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Male Broodiness: is it a Thing?

An Exploration of Men's Desire for Fatherhood

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About me



- I'm 64, Lancastrian-Mancunian, White-British, working class (7th* of 8 children). * *I am the baby in the photograph.*
- I am Hard-of-Hearing due to birth trauma
- I am a 'mediated' childless man: I was very 'broody' in my 30s
- I'm a late entrant into academia gaining my MA in 2007, My MSc in 2008 and my PhD in 2015 (aged 55).
- Why am I telling you this? I follow the values of the auto/biographical approach.

This approach recognizes that the researchers background influences their work: acknowledging the researcher's subjectivity adds validity to the work. (*Hadley, 2020a; 2021; Letherby 2014*)

Background

1. Declining fertility rate: average of 5 children per mother in 1965 to below 2.5 in 2015. *(Ritchie, 2019; Roser, 2014)*
2. In Europe, approximately 25% of men and 20% of women are childless. *(Tanturri et al, 2015)*
3. Most studies on reproductive experience, ideation and outcomes focus on women and couples. *(Inhorn et al, 2009; Hammarberg, 2017)*
4. Much less data on men's experience, ideation and outcomes.
5. Men viewed as 'not interested' and 'disengaged' from reproductive experience, ideation and outcomes. *(Inhorn et al, 2009)*
6. Common myths: men are fully fertile from puberty onwards and women are broody and men are not. *(Hadley, 2021; 2020b)*

Study aim & research questions

- The aim of this study was to evaluate the level of the desire for parenthood (broodiness) in childless men compared to childless women and parents.
- How do men and women compare in terms of broodiness and what factors influence the decision to parent (or not)?
- The following research questions were posed:
 1. How widespread is male broodiness in childless men?
 2. What is the incidence of male broodiness compared to female broodiness?
 3. What factors influence the decision to parent?
 4. Is there a difference between non-parents & parents?
 5. What are the reactions associated with broodiness?

Methodological underpinnings

1. A sequential exploratory **mixed-methods** quantitative-qualitative online survey **including** open questions. (*Hadley, 2020; Lampic et al 2006; Langdridge et al 2005; Teddlie, T., & Tashakkori, A. 2003*)
2. Mixed methods **are particularly** suited **to** understanding complex phenomena. (*Newman et al, 2003*)
3. Quantitative **data** analysed with SPSS. (*Dancey, & Reidy, 1999; Muijs, 2004*)
4. Qualitative **data** analysed using **an** Inductive Thematic Analysis **approach**. (*Braun and Clarke, 2006*)

Survey Recruitment

1. Survey built and hosted on Select Survey ASP.
2. Recruitment was online via snowball email method: only a single entry was allowed.
3. Exclusion criteria included: not completing the mandatory questions; being under 16 years old; not agreeing to the consent form; and not completing the whole survey.
4. Inclusion criteria: UK adults aged >16 years.
5. The study was approved by the University of Manchester Ethical Committee.

Sample

1. The sample was formed of 232 respondents.
2. 2,000 approx., requests to participate were sent.
3. Snowballing: 42 respondents reported 'snowballing' approx. 160 requests
4. Sample composed of 167 females and 65 males.
5. Mean age of 41.37 years (SD = 10.83); median central tendency age of 40 years - range of 45 years.
6. The majority were White British (83.3%), degree or higher educated (68.9%), professional (69.8%), worked full-time (68%), and heterosexual (90.2%).

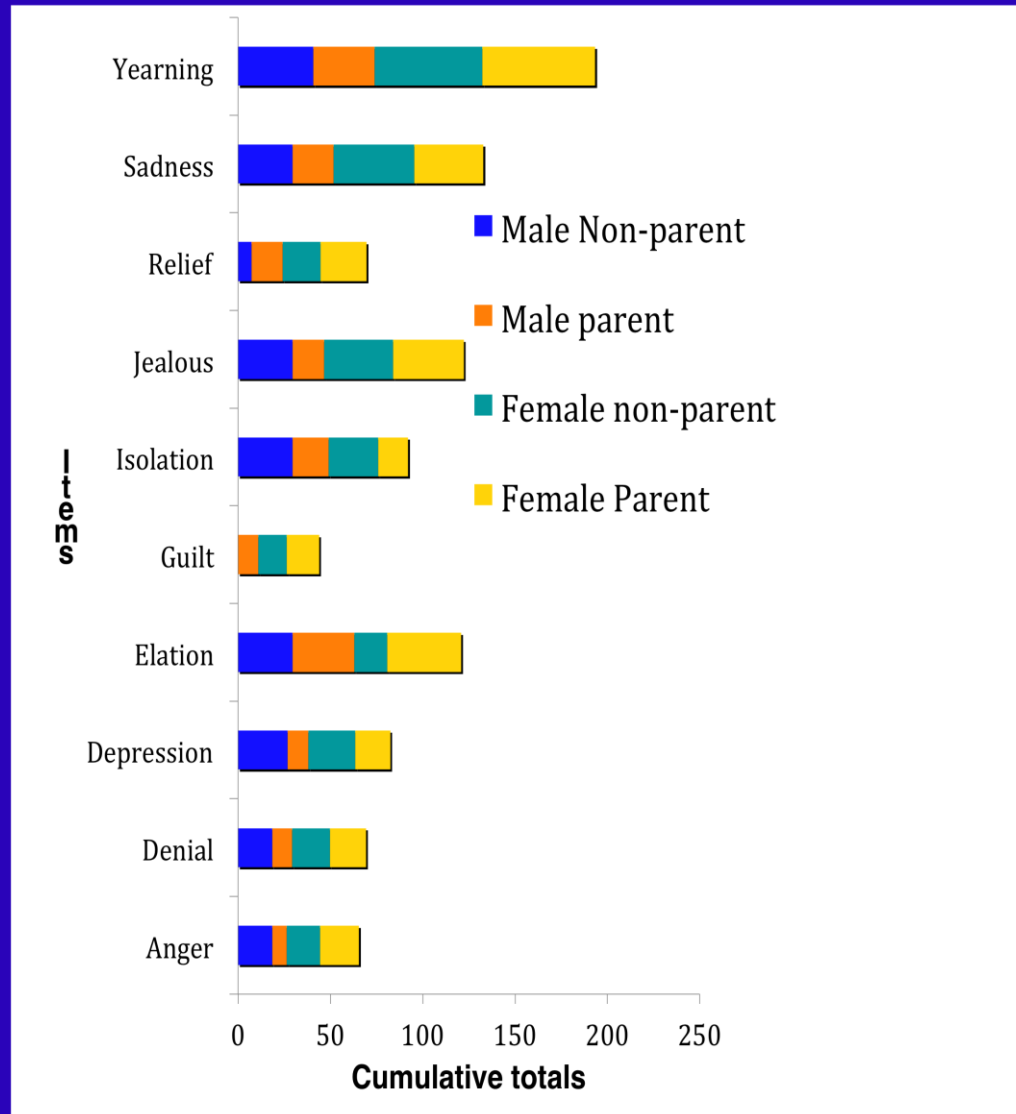
Results

1. More childless men (51.9%) indicated a desire **for** parenthood **compared to** 25.9% who did not.
2. Female **and** male non-parents **showed** a similar level of desire for parenthood: (Mdn= 1.00 [Yes]), $U = 995.000$, $z = -.688$, $p = .492$ and $r = -0.06$.
3. Female **and** male parents **had an** equal desire not to repeat parenthood.
4. **The** myth that men are not concerned about reproduction is challenged by these results.

Main factors in non-parent's reproductive intentions

1. Non-parents **indicated** *family expectations & cultural/societal expectations* **as** highest influences
2. Females **reported** *personal desire & biological urge* **as the** next **major** influence.
3. Males **indicated** *Religious belief & cultural/societal expectation* **as the** next **major** influence.
4. Males **indicated** **an** underlying trend **of** *personal desire & biological urge*.

Reactions to broodiness question



Broodiness item

1. The 'Yearning' was the item most associated with 'broodiness'.
 2. Compared to parents, *non-parents* were more affected by yearning, sadness, and depression.
 3. Females from both groups had similar response levels: *non-parent females* indicating higher responses in isolation and sadness.
 4. Male non-parents demonstrated higher responses for depression and isolation than the other groups.
- Male non-parents recorded higher levels in all items except for elation, guilt, and relief than male parents.

Qualitative analysis

1. Common **to** non-parents **and** parents **were** themes **around** age, health **and** relationships.
2. A theme **of** 'family' **emerged as** a major thematic difference **between** parents **and** non-parents.
3. A theme **of** 'motivation': **highlighted** parent's unwillingness to repeat parenthood.
4. 'Motivation' **for** non-parent's: 'desire' **and** 'future plans.'

“What kept me from being a parent was not having the right ‘constellation’ of circumstances at ‘fertile time’. Most important was a stable loving relationship, divorce at peak time fertility wise, stable financial circumstances and good environment. Prior to my 30s I did not feel psychologically ready.”

Conclusion

- The results from this study showed that men are interested and affected by 'broodiness' – the desire for parenthood.
- Childless men reported *higher levels of depression and isolation*.
- Influences on parenthood were 'cultural' and 'family expectations'; 'feel parent-child bond' and 'give love and affection.'
- Limitations: Sample size; Time; Funding.
- Future studies: Need for more research on men and their attitudes, behaviours, thoughts and feelings about fatherhood.

Thank you!

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Paper:



‘Male broodiness: Does the desire for fatherhood affect men?’

(Hadley, 2020b)

Fertility 2024, Edinburgh. Scotland

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