means the results should be treated as tenuous. However, the findings indicate that the majority of childless men in this study were affected by broodiness at a level similar to childless women.

I can be contacted at:

Research website: www.wantedtobeadad.com