

Unmarried Fathers in Ireland: An Examination of the Barriers to Shared Parenting

Elizabeth Kiely and Robert Bolton 2018

Commissioned by Treoir and funded by the Community Foundation of Ireland



ucc

Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland



Institute
for Social
Science in the
21st Century



Informing
Unmarried
Parents



**The Community
Foundation for Ireland**

Contents

Chapter One - Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background and Rationale.....	1
1.2 Treoir	2
1.3 Research Aims	3
1.4 Methodology	4
1.4.1 Literature Review	4
1.4.2 Desk Based Research.....	5
1.4.3 Primary Research.....	5
1.5 Structure of the Report.....	8
Chapter Two - Non-Marital Families, Coparenting and Father Involvement in Children’s Lives: A Review of the Literature.....	9
2.1 Introduction.....	9
2.2 What is ‘Shared Parenting’? – Mapping the Conceptual Terrain.....	10
2.2.1 What is shared parenting?.....	10
2.2.2 What Should ‘Shared Parenting’/‘Coparenting’ Involve’?	13
2.3 Non-Marital Families.....	15
2.4 Father Involvement in Children’s Lives	18
2.4.1 What Can And Should Fathers Do?.....	18
2.4.2 Benefits of father involvement	20
2.5 Factors Associated with Unmarried Father Involvement	21
2.5.1 Father Prenatal Involvement.....	21
2.5.2 Individual Risk Factors	22
2.5.3 Relationship Trajectories and Multipartner Fertility	26
2.5.4 Cooperative Coparenting	28
2.5.5 Cultural and Legal Factors.....	32
2.5.6 Gatekeeping Behaviours and Beliefs around Coparent Roles	33
2.6 Summary – Key Points from the Literature Reviewed.....	36
Conceptual and theoretical issues	36
Sociology of Unmarried Parents.....	36
General Studies	37
Barriers and facilitators to father involvement	38
2.7 Concluding Note	39
Chapter Three - Legislative, Policy and Practice Interventions with Unmarried Parents /non- Marital Families: A Review of Empirical Studies	40
3.1 Introduction.....	40
3.2 Marriage / Relationship Focused Interventions	41

3.2.1 Overview	41
3.2.2 ‘Building Strong Families’	41
3.2.3 ‘Caring for My Family’	42
3.3 Mother and Father Focused Interventions – the ‘Understanding Dad’ Intervention and the Responsible Fatherhood Programmes	43
3.3.1 Overview	43
3.3.2 ‘Responsible Fatherhood’ Initiatives	43
3.3.3 ‘Understanding Dad’	44
3.4 Quality of Family Life Interventions	45
3.4.1 Overview	45
3.4.1 ‘The Parents’ Fair Share’	45
3.5 Programmes Focused on Early Years - Improving Outcomes for Children in Non-Marital Families.....	46
3.5.1 Overview	46
3.5.2 ‘Family Nurse Partnership’	46
3.6 Coparenting Interventions	47
3.6.1 Overview	47
3.6.2 ‘Strong Start Stable Families’	48
3.6.3 ‘Support Father Involvement’	48
3.6.4 ‘Family Connections in Alabama’	49
3.6.5 ‘Young Parents Programme’	50
3.6.6 ‘Building Everyday Life’	50
3.6.7 ‘Figuring it Out for Child’	51
3.7 Family Court Interventions and Non-Marital Families	52
3.7.1 Overview	52
3.7.2 Parenting Time Orders / Parenting Orders / Family Relationship Centres	53
3.7.3 The ‘Co-Parent Court’	57
3.8 Summary Points	59
Chapter Four - Unmarried Fathers and Shared Parenting: Setting the Social, Legal and Policy Context in Ireland.	61
4.1 Introduction.....	61
4.2 Contextualising Shared and Unmarried Parenting in Ireland	61
4.2.1 Non-marital Family Forms	61
4.2.2 Austerity, Post-Austerity, Labour Market Activation and Lone Parent Families	62
4.2.3 Children in Non-Marital Families	64
4.2.4 Unmarried Fathers in Ireland.....	64
4.2.5 Shared Parenting in Ireland	66
4.2.6 Non-Marital Families and Shared Parenting	67

4.3 Irish Law, Children and Unmarried Families	67
4.3.1 Child Maintenance	67
4.3.2 Family Courts Service	69
4.3.3 Children and Family Law Courts	71
4.3.4 Alternative Dispute Resolution Approaches	72
4.3.5 Legislation	73
4.3.6 The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015	73
4.3.7 Family Support and Shared Parenting	76
4.4 Summary Points	76
Chapter Five – Family Support and Interventions in the Irish Context	79
5.1 Introduction.....	79
5.2 Contextualising Parent and Family Supports in Ireland	79
5.2.1 Legal context for parent and family support.....	79
5.2.2 Policy context for parent and family supports	80
5.3 Programmed Parenting Courses	83
5.3.1 Overview.....	83
5.3.2 Case Study : Parents Plus Programme– Parenting When Separated Programme.....	85
5.4 Interventions for fathers.....	87
5.4.1 Overview.....	87
5.4.2 Case Study One: The Da Project	88
5.4.3 Case Study Two: Just for Dads: A groupwork programme for fathers	91
5.5 Young Parent Programmes	92
5.5.1 Overview.....	92
5.5.2 Case Study: The Teen Parents Support Programme	95
5.6 Child Contact Centres	98
5.6.1 Overview.....	98
5.6.2 Case Study 1: Barnardos/One Family Pilot Child Contact Centre	103
5.6.3 Case Study 2: Time4Us Galway	106
Summary	109
Contextualising Parent and Family Supports in Ireland	109
Programmed Parenting Courses	110
Interventions for fathers.....	111
Young Parent Programmes	112
Child Contact Centres	113
Chapter Six: Views and Experiences of Unmarried Fathers in Ireland Sharing Parenting	115
6.1 Introduction.....	115
6.2 Case Study 1: Rob	115

Coparent Biography	115
Analysis	116
6.3 Case Study 2: Mark	118
Coparent Biography	118
Analysis	119
6.4 Case Study 3: Joe	120
Coparent Biography	120
Analysis	121
6.5 Case Study 4: John	122
Coparent Biography	122
Analysis	123
6.6 Case Study 5: Steve	125
Coparent Biography	125
Analysis	126
6.7 Case Study 6: Jake	128
Coparent Biography	128
Analysis	130
6.8 Case Study 7: David	131
Coparent Biography	131
Analysis	132
6.9 Concluding Discussion	133
Chapter Seven - Findings and Recommendations	135
7.1 Introduction	135
7.2 Terminology	135
7.2.2 Recommendations	136
7.3 Abandoning terms not conducive to shared parenting	136
7.3.1 Recommendation	137
7.4 Gender Equalising Paid and Unpaid Child Care	137
7.4.1 Recommendation	137
7.5 Providing For Automatic Guardianship for Unmarried Fathers	137
7.5.1 Recommendations	138
7.6 The Evidence in Support of Shared Parenting	138
7.6.1 Recommendation	139
7.7 The Importance of Early Support for Unmarried Parents to Facilitate Shared Parenting	139
7.7.1 Recommendations	140
7.8 Accessible Community Based Supports for Shared Parenting	141
7.8.1 Recommendation	141

7.9 Overall Policy Approach to Support Shared Parenting	141
7.9.1 Recommendation	142
7.10 Specific Policies Needed To Support Shared Parenting	142
7.10.1 Recommendations for Government Departments	142
7.11 A Shared Parenting Research Led Service Agenda	143
7.11.1 Recommendations	143
7.12 Need for More Information and Father Inclusive Service Provision	144
7.12.2 Recommendations	144
7.13 Alternative Dispute Resolution	145
7.13.1 Recommendation	145
7.14 Services for Unmarried Fathers	145
7.14.1 Recommendation	146
References.....	147
Appendices.....	168
Appendix 1: Interview Schedule	168
Appendix 2: Information Sheets, Consent Forms and Posters	171
Appendix 3: Shared/Coparenting Measures	184
Resource List	187

Chapter One - Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

The social exclusion experienced by unmarried fathers in Ireland has been documented (Corcoran, 2005; O' Connor, 2009). They constitute a neglected group in the Irish and international shared parenting literature, relative to divorced and separated parents. Legal and social services in countries tend to be better prepared and equipped to support shared parenting in families transitioning from divorce and separation than in unmarried families (Maldonado, 2014; Pearson, 2015). There is a significant prevalence of unmarried families in Ireland. According to the organisation One Family (2017a), 1 in 4 families with children in Ireland is a one-parent family with 218,817 family units with children headed by a lone parent, who are mostly mothers. Researchers consistently point to the benefits of father involvement in their children's lives (Buckley and Schoppe-Sullivan, 2010; Lamb, 2010). Attitudes to family formation conducted in Ireland indicate that persons are very supportive of mothers and fathers sharing parenting and are also positively disposed to working lives and policy measures, which are conducive to shared parenting arrangements (Fine-Davis, 2011). Yet, despite increases in father involvement over time "fathers continue to spend significantly less time than mothers caring for their children" (Buckley and Schoppe-Sullivan, 2010, p. 414).

The Irish national census does not capture data on the number of families who are sharing parenting in Ireland (One Family, 2017b). The only sources available in the Irish context come from the first wave on the child cohort (nine-year-olds) in the Growing up in Ireland Study (GUI) (Fahey *et al* 2012) and the *National Shared Parenting Survey* conducted by One Family (2017b). The GUI data shows that shared parenting is the least common in never-married lone parent families (26%) than other family forms and that this cohort also has the lowest frequency of contact overall (Fahey *et al* 2012). The lesser likelihood of unmarried parents sharing parenting in other country contexts has also been acknowledged (Maldonado, 2014). Also noted, based on analysis of the GUI data, is the evidence showing unmarried father disengagement from children in Ireland with the passing of time (Corrigan, 2014). The poverty risk and the adverse outcomes experienced by children in some lone parent families could be alleviated if they had better access to good shared parenting arrangements that are supported

and sustained. Indeed there is Irish evidence showing a positive correlation between shared parenting and children's physical development by the age of three years (Corrigan, 2014).

Unfortunately in Ireland shared parenting has also been given little research attention. A study of post-separation parenting published in 2011 (Mahon and Moore, 2011) concentrated on family law cases which involved married couples undergoing separation and divorce. The first national survey of shared parenting was only undertaken in 2016 (One Family, 2017b). It documented the shared parenting successes as well as the many and varied challenges which make shared parenting difficult for parents who responded. It also made a significant number of recommendations for services, family law courts and Government policy.

A recent qualitative study was undertaken with a small number of diverse fathers using supervised access programmes to have relationships with their children (Kiely *et al* 2017). Problems identified and particularly pertinent to this research related to parental gatekeeping and inter-parental conflict, concerns about legal discrimination as well as legal costs associated with family law courts and access services, fears that restricted access arrangements which changed little over time were too minimal to support fathers to be fathers and to do fathering in meaningful ways (Kiely *et al* 2017). Fathers also identified limited income and poor accommodation as well as other adverse experiences, which militated against perceptions of them as viable fathers (Kiely *et al* 2017). Most believed that decision makers and professionals held views they were less needed by children than their mothers (Kiely *et al* 2017).

1.2 Treoir

This study has been commissioned by Treoir, formally known as the Federation for Unmarried Parents and their Children. Unmarried parents face particular challenges and may require further information in order to address these challenges, particularly since there is legal differentiation between married and unmarried parents. Treoir operates a National Specialist Information and Referral Service that provides information “on all aspects of unmarried parenthood” (Treoir, 2017, p. 2). This aim of “providing clear and accurate information” (Treoir, 2017, p. 3) has been the focus of Treoir since its foundation in 1976.

The Specialist Information and Referral Service is free and logged a total of 3,082 calls in 2017, with the queries amounting to 6,315 (Treoir, 2017). Unmarried mothers and fathers made

up 1,138 (38%) and 950 (31%) of the calls respectively (Treoir, 2017). Out of 4,592 legal queries made to Treoir in 2017, a total of 1,193 (26%) of these queries related to Guardianship while 998 (22%) related to Access. As Treoir (2017) point out, the lack of automatic guardianship afforded to unmarried fathers provides a feasible explanation as to why this is the most important query. As part of the provision of information, Treoir also distributes its Information Pack (see Treoir, 2018) and a wide variety of leaflets relating to specific aspects of unmarried parenting such as Guardianship, Maintenance and Access and Custody to key services such as maternity hospitals and Citizens Information Centre. Each of these publications are available on Treoir's newly updated website. Information provision is also provided through outreach information workshops. These take place in different counties to groups of unmarried parents and cover a variety of topics such as the legal rights and responsibilities of unmarried parents and issues pertaining to social welfare. Treoir provided 27 of these workshops to 412 people which included both professionals and parents in 2017 (Treoir, 2017).

Treoir also advocates on behalf of unmarried parents for legislation and policy beneficial to non-marital families and has done so since its inception. For example, Treoir sought the abolition of the concept of 'illegitimacy', which was abolished in the Status of Children Act 1987. Treoir has also advocated on behalf of unmarried fathers as they experience difficult challenges and discrimination as unmarried parents, such as a lack of automatic guardianship rights. As part of Treoir's advocacy and research into the situation of unmarried fathers, Treoir have commissioned this research study to provide greater understanding of the barriers that unmarried fathers experience in being involved in their children's lives and in sharing parenting.

1.3 Research Aims

The discrepancy between the ideal of increasing father involvement and fathers' desire to be involved in their children's lives and the reality, has "fuelled fathering research" (Buckley and Schoppe-Sullivan, 2010, p. 414). This research, commissioned by Treoir, aimed to explore the barriers to unmarried fathers' involvement in the sharing of parenting. It has five overall aims:

- To review the literature relating the broader Irish context of shared parenting.

- To review the literature on shared parenting in unmarried families, with a particular focus on the impediments to unmarried fathers' involvement in shared parenting.
- To identify, describe and review shared parenting interventions in the international context designed to facilitate / support unmarried fathers and evaluations of these interventions.
- To identify interventions and projects in Ireland that are relevant to the aims of the research and to review any evaluations of these.
- To interview a number of unmarried fathers to explore to their day to day experiences of sharing parenting or seeking to share parenting.

Shared parenting is not easily defined but for the purpose of the research shared parenting was conceptualised in broad terms as referring to substantive (though not necessarily equal) shared responsibility and care of children by parents and which requires parent to support each other and work together in the best interests of their child(ren) regardless of the status of their own relationships to each other. The term 'shared parenting' is also considered in the next chapter.

1.4 Methodology

The study involved a national and international review of the literature, desk based research to review legislation, policies and practice based interventions as well as face to face / telephone interviews with a small number of unmarried fathers. The research process is documented in the following sections in greater detail.

1.4.1 Literature Review

The focus of one strand of the literature review will be on unmarried fathers, unmarried fathers' participation in parenting and the related barriers and opportunities as documented in the literature. The second strand focuses on shared/coparenting interventions and programmes internationally. The literature gathered from a previous study led by Elizabeth Kiely (Kiely *et al* 2017) was searched for any studies that were deemed to be relevant to this research. In addition, a systematic search was conducted using two databases (EBSCO Academic Search Complete and JSTOR) within the period 2009 to 2018. These databases were first searched using the search terms (Fathers OR dad) AND (unmarried) AND (coparenting) OR (coparenting OR shared parenting). They were also searched using the search terms (coparenting

OR co-parenting OR shared parenting) AND (intervention OR workshop OR programme) AND (unmarried OR unmarried couple). The search was also supplemented by a google search to source useful websites and the grey literature such as practice guides, policy briefs on the subject of shared parenting, shared parenting projects and evaluations of shared parenting projects in other contexts and in Ireland. Literature published outside of these time period was also reviewed if it was deemed highly relevant for the study.

1.4.2 Desk Based Research

In order to ascertain interventions in the Irish context relevant for this study, the research team searched the Benefacts database of Irish nonprofits, Rian, the Irish Research eLibrary, Facebook, Aactivelink and the Barnardos database of parenting courses using search words such as ‘coparenting Ireland’ and ‘shared parenting’.¹

Various organisations and agencies were also contacted either through email, telephone or both in order to ask for clarity on the services they provide and/or to ascertain their knowledge of any other services and organisations which could be of help to the research. Three threads were also created on the RollarCoaster.ie website enquiring as to parents’ knowledge of child contact/family access centres and any support groups for unmarried parents.

1.4.3 Primary Research

Qualitative interviews were conducted with unmarried fathers. A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 1) was generated, predominantly informed by the aim of the study and the literature informing the study. The interviews were designed in a way to allow space to fathers to talk about their understanding of shared parenting, their thoughts and feelings about sharing parenting as unmarried fathers and their ideas as to what would help them in their

¹ Additional search terms used include ‘Contact centre’; ‘child contact centre’; ‘family centre’; ‘coparenting’; ‘co-parenting’; ‘coparenting Ireland’; ‘co-parenting Ireland’; ‘shared parenting’; ‘shared parenting Ireland’; ‘unmarried parenting’; ‘unmarried parenting Ireland’; ‘unmarried parents’; ‘unmarried parents Ireland’; ‘unmarried fathers’; ‘unmarried fathers Ireland’; ‘parenting programme’; ‘parenting programme Ireland’; ‘dad parenting programme’; ‘dad fathering programme’; ‘father parenting programme’; ‘father parenting workshop’.

endeavours as parents sharing care at the time of interview or seeking to share care into the future.

1.4.3.1 Interviewee Recruitment

Callers to Treoir seeking information and assistance, who identified themselves as unmarried fathers involved in the care of their children were informed of the research and invited to participate. Details of the research was also posted on the Treoir Facebook page and fathers interested were informed of the researchers' contact details. Out of a total of 16 fathers, who expressed an interest and provided their contact details, 8 fathers were actually interviewed in June and July 2018 and one father withdrew from the research after interview. Of the fathers who did not participate, five did not respond to the researchers' texts and calls. Two fathers said they did not want to proceed with the interview while one father was too busy to proceed. The fathers interviewed were quite diverse in age, status, number of children, residential location in Ireland, engagement in childcare and level of conflict in the relationships they had with ex-partners. All of the fathers who agreed to be interviewed were Irish, involved and engaged in the direct care of their children and their relationships with their children's mothers had either finished or in one instance was suspended. Two fathers had been involved in the family courts system to formalise their situations with regard to their children while the five other fathers had established their own parenting arrangements with the mothers of their children without outside interference. The fathers interviewed comprise a small unrepresentative sample of unmarried fathers in Ireland, yet they challenge narrow stereotypes of unmarried fathers as either heroes or villains. We have not sought to assess the truth of their accounts by interviewing ex-partners or significant others, rather we wished to access the views and experiences of unmarried fathers, who care for their children or desire to care for them. We are aware that there are fathers, who actively choose to have no relationship/involvement with their children and where there are no barriers to involvement. However, the interviews in this report do not include such fathers. We believe their narratives provide a rich understanding of the day to day experiences and feelings of a group, who generally lack visibility in Irish society. We also think that their views as to what factors in Irish society both help and hinders them in sharing parenting are worth knowing.

1.4.3.2 Data Transcription and Analysis

All the interview material was transcribed. The interviews are presented and analysed as ‘case studies’. They were presented in this way because they provide insight into the diversity of human experiences that may not be done justice by our normative expectations of narrow identity categories. They also provide contextualised knowledge facilitating ongoing critical exchange between the real life experiences of unmarried fathers caring for children and the laws, policies and practices which shape their experiences. The narrative case study approach also permitted changes in couple relationships and parenting arrangements over time to be captured to a greater extent than is the case in quantitative survey based research approaches. Each interview in its raw form was used to generate a condensed story of each unmarried father’s story of their experiences to date as they pertain to sharing parenting. In this context there is both a reconstruction and a ‘double interpretation’ (Bryman, 2012) taking place – an interpretation of the interviewees’ interpretation and so it is possible that interviewees’ accounts are represented in ways not of their choosing. Verbatim quotations taken from interviews are presented in italics in what are largely reconstructed and condensed accounts. What follows each narrative is a brief analysis of the instructive or significant features. Further analysis involved drawing out some commonality of thinking and experience across the interviewee accounts to contextualise the interview material with reference to the knowledge and insight gleaned from secondary research conducted. Despite the limited sample of 7 fathers interviewed, the interview data is rich and could be subject to forms of analysis, which are beyond the scope of this report.

1.4.3.3 Discussion of Ethical Issues

The research carried out was reviewed and approved by the University College Cork Social Research Ethics Committee. All interviewees were provided with information sheets and consent forms (See Appendix 2) and persons’ agreement to be interviewed was also recorded. A time limited withdrawal facility was provided and was utilised by one father, who withdrew from the research after interview. Pseudonyms are used for all research participants in this report and for their children if they were identified by name. Some descriptive details deemed to compromise persons’ identities is slightly altered to protect interviewees’ identities. A number of fathers interviewed were keen to be kept informed of the progress of the research and the research team was agreeable to doing this.

1.5 Structure of the Report

The report is divided into six chapters. Chapter Two comprises the literature review which focuses on the international and national peer reviewed studies on shared parenting and coparenting generally with a focus on unmarried parents and fathers. It also reviews the literature on barriers to unmarried fathers' in shared parenting / coparenting. Chapter three reviews the literature on shared parenting /coparenting interventions and assesses what is known based on evidence gathered as to the outcomes of these interventions. Chapter Four focuses on the Irish context and reviews the relevant studies in relation to the demographics of shared parenting and unmarried families. It also outlines and explores some of the key legal issues relating to unmarried fathers and shared parenting. Chapter Five explores Irish interventions that are relevant to the aims of this study. The chapter provides a general overview of the policy and legal context for parenting and family support in the Irish context. It then proceeds to explore various forms and types of specific interventions, programmes and parenting and family support services. Chapter Six draws upon the primary research and presents the analysis in case study form. The biography of each fathers' situation is described followed a by a brief analysis and a more extensive overall analysis. Finally findings and recommendations are elaborated in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Two - Non-Marital Families, Coparenting and Father Involvement in Children's Lives: A Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on how 'shared parenting' or 'coparenting' is understood and conceptualised and to review studies which draw attention to the barriers and facilitators in non-resident unmarried fathers' involvement in their children's lives. The research literature on which this chapter is primarily based is international in scope but limited to English language studies published predominantly in the last five years, of which the majority are undertaken in the US context.

As Goldberg and Carlson (2015) point out, although coparenting was first identified as an important topic due to rising divorce rates in the 1970s, only a handful of studies have focused on the nature and implications of coparenting among unmarried parents, particularly after their relationship ends. In the United States context for example, Maldonado (2014) points out that the Association of Family and Conciliation Court's *Final Report* (Kline Pruett and DiFonzo, 2014) regarding children's meaningful relationships with both parents focuses on divorcing families. Thus, it "inadvertently ignores challenges that are disproportionately faced by millions of never-married, low income, and minority parents" (Maldonado, 2014, p. 636). Furthermore, Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz (2010) note that the majority of research in relation to coparenting has focused on two parent families, divorced couples and white middle-class families. In contrast, "research on coparenting from the perspective of fathers is sparse in the coparenting literature" (Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz, 2010, p. 32).

Much of the studies currently available on unmarried parents has used data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study in the US. In this chapter, most of the empirical studies cited also come from data from the Fragile Families Study (FFS). The term 'fragile family', typically used in the USA, is used to describe lower-income couples who have children outside of marriage. The FFS study was carried out in 20 large U.S. cities and follows a cohort of children born between 1998 and 2000 in order to understand and learn more about the circumstances of unmarried parents and their children in the early years of their children's lives (Waller and Swisher, 2006). The total sample includes 4,898 births, 3,712 of which occurred to unmarried parents and 1,186 occurred to a comparison sample of married parents. The

mothers and fathers who made up the 3,712 unmarried couples were interviewed upon the birth of their children and again one, three, five and nine years later (Osborne and Ankrum, 2015).

2.2 What is ‘Shared Parenting’? – Mapping the Conceptual Terrain

2.2.1 What is shared parenting?

The term ‘shared parenting’ has been understood and conceptualised differently by numerous charities and researchers (Feinberg, 2003; Van Egeren and Hawkins, 2004). It has also been broadly (and not always) viewed as synonymous with ‘coparenting’ (Gingerbread, 2011, p. 14; Van Egeren and Hawkins, 2004, p. 165), but researchers have noted the lack of consensus over “what coparenting actually *is*” (Feinberg, 2003; Van Egeren and Hawkins, 2004, p. 165) [their emphasis]. The broader discussion around both ‘shared parenting’ and ‘coparenting’ has been characterised by additional terms such as ‘parenting partnership’ (Floyd and Zmich, 1991) and ‘parenting alliance’ (Cohen and Wissman, 1984)

Researchers (Feinberg, 2003; Van Egeren and Hawkins, 2004) have attempted to define and conceptualise coparenting by examining what dimensions may make up the components of coparenting and have developed numerous concepts and measurement instruments with which to measure coparenting (see Appendix 3). One of the most widely used measures for example, is the ‘Parenting Alliance Measure’ (PAM). The PAM is a 20-item self-report instrument used with parents of children aging from 1 to 19 years. All items are measured on a 5-point rating scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting a stronger coparental alliance (Camisasca, Miragoli, Caravita and Blasio, 2015). The ‘parenting alliance’ describes “the part of the marital relationship that is concerned with parenthood and child rearing” (Abidin and Brunner, 1995, p. 31). According to Weissman & Cohen (1985, p. 25, cited in Abidin and Brunner, 1995) a strong parental alliance is achieved when parents invest in the child, value the other parent’s involvement with the child, respect the other parent’s judgements and desire to communicate with the other parent.

For McHale and Kuersten-Hogan (2007, p. 5), the term ‘shared parenting’ is used by contemporary family researchers who are interested in questions regarding “who does what in the family-the specific arrangements families work out to decide who is responsible for handling what chores and responsibilities with children”. Similarly, Deutsch (2001) uses the term in relation to discussing ‘equally shared parenting’ which describes how the ‘who does

what' of shared parenting should not be differentiated by gender. Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) also conceptualise 'shared parenting' in this way, but argue that 'shared parenting' is a lower level concept in that it is the last of four *dimensions* or components that relate to the overall concept of 'coparenting'. In other words, they see 'shared parenting' as one aspect of 'coparenting' and define 'shared parenting' as "the degree to which one or the other parent is responsible for limit-setting and each partner's sense of fairness about the way responsibilities are divided" (Van Egeren and Hawkins, 2004, p. 169).

Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) propose that the other three dimensions of coparenting involve 'coparenting solidarity', 'coparenting support' and 'undermining coparenting'. 'Coparenting solidarity' involves "expressions of warmth and positive emotion during interaction with or about the child" (Van Egeren and Hawkins, 2004, p. 168). 'Coparenting support' involves "strategies and actions that support and extend the partner's efforts to accomplish parenting goals, or the parent's perceptions of support in his/her efforts to accomplish parenting goals (Van Egeren and Hawkins, 2004, p. 169). Finally 'undermining coparenting' thwarts the goals of the other parent and can take place when the other parent is absent from the three way interaction, "such as when the parent makes a disparaging comment about the partner to the child" (Van Egeren and Hawkins, 2004, p. 169). Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) conception is thus, 'methodologically driven'. Feinberg's (2003) conception on the other hand is useful for clinical practice (Van Egeren, and Hawkins, 2004). Feinberg (2003) also argues that coparenting involves four components. The first is the 'childrearing agreement' which refers to the degree to which parents agree on child-related topics such as acceptable behaviour and moral values. The second involves the 'division of labour', related to the division of tasks and duties between the coparents in relation to the child. This is similar to Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) conception of 'shared parenting'. The third component in Feinberg's (2003) conceptual framework relates to 'support-undermining' which is similar to the first three components of Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) framework. Finally Feinberg (2003) sees 'joint family management' as the final component of coparenting and involves how the family and extended family is managed as a whole.

There are other dimensions of shared/coparenting which mediate the conceptual boundaries of shared/coparenting. The UK based charity, *Families Need Fathers* (2018) for example, relates the term 'shared parenting' to the how both parents manage parenting "following separation or divorce". The charity defines 'shared parenting' as a process where "children are brought up with the love and guidance of both parents" and prefers this term over others because it "makes

it explicit that both parents must share this role” (*Families Need Fathers*, 2018). In constructing a working definition of shared parenting that is inclusive and sensitive to a variety of shared parenting relationships, the Irish based organisation *One Family* (2017b, p. 2) conceptualises shared parenting as a state where “two parents, who are no longer in an intimate relationship, continue to parent their child together in a parenting relationship.” What is different in One Family’s definition is that it does not relate shared parenting solely to the dissolution of a marriage, but of an ‘intimate relationship’ hence, the definition encompasses some unmarried parents. What is similar on the other hand, is the focus on both the ‘dissolution’ of some form of an ‘intimate relationship’.

It has been suggested however, that ‘shared parenting’ does not necessarily begin following the dissolution of a marital or (as in One Families conception) an ‘intimate’ (One Family, 2017b) relationship. Rather, coparenting has been conceptualised as a ‘distinct’ (Hohmann-Marriott, 2011; Waller, 2012, p. 326) concept since it has been shown to be an independent and distinct aspect of a marital, romantic or other relationship (Varga *et al* 2017; Waller, 2012; Weiner, 2016). This is because although better quality marital relationships are predictive of more supportive and cooperative coparenting, evidence shows that couples with a low marital quality can still work to develop a supportive coparenting relationship (Hohmann-Marriott, 2011). Such distinctions and attempts at conceptualising the differences between parents’ romantic and coparenting relationships are important because they inform intervention programmes (see McHale *et al* 2012), particularly when they help couples with relationships.

The question of ‘what is shared parenting?’ also goes beyond the marital and romantic relationship of the mother and father. Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) distinguish between the internal and external structure of coparenting. The external structure of coparenting encompasses questions relating to the ‘who’, ‘when’ and ‘where’ of coparenting. In terms of the question of ‘who’ can be coparents, Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004, p. 166) propose that “a coparenting relationship exists when at least two individuals are expected by mutual agreement or societal norms to have conjoint responsibility for a particular child’s well-being”. This is consistent with Feinberg’s (2003, p. 97) argument that parenting should be seen as “a function that involves meeting children’s needs for physical and emotional sustenance, protection, and development”. In other words, coparents need not necessarily be the biological parents as some definitions and conceptualisations imply (e.g. Varga *et al* 2017), but other “important coparents” (Feinberg, 2003, p. 97). This is an important point given research which

shows that other people can mediate the coparenting dynamics of the biological parents (Gaskin-Butler *et al* 2012).

For Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004), the ‘when’ of coparenting begins explicitly at birth, but the process of discussing coparenting begins before birth and is predictive of subsequent coparenting. This is consistent with Weiner’s (2016) more ambitious view of coparenting. She argues for a new legal and societal discourse that recognises what she has termed the ‘parenting partnership’. This new discourse and conception would recognise that coparenting is not something that needs to be negotiated after the ending of a relationship, but something which partners need to think about and work out “even before conception” (Weiner, 2016, p. 1577). Finally, in terms of the question of ‘where’ coparenting, Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) argue that coparenting can take place both in couple interactions in the presence of the child and within a single parent-child interaction. This last point is important as the single parent-child interaction can both support and undermine the other parent’s coparenting practice.

2.2.2 What Should ‘Shared Parenting’/‘Coparenting’ Involve’?

Embedded within both the empirical and conceptual discussion regarding what constitutes ‘shared parenting’ or ‘coparenting’ is an emphasis on the importance of coparents’ maintaining a ‘cooperative coparenting’ relationship (Feinberg, 2003; Van Egeren and Hawkins, 2004). Although ‘shared parenting’/‘coparenting’ may, on the most basic level refer to ‘shared responsibility’ (Feinberg, 2003) and mutual involvement in the child’s life, regardless of the actual time or the (lack of) support or coordination between coparents (Feinberg, 2003), the emphasis on the ideal of ‘shared parenting’/‘coparenting’ further complicates the definition of the terms. In other words, although both parents may ‘share custody’ or be actively involved in the child’s life, they may not necessarily be ‘coparenting’ if their involvement is characterised by high conflict interactions and thus, they may be engaged in ‘disengaged’/‘parallel’ parenting (Waller, 2012).

Research on divorced parents has consistently found that adverse child adjustment from divorce does not stem from “the divorce per se” (Feinberg, 2003, p. 100) but other factors associated with divorce, such as conflict. Related to the idea that coparenting is a distinctive concept, Feinberg (2003, p. 100) highlights research which shows that “*Coparent* relations are a stronger influence on parenting and child adjustment than are other aspects of the couple relationship” [our emphasis]. Negative or conflictual coparent relations have been shown to be

associated with negative child outcomes. A ‘conflicted’ coparenting style is characterised by frequent arguments between parents. Drawing upon data from qualitative interviews with unmarried mothers and fathers from the Fragile Families Study, Waller (2012, p. 330) found that most parents reported that the most common conflict resolved around “fathers’ time with and financial support of the children, inconsistent parenting rules and standards, and parenting behaviors that put children at risk” (Waller, 2012, p. 330). Similar to the ‘disengaged’ style, ‘conflicted coparenting’ was found to be more evident among parents who had separated or who did not develop a long term romantic relationship (Waller, 2012).

In terms of the specific negative effects of coparental conflict, the actual “mechanisms linking couple conflict with child (mal)adjustment are probably multiple and complex” (Feinberg, 2003, p. 108) and there is little need for the purposes of this literature review to explore psychological interpretations of why conflict is associated with negative outcomes for children. What is important to note is that researchers have noted the differences between *types* of interparental conflict and the *effects* of this conflict. In terms of the types of conflict, there is conflict that children directly observe between parents and conflict they do not directly observe or hear between parents (Feinberg, 2003). Children’s direct observing of interparental conflict is associated with both internalizing and externalizing disorders (Feinberg, 2003; Warshak, 2017). Thus, it is argued that “parents should deliberately avoid exposing children to witnessing and hearing conflict between parents (Feinberg, 2003; Warshak, 2017). Feinberg (2003, p. 108) does note however, that this ‘strategic avoidance’ of parental conflict should not be confused and conflated with a “withdrawal from interaction generally”, but only from highly conflictual topics. Such withdrawal from general interaction between parents may lead to ‘disengaged’ or ‘parallel parenting’ (Waller, 2012) which can be problematic for some children (Weiner, 2016). In terms of conflict between parents that children do not directly observe or hear, the impact is still present, but is indirect, through the way in which the stress generated by this conflict negatively influences the quality of the single parent-child interaction (Camisasca *et al* 2015).

In contrast to a ‘conflicted’ coparenting style, it is argued that the ideal of shared parenting should comprise the formation and maintenance of what has been called a ‘cooperative coparenting’ style (Waller, 2012, p. 328). A ‘cooperative coparenting’ style is characterised by both parents “actively supporting each other’s parenting efforts” (Waller, 2012, p. 328). Some of the ‘hallmarks’ of this style include maintaining consistent parenting rules, the expression of solidarity between coparents, “a willingness to share the parenting responsibilities, and a desire to avoid arguments and undermining behaviour” (Waller, 2012, p. 329). Parents who are

engaged in this style also reported doing things with the child together, rather than individually with the child (Waller, 2012).

One of the benefits of cooperative coparenting is that it can boost the other parent's sense of parental self-esteem and efficacy. The concept of self-efficacy holds that "the self-perception that one possesses the internal ability to manage difficult external conditions" (Feinberg, 2003). Since coparenting can support parental self-esteem, parents can experience improvements in their interactions with their children. 'Cooperative coparenting' is also relevant for the child's social competence, self-regulation, behavioural inhibition, attachment and externalising and internalising behaviours (Camisasca, Miragoli, Caravita and Blasio, 2015).

2.3 Non-Marital Families

The latter half of the 20th century saw a dramatic rise in the number of nonmarital childbirths in many contexts. Osborne and Ankrum (2015) point out that over the past several decades, both the number of children born outside of marriage and the number of cohabiting unmarried couples has been increasing. Researchers have attempted to understand the dynamics and impacts of this new family formation (McLanahan and Beck, 2010). Osborne and Ankrum (2015) note that although the structure of unmarried families is different from the traditional married American family, they share similar interests and aspirations, such as hoping to experience a maturity in their relationships with the intention of getting married and wanting to be involved in their children's lives.

For McLanahan (2009, p. 127), the evidence shows that nonmarital childbearing is associated with a greater risk of poor parenting and thus, lowers children's life chances since "unmarried mothers experience less income growth, more mental health problems, and more maternal stress than married mothers." This stress is associated with partnership instability and multipartner fertility. Partnership instability increases maternal stress and with multipartner fertility, mothers report that the stress is attributable to their difficulties in getting along with the fathers and thus, is productive of less cooperation in sharing the parenting of their children (McLanahan, 2009).

Significantly for McLanahan (2009, p. 116), the data shows that "many unmarried parents are poor *prior* to having a child" in the US. McLanahan (2009) takes the mental health and health behaviour data from the FFS as indicative of parents' social-emotional skills. Compared to

married parents, unmarried parents are younger, have a higher prevalence of ‘multipartnered fertility’, are disproportionately African American and Hispanic, have far lower rates of high school completion and report lower earnings and higher poverty rates.

Data from the FFS shows that in comparison to married parents, unmarried parents report high levels of depression, problems with alcohol and “unmarried fathers are twice as likely to have problems with drug use, three times as likely to be violent, and nearly seven times as likely to have been incarcerated in the past” (McLanahan, 2009, p. 116). The FFS found that “All unmarried fathers had relatively low levels of education, employment, and earnings. Many of them had spent time in jail” and “less than 10% reported problems with drugs” (Tach *et al* 2010, p. 188). The FFS study also shows that forty-two percent of unmarried fathers lived with both parents at age 15, compared to sixty-nine percent of married fathers (Osborne and Ankrum, 2015).

In terms of the structure of unmarried parents’ relationships at birth, the FFS shows that 32% are romantically involved, and half of parents are cohabiting (McLanahan, 2009). Parents also generally describe their relationships as supportive and have positive views about marriage in general and in their future prospects of staying romantically involved and marrying (McLanahan, 2009; Tach *et al* 2010). As Osborne and Ankrum (2015, p. 222) point out however, this wish “often fails to materialize” for unmarried families, who experience challenges “that set them apart from traditional married-parent families”, one of which is that many unmarried parents break up shortly after their children are born. By the time a child reaches five years, only 22% report marrying (McLanahan, 2009) and the FFS show that 60% of these nonmarital relationships have dissolved by the time a child is five years old (Tach *et al* 2010) with the data overall pointing to ‘high partnership instability’ amongst fragile families (McLanahan, 2009).

According to Tach *et al* (2010), unmarried fathers have been constructed as predominantly uninvolved parents, but Tach *et al* (2010) point to research published in the 1990s in the US context, which shows that this image is an unfair one in relation to young children in particular. The Fragile Families data shows that unmarried fathers are highly involved at birth and both parents desire this involvement to continue (Tach *et al* 2010). Five years later however, amongst non-resident fathers, one third have no contact and 43 percent report seeing their child 12 days per month. Osborne and Ankrum (2015) point out that the signs of these instabilities

can be seen during pregnancy, as fathers who are not involved during the prenatal period or who do not attend the birth, have been shown to be less likely to be involved later.

Gaskin-Butler *et al* (2012) conducted telephone interviews with 45 unmarried first-time African American mothers to explore their expectations regarding the form they expected a coparenting system to take following the birth of their child. The results show that mothers expected a variety of coparenting systems to develop. The key findings are that 36% (16) of mothers cited the father as the expected primary coparent but interestingly, these same mothers also named another individual as an expected coparent such as grandmothers and other relatives. Forty seven percent (21) of the women interviewed reported that they expected that the grandmother would act as a primary coparent with half (11 of 21) of these women also expecting father involvement. In total 67% of mothers interviewed expected father coparenting involvement in an ongoing way and 80% expected the same for grandmothers. In sum, a notable finding was that no woman anticipated a mother-father only coparenting system (Gaskin-Butler *et al* 2012, p. 367).

In terms of the qualitative findings, Gaskin-Butler *et al* (2012) identified four types of expectations regarding the form mothers expected the coparenting system to take. While some mothers expressed optimism regarding coparenting, others expressed anxiety over the coparenting relationship between the father and grandmother. Relatedly, for Gaskin-Butler *et al* (2012), one concerning category was of women, who believed that involvement of others in the baby's life would have negative ramifications. This related to history with inter-partner violence with the baby's father, but also a concern about potential conflict between the baby's father and other coparents. Gaskin-Butler *et al* (2012) also did not find any evidence of possible 'maternal gatekeeping' amongst the mothers interviewed. Instead, 60% of the women expressed confidence that the father would be involved with the baby and 90% responded 'yes' when asked if the father would be involved with the baby.

Although these findings suggest the possible need to take on board the impact or influence of other coparents in the development of parenting plans and in interventions which may focus on developing positive coparenting skills, there are key limitations to this study. These relate to the sample size (which limits generalizability) and the demographic (African American mothers) of the sample. Gaskin-Butler *et al* (2012) also note that the sample may constitute an over-sampling of less residually transitory women, since the women interviewed were those who were receiving community prenatal care in a historically black neighbourhood and who

maintained a strong kin and non-kin connection in their community. Nevertheless, the article raises interesting avenues both for thinking about possible issues relating to coparenting systems and suggests that similar research needs to be undertaken for different groups of unmarried mothers.

2.4 Father Involvement in Children's Lives

2.4.1 What Can And Should Fathers Do?

The question of what constitutes father involvement is important as both research studies and evaluations of specific interventions have shown that expectations regarding what fathers can and should do, mediates the extent to which fathers are involved in their children's lives. Futris and Schoppe-Sullivan (2007, p. 259) note that "Father involvement is a multidimensional construct". Researchers have used three constructs that make up the elements of what encompasses 'father involvement'. 'Accessibility' refers to the amount of time a father spends with his children. 'Accessibility' has been the subject of debate however. Writing on shared care in the Australian context for example, Smyth (2009) points out that the issue of coparenting time has been 'mathematised', whereby there has been an emphasis on how much units of time children may spend with both parents. For Smyth (2005, cited in Smyth, 2009), providing both parents agree, in terms of time scheduling it is beneficial for both parents to be able to both spend time with children in a range of contexts and to have unstructured and spontaneous time together. For Smyth (2009, p. 42) this "preoccupation with time" neglects research which shows that there is no clear linear relationship between the amount of time spent and children's positive developmental outcomes. Smyth and Chisholm (2017) have also argued that the preoccupation with equal time are at risk of encouraging parental feelings of entitlement and not behavioural outcomes for children.

'Engagement' refers to activities fathers may undertake which cultivate a social and emotional bond with their child (Osborne and Ankrum, 2015). Futris and Schoppe-Sullivan (2007, p. 259) note that this face to face engagement, rather than 'accessibility', "confers greater benefits to children of both resident and non-resident fathers" such as providing the foundation for a longer term and enduring father-child relationship. Finally, 'responsibility' denotes the father's role in caring for a child's needs and welfare (Osborne and Ankrum, 2015).

Related to what can constitute father involvement, there have also been questions about how father involvement and ‘shared parenting’/‘coparenting’ should be organised and negotiated and there have also been normative questions as to what involvement should entail. In terms of the question of ‘how’ father involvement is negotiated, although the ‘need for a court order’ may provide the right for contact, it does “not eliminate the advantages that fathers receive when the parents can *agree* to share custody” (Weiner, 2016, p. 1565) [our emphasis]. The imposition of equal custody, by splitting the time between parents can lead to an inflation of antagonism and conflict that can harm the child. McHale (2010, cited in Weiner, 2016) has noted for example, that high levels of father engagement can sometimes ‘catalyze’ problematic coparental dynamics. In fact, parents who “negotiate” or are “given an unequal custody award” (Weiner, 2016, p. 1570) have lower levels of conflict than those for whom equally shared custody is imposed.

Maldonado (2014) notes that although the Association of Family and Conciliation Court’s *Final Report* (Kline Pruett and DiFonzo, 2014) is correct to argue against the automatic presumption of shared parenting time due to a multiplicity of factors, this should not mean that this should always be the case. This may endorse the ‘the status quo’, resulting in situations whereby the child will primarily live with the mother. Yet, the division of parenting time and children’s overnight stays (called ‘overnights’) have been the subject of much discussion, debate and controversy. Warshack (2017) for example reflects upon the controversy over how some social science research supposedly shows that children’s development is harmed if they spend roughly equal amounts of time with both parents and/or if they spend ‘overnights’ in both parent’s homes. The issue predominantly relates to attachment theory and its interrelationship with gender. Warshak (2017, p. 179) points out that one of the gendered beliefs pertaining to parenting has been the “idea that mothers, by nature, are uniquely suited to raise young children” and that a child’s separation from their mother causes psychological damage. Consequently, it has been posited that children should not generally have too many ‘overnights’ with their fathers. This “tender years doctrine” has “dominated child custody decisions throughout the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth” (Warshak, 2017, p. 179). Social science research from the 1970s to the 1990s deconstructed these ideas and the period 2001 to 2011 in particular saw a significant waning of these ideas in courts, among health professionals and parents. In a 2011 special issue of the *Family Court Review* journal however, the growing acceptance of the need for young children to develop quality relationships with both parents was once again questioned. The special issue was guest edited

by Jennifer McIntosh, who argued that “joint physical custody for children under the age of four” (Warshak, 2017, p. 182) should be discouraged. Instead, children under the age of four should spend more time and ‘overnights’ with a primary caregiver. In a Position Paper for the Australian Psychological Society, McIntosh *et al* (2009) advocated against shared care for under 10 year old children when conflict between parents is high and the parenting is of poor quality.

Warshak’s (2014) *Consensus Report* aimed to provide clarity to the confusion which was ignited by this *Family Court Review* special issue. Warshak’s (2014) conclusions and recommendations were also endorsed by 110 scholars and practitioners in the field of child development. The *Consensus Report* (Warshak, 2014) argues that there is no “scientific foundation... for a general policy of limited or discouraging young children’s overnight with one parent”. In summing up the evidence, Warshak (2017, p. 201-203) argues that ‘overnights’ with both parents should be encouraged and that children should be afforded meaningful contact with both parents.

There has also been controversy and disagreement over the effects of shared care with parents who experience high conflict. Based on their research, McIntosh and colleagues (cited in Smyth, 2009, p. 49) argue that a child who spends equal time with parents will have worse outcomes if parents are engaged in high conflict. As Warshak (2017, p. 195-196) points out, these studies have led to a concern that “spending more time with dad will harm rather than help the child.” Relatedly, if parents are in conflict because they disagree about ‘overnights’, since conflict will harm the child, “they are” thus, “better off seeing their dad only during the day” (Warshak, 2017, p. 196). For Warshak (2017), not only can this send a parent the message that conflict can constitute a way of overriding shared custody, a meta-analysis (Bauserman, 2002 cited in Warshak, 2017) shows that children’s outcomes are better regardless of the level of conflict between parents if they experience the shared care of parents. For example, other research (Nielson, 2017, cited in Warshak, 2017) has shown that conflict is not more damaging for children experiencing shared parental care as the shared care can actually help buffer the negative impact on the child of the interparental conflict (Warshak, 2017).

2.4.2 Benefits of father involvement

Fathers’ diverse roles as providers, caregivers and allies of partners or ex partners have been found to be important for children’s development (Lamb and Lewis, 2010; Lamb, 2010;

McHale and Coates, 2014; Neponymaschy and Garfinkel, 2011; Rebman *et al* 2018; Warshak, 2017). The benefits of father involvement with children can be thought of comprising of both direct and indirect benefits for multiple aspects of child development (Tamis-LeMonda *et al* 2004). According to Osborne and Ankrum (2015, p. 223), the term ‘paternal involvement’ refers to “a broad range of activities shared by fathers and their children” such as “caregiving, helping with homework, providing moral guidance and discipline, or sharing recreation and leisure time”. These elements of father involvement relate to the father’s face to face interaction with the child and thus, have direct positive outcomes for the child. However, the benefits of involvement can also revolve around the non-face to face support of the child, such as the giving of financial and informal support such as the provision of diapers, clothes and food. These elements are supportive of indirect outcomes for the child both in terms of the benefits of the material provisions themselves, but also how these elements can help reduce the stress of the other parent, who may in turn parent more positively (Osborne and Ankrum, 2015, p. 223).

Forty five parents interviewed in Sweden who willingly or more reluctantly, chose equally shared joint physical custody for their children ranging in age from 0 to 4 years, were generally very positive about it as a mode of parenting that worked well and saw benefits for children and for themselves as parents (Fransson *et al* 2016). Studies of outcomes for children in Sweden who experience shared parenting arrangements have found that they fare better (psychologically) than children in sole parental care arrangements (Bergstrom *et al* 2017; Fransson *et al* 2016). An evaluation of changes made to Family Law in Australia in 2006, designed to promote and support shared parenting arrangements, reported that children in these arrangements also fared better than children in maternal residence except in situations where mothers reported safety concerns (Kaspiew *et al* 2009).

2.5 Factors Associated with Unmarried Father Involvement

2.5.1 Father Prenatal Involvement

In their review of findings from the Fragile Families Study, Osborne and Ankrum (2015) argue that father prenatal involvement has been shown to predict future involvement. What constitutes ‘prenatal involvement’ can include things like discussing the pregnancy with the mother, listening to the baby’s heartbeat and attending the birth (Osborne and Ankrum, 2015). This support could be explained by a father having prior commitment, but research has also suggested that this early support can “strengthen his commitment and enhance coparenting in

the long run by improving his efficacy and level of comfort with parenting in general” (Osborne and Ankrum, 2015, p. 226).

These findings are also consistent with findings from the UK Millennium Cohort Study. Kiernan (2006) used data from the baseline study which took place in 2001-2002 and gathered information from over 18,000 families around the time the child was nine months old to understand fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives. Fifteen percent of the births from this cohort were to unmarried parents. The study shows that fathers who were both present at birth and whose names were included on the birth certificate “saw their child more frequently, were very interested in their child, and were on friendly terms with the mother” (Kiernan, 2006, p. 660). The payment of child maintenance by the father had the “strongest association” with being present at birth and being on the birth certificate (Kiernan, 2006, p. 661). Compared to fathers who did not attend the birth and whose name was on the birth certificate, fathers who were present at the birth of their child showed greater levels of involvement. Kiernan (2006) suggests that this could be due to how fathers’ birth presence may help cultivate an emotional attachment to their children. This is consistent with Osborne and Ankrum’s (2015) interpretation of the findings from the FFS, which suggests that early involvement in a child’s life cultivates a fatherhood identity, which in turn promotes later involvement.

2.5.2 Individual Risk Factors

2.5.2.1 Ending the Relationship

The most obvious barrier to father involvement in a child’s life is the ending of a relationship, simply because father daily contact and interaction between father and child may be limited by the reality that the father no longer resides in the same household (Waller and Swisher, 2006) and due to the mother normally assuming custody of children. Research has found that although both nonmarital mothers and fathers expect their relationship to continue, the greater likelihood is that these ideals may not materialize (Osborne and Ankrum, 2015). Waller and Swisher’s (2006) interview material of 41 parents, who had a nonmarital birth, helps to understand these dynamics by exploring the meanings behind why unmarried parents’ relationships may be more fragile. The interview accounts show that “mothers tended to select out of ‘unhealthy’ relationships” either by “ending their relationships unilaterally or in agreement with the father” (Waller and Swisher, 2006, p. 407) due to multiple reasons, such as fathers’ physical abuse and substance use.

These father characteristics in turn lead mothers to enact gatekeeping practices such as moving to different areas and requiring that fathers be supervised by a family member when in face to face contact with the child. Waller and Swisher (2006, p. 407) use the term ‘protective gatekeeping’ to describe these practices as it speaks more (in contrast to the term ‘gatekeeping’) to how mothers limiting of fathers involvement can be due to legitimate responses to “a perceived risk”. Mothers did not perceive this risk to be related to the potential of the father to set out to harm the child, but in terms of how substance use / abuse interfered with the father’s parenting competence and the impact on the child of a father’s negative role modelling behaviour.

2.5.2.2 Income, Education and other Resources

Consistent with previous research on divorced couples, Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz (2010, p. 55) note that fathers’ reporting of supportive coparenting is greater the more they report higher educational attainment, but the best explanation they can offer “is speculative at best”; fathers may know more about coparenting if they are educated and may evaluate their coparenting relationships more positively.

Maldonado (2014) points to income as a ‘significant’ factor in the development of a parenting plan as low-income parents are less likely to share parenting for a variety of reasons. Relatedly, findings from the FFS show that fathers’ unemployment is associated with low levels of coparenting (Goldberg and Carlson, 2015). Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz (2010) aimed to explore the factors that influence never-married, non-resident fathers’ perceptions of their coparenting. Consistent with previous research on divorced fathers, the data shows that nonresident, never-married fathers reported more supportive coparenting relationships if they had a higher income. Tach *et al* (2010) also show that fathers’ contact with their children increases if their income also increases. This is also consistent with the finding that fathers’ informal support is “significantly associated with more positive coparenting” (Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz, 2010 p. 58). These findings are also similar to Rettig and Leichtentritt’s (2001) study on non-custodial fathers perceptions of how their personal and interpersonal resources may influence coparental interactions. They found that fathers’ perceptions of sufficient economic resources were also associated with the increased likelihood of ‘giving resources’ such as respect and support. ‘High giving resources’ such as respect and personal social-psychological resources was also

related to more positive evaluations of father-child relationships (Rettig and Leichtentritt, 2001).

Researchers have suggested numerous explanations for these findings. Elder (1985, cited in Kiernan, 2006) previously suggested that fathers who perceive that they lack the financial means to provide for a family may seek to avoid family obligations in order to restore the loss of control over their lives. Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz (2010) note that studies have shown that mothers may not be encouraging of father involvement if they perceive that they are unable to financially contribute. Maldonado (2014, p. 635) argues that low-income fathers may not have an adequate home for their children to spend time with them, may have less access to legal representation and “Mothers who lack legal representation may not be aware of the research demonstrating that shared parenting may be beneficial to both children and parents”. Relatedly, Maldonado (2014, p. 636) points to research indicating that the “aggressive pursuit of child support” may instil a belief amongst fathers that their worth as a father is measured by their financial contributions. The lack of income thus, elicits feelings of shame. It is this feeling of shame which may inhibit fathers’ contact with children.

Jamison *et al*’s (2017) research points toward couples’ skills at managing limited resources as another explanation. Jamison *et al* (2017) set out to uncover how unmarried couples coparent in the context of poverty. They conducted 11 in-depth interviews with paired unmarried mothers and fathers individually in the United States. The interviews were subject to ‘dyadic’ analysis, meaning that although couples were interviewed separately, the transcripts were treated as one single unit of analysis. This was in recognition of the significant number of studies which concentrate on married or divorced parents in relation to the variables mediating the quantity and quality of coparenting.

Jamison *et al* (2017) employed Family Stress Theory (FST) on the basis that it permits an exploration of resilience in families and because it explains how families manage stressors and the outcomes they experience as a consequence. After assessing a number of definitions of coparenting, the authors chose Feinberg’s (2003) as a model with four overlapping aspects – joint family management, support / undermining, division of labor and childrearing agreement.

Jamison *et al* (2017) argue that the ability to coparent and to allow coparenting to flourish was related to couples’ skills at managing limited resources effectively or activating the social resources they needed. The authors concluded based on their research that coparenting processes cannot be separated from other process within the family (housing issues, finances

etc). Family Stress Theory was perceived beneficial in that it enabled distinction between families typically constructed homogeneously as ‘fragile families’ and the authors favour a broad view of family stressors based on the research conducted. They point out that while children from married families fare better than their peers from unmarried families, not all children from unmarried families experience poor outcomes. In terms of implications for practice, the authors note that interventions programmes targeting low income unmarried parents may not be generating the positive results expected of them if they are not based on a correct identification of the problems impacting on coparenting. If they are not focused on providing help with basic needs first, they may be failing to deal in any way with the stressors poor families confront in their daily lives. Bolstering parents’ abilities to obtain and manage resources (budgeting, identification of community and family supports) or instrumentally helping them to secure housing, child care assistance, job training etc., may serve families better as parents when their relationships are strong and when their motivations to coparent are already shown to be strong, as evidenced in this sample.

2.5.2.3 Incarceration

Fathers with a history of incarceration have reported less coparental supportiveness (Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz, 2010). Father “incarceration was the most common risk factor” identified by “the majority of parents” in Waller and Swisher’s (2006, p. 412) study and the reason for incarceration pertain mostly for drug related offences. The study shows that fathers do attempt to maintain relationships with their children when incarcerated, but this depends on the cooperation of the mothers. In their sample, no mother reported being willing to take their child to see the father in prison after their romantic relationship ended. Distance constituted one barrier to facilitate father-child interaction. The interview material also suggested that mothers believed that father involvement in their children’s lives during incarceration could lead children (especially sons) to emulate the father’s behaviour. Mothers did not stigmatise father incarceration per se, but both the mother and fathers interviewed suggested that incarceration can erode the mother’s trust in the father and induce strain in their romantic relationships.

2.5.2.4 Drug and Alcohol Use

In Waller and Swisher's (2006) study, fathers who had substance use problems withdrew from involvement in situations where mothers monitored fathers' access to the child, especially in cases where substance use co-existed with violence.

2.5.2.5 Physical Abuse

Waller and Swisher (2006, p. 409) found that mothers who reported experiencing physical abuse placed restrictions on the father's access to the child, "typically requiring visits to be supervised" (and fathers also downplayed their abuse). Mothers expressed a struggle between protecting their children at the same time as wanting the fathers of their children to be involved in their lives. Interestingly, Waller and Swisher (2006) also report that fathers themselves can also take the lead in distancing themselves from their children due to a belief that their abuse prohibited their positive role modelling.

5.2.2.6 Mother Characteristics

Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz's (2010) study showed that in terms of the 'role of individual mother characteristics', fathers reported less supportive coparenting if the mother had lower education levels and more supportive coparenting if mothers were employed. Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz (2010) argue that this could be due to fathers being able to fulfil some of the roles that mothers could not due to their paid employment. However, they stated that this was an interpretation and that arguably more research was needed to validate this interpretation. These findings are consistent with findings from the UK Millennium Cohort study, which shows that mothers' qualifications were predictive of contact with the father and of receiving child maintenance (Kiernan, 2006). Kiernan suggests that this could be due to mothers being able to better negotiate with non-resident fathers due to their greater skills and confidence. This interpretation is also speculative however, and a more definite answer would require future research.

2.5.3 Relationship Trajectories and Multipartner Fertility

Research has found a relationship between the relationship trajectories of both parents and father involvement and positive coparenting. Research has shown that father involvement

significantly declines after parents repartner and have more children. This repartnering is also associated with less cooperative coparenting (Turner and Halpern-Meekin, 2017). As Osborne and Ankrum (2015) point out, multipartner fertility has been shown to put a strain on the quality of the coparenting relationship.

Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz (2010) used data from the FFS to explore how fathers' perceptions of coparenting may be influenced by the father-mother and father-child relationship. The data shows that fathers reported less supportive coparenting from their previous partner if they, the fathers, had a new partner or if the child's mother had a new partner (also Goldberg and Carlson, 2015; Tach *et al* 2010). In terms of fathers' new partners and multipartner fertility, researchers (Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz, 2010; Goldberg and Carlson, 2015) argue that this could be due to fathers' shifting allegiances, time and resources away from previous relationships into their new relationships and coresidential children

Tach *et al* (2010) expand on this aspect further. They use data from the FFS to test the 'package deal' hypothesis, which holds that fathers' relationship with their children is contingent with their relationship to the child's mother and that fathers' level of involvement and amount of contact with their children will decline following the breakup of the relationship with the child's mother. The 'package deal' concept has been explored predominantly in relation to married parents, but Tach *et al* (2010) wished to further add to the literature by exploring how the concept may relate both to unmarried fathers and how unmarried fathers and mothers' future relationships transition. They hypothesise that due to the entry into a new relationship, unmarried fathers "may feel considerable pressure to re-create the 'package deal' with the new family, without interference of prior partners or children from past relationships" (Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz, 2010; Goldberg and Carlson, 2015; Tach *et al* 2010, p. 182).

Tach *et al*'s (2010) analysis shows that while both mothers and fathers subsequent partners and children increase the likelihood that a father will have either no contact or less intensity of contact with his children, it is the mother's changes in romantic and parental status that has a stronger effect on paternal involvement, which is consistent with Turney and Halpern-Meekin's (2017, see below) research on relationship churning. Tach *et al* (2010, p. 197) show that this factor is "at least as great in magnitude as changes in a father's economic characteristics or other characteristics." These findings contradict the 'package deal' hypothesis, which has shown that it is previously married fathers' subsequent partnerships and parenting roles that are related to a decrease in father involvement. Tach *et al* (2010) provide a

number of explanations for these results. These include the tendency for mothers to ‘trade up’ by re-partnering with men who are likely to have more resources and less behavioural problems than the father of the child and the impact on mothers who may be less intent on supporting father involvement. New partners of the mothers may share their fear that past sexual relations with fathers could be rekindled and fathers may choose to draw back from the children when their children’s mother re-partners.

While the research thus far cited pertains to parents’ full dissolution of their relationships and subsequent repartnering, Turney and Halpern-Meekin (2017) argue that existing research on the parents’ relationship trajectories dichotomizes the idea of relationship status by constructing couples as ‘together or not’. Turner and Halpern-Meekin (2017, p. 862) draw upon data from the FFS to understand how parents who “have an on-again/off-again relationship” – known as ‘parental relationship churning’ – may be linked with father involvement. They examine ‘churners’ and how they contrast with couples who are ‘stably together’, couples who ‘stably separate without repartnering’ and couple who ‘stably separate and repartner with someone new’. Another key element examined was the relationship between churning and the quantity and quality of father involvement. This is important to examine because studies indicate that positive outcomes are especially linked not only to father involvement, but to a father’s “high-quality coparenting relationship with the mother” (Turner and Halpern-Meekin, 2017, p. 863).

Turner and Halpern-Meekin (2017, p. 881) find that “fathers in churning relationships remain more involved with their children than do fathers who have repartnered or seen their children’s mothers repartner.” They also found that fathers were more likely to maintain involvement with the child if they experienced relationship churning than fathers whose relationships had fully dissolved, “especially if the mothers repartnered” (Turner and Halpern-Meekin, 2017, p. 881; also Tach *et al* 2010). Perhaps unsurprisingly, churning fathers were found to be less involved with their children than fathers who were ‘stably together’ with mothers.

2.5.4 Cooperative Coparenting

Research conducted on married parents has shown that the quality of the romantic relationship “strongly associated with the quality of the coparental relationship” (Weiner, 2016, p. 1552). According to Osborne and Ankrum (2015) “The quality of the parents’ relationship is one of the most consistent predictors of father involvement”, with father involvement higher if the

father is romantically involved or is friends with the mother. Thus, Osborne and Ankrum (2015, p. 228) argue for interventions that aim to improve relationship skills. However, such interventions are unlikely to be appropriated for those who have fully dissolved their unions however. Furthermore, consistent with the idea that ‘coparenting’ is a separate aspect of the romantic or marital union, research shows that a romantic or marital union is not necessary for successful coparenting. Goldberg and Carlson (2015) found for example, that the quality of parents’ romantic relationship when they were still together was a strong and consistent predictor of their subsequent coparenting trajectory, which suggests that couples who are able to support each other as partners are better able to do so as parents, even after their romantic relationships come to an end.

Futris and Schoppe-Sullivan (2007, p. 259) find that the evidence that a strong parenting alliance (in other words, ‘cooperative coparenting’) predicts father involvement “is encouraging for adolescent parents” in particular, since many do not remain romantically involved with each other during their child’s early development. In other words, a strong romantic relationship is not necessary for a positive coparenting relationship and consequently, not necessary for father involvement. As Feinberg (2003, p. 97) points out, scholars have noted that “coparental distress is not [necessarily] synonymous with relationship distress”. Conversely, “supportive coparenting” is not necessarily “synonymous with relationship intimacy” (Feinberg, 2003, p. 91). Father support for these insights is shown by Turner and Halpern-Meekin’s (2017) study, which highlights that fathers have been shown to be more involved with their children if they have good non-romantic relationships with mothers.

Studies relating to coparenting and parental involvement have generally focused on coparenting following the dissolution of a marital union and have shown that “cooperative coparenting is highly predictive of non-resident fathers’ involvement with children” (Waller, 2012, p. 327). Researchers have begun to address the gap in the research by focusing on the relationship between involvement and cooperative coparenting amongst unmarried parents. The research shows consistency between married and unmarried parents in this regard, showing that there is a strong relationship between father involvement and cooperative or positive coparenting in non-martial families (Carlson *et al* 2008; Futris and Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007; Waller, 2012, Varga *et al* 2017).

Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Birth Cohort (ECLS –B) for example, Hohmann-Marriott’s (2011) article focused on 5407 co-resident parents with a two year old

child. It involved exploring the associations between three aspects of coparenting (support, responsibility and dissonance) with three aspects of father involvement - engagement, accessibility and responsibility. The results show that for all parent categories, participating in decision making about the child's wellbeing was associated with fathers' greater engagement, accessibility, and responsibility for their children. Less engagement and responsibility were linked with greater conflict for all parent categories. Greater communication about the child was linked with lower father involvement, a finding which seemed counterintuitive. It was surmised that this may be explained by different reports between parents on communication suggesting that communication about the child may be frequent but futile.

Using data from the FFS, Carlson *et al* (2008) examined the association between coparenting quality and non-resident father involvement with children over the first five years after a nonmarital birth. Consistent with Sobolewski and King's (2005) research, the degree to which non-resident couples can cooperate in rearing their child encourages fathers to remain involved. The study found that communication and positive coparenting were strong predictors of non-resident fathers' future involvement, but that father involvement was a weak predictor of future coparenting quality. In other words, the evidence of effects moving from coparenting to fathers involvement were strong and weak in moving from the opposite direction.

Similarly, to broaden an understanding of unmarried fathers coparenting practices, Waller (2012) drew upon data from the FFS to fill a gap in the understanding of unmarried coparenting and factors which inhibit and facilitate father involvement. Waller (2012) sought to understand why some *unmarried* fathers appear to be less successful than others in establishing and maintaining their relationships with the children. One of the key questions in relation to the literature on coparenting is whether there are differences between post-divorce and separation parenting and unmarried shared parenting. Consequently, the paper explores how different coparenting *styles* mediate "the quantity and quality of unmarried father's involvement with their three-year-old children" (Waller, 2012, p. 326).

Firstly, Waller's (2012) analysis shows that the 'cooperative', 'disengaged'/'parallel', 'conflicted' and 'mixed' parenting styles exist amongst unmarried families as they do for post-divorce parents. Second, in terms of how the type of parenting style mediates father involvement, Waller (2012, p. 339) reports "that the style of coparenting which emerges between parents following a nonmarital birth is highly predictive of the quantity and quality of fathers' involvement in their children's lives". The results show that there is "strong evidence"

that a 'cooperative' coparenting style is "significantly associated" (Waller, 2012, p. 336) with both the quality and quantity of father involvement, in contrast to the 'conflicted' or 'disengaged'/'parallel' coparenting style. The results also suggest that two of the barriers to the development of this coparenting style include the parents having never been together as a couple or the separation of the parents after the birth of the child. In terms of the 'mixed' style, father involvement was "not significantly different" (Waller, 2012, p. 339) from parents who practiced the cooperative style, meaning that the coexistence of cooperation and conflict can buffer the effect that a high conflict coparenting style can have on father involvement.

Waller (2012) also found that the 'conflictual' style was the most associated with less involvement than the 'disengaged'/'parallel' style and thus, recommend that where either a 'cooperative' or 'mixed' style is not possible, a 'disengaged'/'parallel' style is recommended. In sum, as far as possible a conflicted style is to be avoided. Weiner (2016) does note however, that there are specific issues that 'disengaged'/'parallel' parenting raises. First, while agreeing that this style of parenting is suited for high conflict parents, the 'segregated existence' within families it places on children can lead to some children becoming "confused, overwhelmed, or resentful of the arrangement", though other children do adapt (Weiner, 2016, p. 1562). Second, parallel parenting can be unsatisfying to the extent that fathers in fragile families can be of risk at disengaging over time to the extent of becoming 'absent fathers'.

Waller's (2012) findings that cooperative coparenting is strongly associated with father involvement is consistent with other research. Sobolewski and King (2005) for example also found that 'cooperative coparenting' is predictive of father involvement, both in terms of frequency of contact and the quality of the father-child relationship. Similarly, Futris and Schoppe-Sullivan's (2007) study explored mothers' perception of barriers to father engagement, parenting alliance strength, and fathers' engagement with their young children. The study sample, consisting of 74 mothers were recruited through an intervention programme for pregnant and parenting teenagers in Ohio. The results showed that the strength of the parenting alliance was not only related to the frequency of contact between the father and child, but is also "positively associated with both fathers' caregiving and nurturing" (Futris and Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007, p. 263).

Varga *et al* (2017) have found similar results in their research on young unmarried parents. Varga *et al* (2017) sought to explore how coparenting expectations during pregnancy may predict father involvement as the authors suggest that pregnancy may be an important

intervention point in aiding later father involvement with the child. The study involved interviews with 94 low income adolescent parents. The mean age of the mothers was 17.8 years and 20.2 years for fathers. The researchers used a variety of measures to measure participants' relationship quality, the level of father involvement and coparenting using the Parenting Alliance Inventory (see Appendix 3). Varga *et al* (2017) found that the stronger the level of coparenting, the greater the likelihood of father involvement. Both relationship quality and coparenting predicted father involvement, but for fathers, the quality of a relationship was not linked to coparenting. In other words, consistent with the view that coparenting is a separate concept from the couple relationship (Waller, 2012), a good relationship quality does not necessarily mean a good coparenting relationship (Feinberg, 2003). The research highlights the importance of involving fathers during pregnancy to promote future father involvement and suggests the importance of prenatal interventions in this regard.

2.5.5 Cultural and Legal Factors

As previously mentioned, Weiner (2016), argues for a more ambitious approach in regard to broader societal and cultural conceptions of shared parenting and 'child custody'. Weiner questions the extent to which custody law supports cooperative coparenting both during and after the romantic relationships ends. Speaking with reference to the United States, she points out that custody law is limited in its 'normative power' in guiding parents' behaviour *during* a romantic relationship. As an example, she points out that even the presumption against the awarding of custody to domestic violence perpetrators has not been "as determinative as survivors advocates had hoped" (Weiner, 2016, p. 1557).

Following the ending of the relationship the procedure of custody law sometimes involves the promotion of cooperative parenting through mediation and parenting classes (Weiner, 2016). Yet, for Weiner (2016), the problem is that these mechanisms emerge too late in the process. They do nothing to encourage parents to develop quality coparenting relationships at the very beginning of couple relationships, "nor do they help people select someone who will be a good parenting partner" (Weiner, 2016, p. 1556).

Weiner (2016, p. 1561) argues that a positive, cooperative and supportive coparenting relationship is not something that should be focused on only after the dissolution of a romantic union. Rather, society needs to develop a new way of thinking about coparenting to help "to create supportive parental relationships from the moment of a child's birth" (Weiner, 2016, p.

1561) in order to ease the problems of negotiating shared parenting following the ending of a relationship. Currently, the structure of marriage “does not convey the sense that spouses have a separate relationship with each other as parents once they have a child together-i.e., a parent-partnership-and that this parent partnership has its own norms and continues after divorce” (Weiner, 2016, p. 1572).

The answer, Weiner (2016) argues, is to create a new legal status for parents with a child, which would also help in cultivating a new set of norms and ideas around coparenting relationships. Weiner (2016) proposes that this new legal status would come into effect following the birth of the child and would entail specific five legal obligations: a duty to aid, a duty not to abuse, a duty of relationship work, and duty of good faith and a duty to give ‘care of share’. These obligations would work to encourage cooperative coparenting and support between partners in their parenting roles. She highlights for example, that the obligation of ‘relationship work’ could involve encouraging couples to use programme and interventions, which would help them transition into parenthood.

Weiner (2016, p. 1573) argues that these legal obligations would also foster a new ‘social role’ whereby the parents would become ‘parent-partners’, which could help shape parent’s coparenting “relationship vis-à-vis the other parent”. This social role (as do other roles) would carry social expectations. As sociological theory has explained, social roles guide individuals’ behaviours thus, this new social role would ideally guide the ‘parent-partners’ of the ‘parent partnership’ in the direction of mutual support and solidarity in their partnership. The problem with ‘coparenting’ as it is more broadly discussed, is that the process of negotiating coparenting roles occurs only after a separation or the ending of a relationship, whereby custody law and coparenting programmes emphasise that both parents are still ‘parents together forever’. With the new social role, which Weiner (2016, p. 1577) proposes, parents would receive the cultural message that they are ‘parents together forever’ “*even before conception and throughout their romantic relationship*” [Weiner’s emphasis].

2.5.6 Gatekeeping Behaviours and Beliefs around Coparent Roles

Maternal gatekeeping generally refers to “attitudes about the importance of the role of the fathers’ and mothers’ satisfaction with father involvement” (De Luccie, 1995, cited in Fagan and Cherson, 2017 p. 635) and the related actions which mothers may use to inhibit father involvement. The concept has been criticised however, for privileging fathers’ perspectives

about child access over mothers, who may have legitimate concerns and reasons for limiting father access (Gaskin-Butler *et al* 2012). Research finds that mothers express a wish for increased father involvement and Gaskin-Butler *et al* (2012, p. 364) also argue that mothers actions which are “interpreted as gatekeeping by researchers and fathers are often not intended to discourage father involvement, but rather to negotiate more acceptable father behaviour”.

Although a parenting-time order can prevent gate closing since a parent risks being in contempt of the order, this only ensures that parents cannot directly and explicitly stop a parent’s contact with the child. Weiner (2016) notes however, that involvement can still be reduced through the implicit ways in which gate closing can indirectly discourage the other parent from being involved in the child’s life. In other words, parents can act in ways that damage the other parent’s sense of efficacy or willingness to continue to be involved in their child’s life, such as enacting unsupportive beliefs and behaviours, rather than directly inhibiting involvement. Essentially, unsupportive beliefs and behaviours by one parent toward the other parent can discourage the parent in being actively involved in their child’s life. Unsupportive behaviours or beliefs do not mean that mothers for example, are to be blamed for subsequent father withdrawal from children. Rather, this dynamic is bidirectional. Mutual parental support is productive of further mutual parenting support while the same feedback dynamic holds true for mutual discouragement. In sum, to maintain continued involvement in a child’s life, “some parents need the affirmation associated with gate opening to stay engaged in the parenting exercise” (Weiner, 2016, p. 1563).

Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004, p. 176) highlight research that shows that fathers’ interpret lack of maternal support for their parenting decisions as perceptions about their competence. Favez *et al*’s (2016) study aimed to analyse how mothers and fathers’ beliefs about parental roles influence coparenting relationships in three way interactions since research has shown links between parental sense of self efficacy, warm parental interactions and satisfaction around the coparenting relationship. They highlight how a sense of self-efficacy has been shown to be associated with both warm parental interaction with the child and a feeling of satisfaction about the coparenting relationship. This in turn produces a sense of self efficacy in parents. Self-efficacy “refers to the sense a parent has of being able to positively influence the behaviour and development” (Favez *et al* 2016, p. 285) of their children. This feeling of self-efficacy, or esteem and confidence about parenting however, depends upon beliefs about parental roles. Parents’ beliefs around gendered parenting roles in relation to themselves and the other parent may inhibit self-efficacy and may be productive of conflict: For example, “a mother with a

traditional view of roles may perceive a helping attitude of the father as a violation of boundaries and a disrespect of her prerogatives” (Favez *et al* 2016, p. 285).

Fathers’ beliefs about what fathers should do mediates their involvement in family life and both fathers’ and mothers’ non-traditional beliefs of parenting roles during pregnancy are predictive of cooperative coparenting interactions after the baby is born (Favez *et al* 2016). Sixty-nine married, two-parent families living in the French-speaking part of Switzerland took part in Favez *et al*’s (2016) study when the child was three, nine and eighteen months old. The research involved observing the quality of the three way interactions of the parents with the infants and toddlers using a validated observation design. Parents were also individually asked to complete a questionnaire, which assessed parental sense of competence, beliefs about parental roles, depression and marital satisfaction. The results indicated that a parental sense of competence and gendered beliefs about mother and father roles had a bearing on conflictual coparenting interactions between parents and on the level of child engagement. In terms of coparent conflict, the greater the disagreement over the importance of the mother, the greater the levels of conflict. At 18 months, the more fathers’ believe in their own competence and their belief that mothers are more important in the raising of their child, there is both less support for the mother and more conflict. Relatedly, one significant finding was that it was observed that the child was more engaged with both parents if the father felt he was more important than the mother. For Favez *et al* (2016, p. 296), this shows that a “father’s beliefs in his own value in the family clearly has a positive impact on the engagement of the child”. This should not be taken to mean that fathers should see themselves as more important in the sense that mothers are devalued. It does suggest that fathers’ beliefs of their own worth as fathers heightens their level of engagement with their children. In light of these findings, Favez *et al* (2016, p. 297) argue that:

For practitioners, understanding the coparenting dynamics in a given family implies knowing parental expectations and representations about parental roles, as well as the social and cultural background shaping these representations, in order to prevent conflict from becoming chronic.

Although beliefs about fathers may inhibit mothers’ gateopening, the dynamic works as a feedback loop. Negative beliefs inhibit father involvement, thus reinforcing beliefs. Conversely, facilitating or encouraging “hands on caregiving” by fathers “can increase

mothers' confidence in the fathers' competence" (Weiner, 2016, p. 1551). Such practices can further provide a base for friendship and respect between coparents. Fathers who believe they will be denied access to shared parenting time are not likely to seek shared parenting. The unmarried father, who has never lived with the mother and child, may not have had an opportunity to do much parenting. Thus, not surprisingly, he may not feel confident that he can take care of a child for more than a few hours at a time and the mother may not trust that he can either. Thus, Warshak (2017, p. 200) recommends that:

To the extent that conflict is generated by a father who opposes the mother's efforts to marginalize his participation in raising the young child, efforts should be made to educate the mother about the benefits to children of parenting plans that give more opportunities for the development and strengthening of father-child relationships and that keeps fathers more involved.

2.6 Summary – Key Points from the Literature Reviewed

Conceptual and theoretical issues

- The terms 'shared parenting' and 'coparenting' have been used synonymously and there is a lack of consistency in the definition of both the terms and what components should be used to measure them.
- Shared/coparenting has been conceptualised on a basic level in terms of time and more broadly and ambitiously in terms of the cooperation and/or level of support between parents.
- Shared/coparenting has been viewed as something distinct to that of the romantic relationship. Shared parenting/coparenting does not begin following the ending of a relationship but as something that begins even before conception.
- Researchers have developed a number of instruments to measure coparenting.

Sociology of Unmarried Parents

- That there are particular challenges encountered by unmarried parents in relating to shared parenting than other parent categories, has been acknowledged by researchers (e.g. Maldonado, 2014).

- While associations have been found in studies between unmarried parenthood and poor child outcomes, unmarried parenthood is not a predictor of poor child outcomes as not all children from unmarried families experience poor outcomes (Jamison *et al* 2017).
- In the field of research concerned with different family forms and father involvement in children's lives, married parents who divorce / separate have been studied to a much greater extent than non-marital families / unmarried parents (Maldonado, 2014). Much of the research reviewed on non-marital families and father involvement is based on waves of data generated from the Fragile Families and child Wellbeing Study (FFCW) which involved 5000 children born in 20 US cities between 1998 and 2000. A high portion of this sample was comprised of non-marital births.
- There are differences in the unmarried and married parents profiles studied in terms of educational level, income level, employment status, drug use and multipartner fertility.

General Studies

- While high inter-parental conflict is a contra – indicator of shared parenting, shared care has been identified in some studies as buffering the negative impact of interparental conflict.
- The studies reviewed show that a relatively high percentage of non-marital relationships have ended by the time the child is 5 years of age and oftentimes despite evidence of parents' strong intentions to stay together at the time of their child's birth (see Carlson *et al* 2008).
- Coparenting should ideally involve 'cooperative coparenting' given the benefits of this coparenting style as 'conflictual coparenting' negatively impacts on children's wellbeing.
- Conflicted or disengaged coparenting styles are more common amongst parents who have either separated or who have never developed a long term romantic relationship.
- Generally the research shows that fathers' involvement in children's lives is positive for children, for mothers, for fathers (Warshak, 2017) and for children's outcomes (McHale and Coates, 2014; Neponymaschy and Garfinkel, 2011; Rebman *et al* 2018; Warshak, 2017), particularly when there is no violence and when conflict between parents is not consistently high.
- The research challenges the stereotype of unmarried fathers as uninvolved fathers relative to other categories of fathers. The research points to a strong desire of fathers

to be involved and stay involved in their children's lives, but it also draws attention to the factors which make involvement with children challenging for this group of fathers.

Barriers and facilitators to father involvement

- It is better for coparents to mutually *agree* to shared custody rather than having a custody order imposed on them.
- Father involvement at pregnancy and birth positively correlates with his parenting commitment, confidence as a parent and his later involvement.
- Father involvement is a multidimensional construct and can take many forms. Father involvement does not have to be 'mathematised' and relate only to the amount of time fathers have access to their children.
- Though contested, the Warhsak (2014) *Consensus Report*, endorsed by 110 scholars, argues that there is no evidence to suggest that 'overnights' with fathers are damaging to young children as research indicates that a child should be afforded the opportunity to develop an attachment to both parents rather than to only one primary caregiver.
- Research points to the significance of parents' beliefs about the roles of both mothers and fathers in mediating the quality of their coparenting relationship.
- The association between the quality of the relationship between unmarried parents and coparenting as well as father involvement in children's lives has been studied and found to be significant in some studies (McLanahan and Beck, 2010) but not so much in others (Vagra *et al* 2017). This discrepancy may be due to some unmarried couples having a stronger child as distinct from a relationship focus, conducive to father involvement and coparenting (Roy *et al* 2008; Hohmann-Marriott, 2011; Varga *et al* 2017).
- Prenatal involvement of the father can strengthen the fathers' commitment to coparenting and confidence in parenting in the long term.
- Mothers may engage in 'gatekeeping' out of concern about a father's parenting competence and his negative role modelling behaviour
- Father involvement is impacted by individual factors such as educational attainment, income, employment security, incarceration, drug and alcohol use, physical abuse and mother characteristics.
- Multipartner fertility and repartnership is predictive of father involvement and cooperative coparenting. Changes in mothers' romantic and parental status (e.g. mothers' re-partnering) have been found to have stronger effects on fathers'

involvement in children's lives than changes in fathers' romantic and parental status in a number of studies (Berger and McLanahan, 2015; Tach *et al* 2010; Turney and Halpern-Meekin, 2017).

- Studies have shown that cyclical cohabitation / parental on off relationships has been found to be positively associated with fathers continued involvement with their children than dissolved parental relationships or dissolved parental relationships in which mothers have re-partnered (Nempmnyaschy and Teitler, 2013; Tach *et al* 2010; Turney and Halpern-Meekin, 2017).
- 'Cooperative coparenting' highly predicts father involvement.
- The argument has been made that society needs to develop a new social role called the 'parent(ing)-partnership' in order to emphasise that the coparenting relationship is distinct from the romantic relationship. It has been argued that this would help to create a set of normative expectations required to maintain a positive coparenting relationship that is independent of parents' romantic relationships.
- Unsupportive beliefs and behaviours toward the other parent can discourage the other parent's efficacy and confidence as a parent.
- Mutual parenting support is productive of further mutual parenting support and thus, involvement.
- Parents' beliefs about gendered parenting roles have been found to be related to parents coparenting relationships: fathers' beliefs in their own value as fathers is positively associated with continued involvement; fathers' engagement in hands on caregiving can increase mothers confidence in the fathers' competence as fathers; researchers advise that mothers may need to be informed as to the benefits of father involvement in their children's lives.

2.7 Concluding Note

This chapter has reviewed both the literature relating to factors which facilitate and prevent fathers' involvement in their children's lives and the literature relevant to the issue of coparenting in non-marital families. In the following chapter, the focus is on interventions targeting unmarried parents / non-marital families and particularly those focused on assisting unmarried parents to positively coparent. Findings of assessments and evaluations of these interventions where they are available are also provided.

Chapter Three - Legislative, Policy and Practice Interventions with Unmarried Parents /non-Marital Families: A Review of Empirical Studies

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a range of interventions targeted at non-marital families / unmarried parents are elaborated and assessed in terms of their effectiveness and their outcomes. At the end of the chapter, key summary points important for thinking about policy and practice in this field are presented as informed by the content of the chapter and particularly by points of consensus drawn from the research reviewed.

First, it is important to note that interventions for couples, fathers or parents have not been systematically evaluated and even fewer have been evaluated that have included non-marital couples as participants (Cowan *et al* 2010). A comprehensive review of the evidence of parenting programmes' effectiveness in the USA focused on post-divorce parents' education programmes and the lack of rigorous programme evaluations was cited as an explanation for the inconclusive findings (Sigal *et al* 2011). While some of the research points to the benefits for children, child outcomes have rarely been assessed very systematically (Cowan *et al* 2010). Programmatic interventions have tended to be evaluated against a control group (parents / families who are not included in the programme) but there tends to be little information on how programme effects may be varied for different subgroups of parent participants. Rarely have programmes evaluated been subjected to a costs benefits analysis (Cowan *et al* 2010). Many studies are derived from self-report data / assessments provided by parents, mothers and to a lesser extent fathers, but children's assessments in terms of how they perceive or experience the reported outcomes from parenting / coparenting or family interventions are significantly lacking (McHale *et al* 2012). Over time generic couple relationship and parenting interventions designed for middle class married families have been tailored and modified in various ways to respond to the specific needs of unmarried couples / parents (Cowan *et al* 2010). Relative to marriage and couple relationship education programmes, explicit coparenting interventions with unmarried parents are newer and have been subjected to less research but on the basis of the limited research conducted, they show promising results. Most of the development in interventions and evaluations of them are overwhelmingly in the US context.

3.2 Marriage / Relationship Focused Interventions

3.2.1 Overview

Over the years, there have been notable shifts in the programme provision to support marriage and relationships. Marriage promotion or marriage education programmes are still a feature of most countries and receive significant state support but couple relationship or family relationship programmes have also gained prominence over time. Some researchers (Cowan *et al* 2010) highlight the value of family relationship programmes for being helpful for couples / parents but for also being beneficial for children as parent child relationships are also given due concern (Cowan *et al* 2010). Improving or strengthening parents' relationships with each other has long been assumed to be a key strategy to effect positive coparenting and there is evidence to support this assumption, as documented in the previous chapter.

3.2.2 'Building Strong Families'

A number of researchers have reviewed the Building Strong Families Programme (BSF), a large scale intervention programme in the USA that aimed to improve child-wellbeing by predominantly improving unmarried parents' relationship stability and quality (Cowan *et al* 2010; Wood *et al* 2014). A key part of the programme was the provision of relationship skills education. This was implemented at eight sites and 5000 couples responded to telephone surveys 15 to 36 months after they applied for the BSF. The evaluation showed that BSF couples were less likely to stay together and live together in comparison to the control group (those couple who were not admitted to the programme). Furthermore, BSF couples did not report better relationship quality and ability to manage conflict in comparison to the control group. Father involvement was also worse for fathers who participated in the BSF programme. There was variation in the programme effects at different sites, with the programme in Oklahoma showing more positive effects than the programme in Baltimore.

In explaining the limited success of the programme, Wood *et al* (2014) makes a number of relevant points. In terms of explaining the lower level of father involvement, they argue that the programme may have unintentionally led to fathers distancing themselves from children due to the feelings of failure, which the programme might have elicited. The BSF couples indicated that one of the strongest messages of the programme was "the need for fathers to step up and be more responsible" (Wood *et al* 2014, p. 461). Research from one of the sites in which

the programme was implemented showed that the BSF fathers were more likely to blame themselves for a multiplicity of problems such as substance abuse and financial problems than control groups. Wood *et al* (2014) argue however, that the BSF programme messages around what it means to be a good father may have led some men to think that they could not measure up or that their children were better off without them.

They recommend that “Further programmes serving unmarried parents should give careful attention to the messages they convey to fathers and be sure that goals for good parenting and partnering are presented to fathers in ways that make these goals appear realistic and attainable” (Wood *et al* 2014, p. 461). Reviewing the BSF and relationship and marriage education (RME) initiatives generally, McHale *et al* (2012) also argue that while the evidence of their success with non-marital families is relatively bleak, they do show promise, particularly in enhancing communication skills, which is considered to be an important component of positive coparenting.

3.2.3 ‘Caring for My Family’

Caring for My Family (CFMF) is a relationships education programme specifically for unmarried parents in a romantic relationship who had one child. A pilot study of this US programme (Cox and Shirer, 2009) reported that parents were more intentional regarding becoming a family and there was attitudinal and behavioural change in the direction needed for healthy coparenting. The researchers noted that based on the results of the pilot, the programme curriculum was revised to include more content but that further revisions were needed to strengthen its use with unmarried couples involved in paternity establishment and child support enforcement. The majority of programme participants were women and as a result, conclusions as to the impact of the programme intervention on males were negligible (Cox and Shirer, 2009).

Roy *et al*’s (2008) life history interviews with a diverse sample of 71 low income unmarried fathers in the Midwest (USA) showed that the relationships between the fathers and their partners were not short term as people might assume, rather they were very long time affairs, lasting between 6 and 16 years without resolution or marriage. However, for many of the fathers their parenting relationships took precedence to their partnering relationships, which were much more voluntary and contingent. This led them to question the policy focus on discouraging non-marital births and encouraging marriage as key objectives. Rather they

suggest the usefulness of policy approaches promoting as much stability as is possible in non-marital families and providing support to persons in unmarried relationships to sustain their relationships amidst key challenges, which tend to persist in their lives over a long period of time. In this context, they argue that shorter term interventions designed to provide intensive material and other supports to families are not likely to see positive effects in the longer term. This suggestion for more support is made in view of policies which potentially heighten tension in relationships between parents in non-marital families (e.g. the requirement that welfare recipients identify fathers or lose their entitlements). Based on their research they also advocate for programmes oriented to support the non-marital family system rather than programmes targeting solely mothers or fathers in low income families. However, difficulty recruiting fathers as well as constraints due to work or family responsibilities as well as violence or control issues within families, have given rise to interventions directed at mothers or fathers solely as is evident in the following section.

3.3 Mother and Father Focused Interventions – the ‘Understanding Dad’ Intervention and the Responsible Fatherhood Programmes

3.3.1 Overview

Fagan *et al* (2015) highlight that research has increasingly focused on the barriers and facilitators to father involvement with children. This is occurring in the context in which society “is increasingly demanding that men who bear children assume an active, nurturing father role” (Fagan *et al* 2015, p. 581). Fagan *et al* (2015) draw attention to the existence of many federally funded fatherhood and healthy marriage programmes in the United States, which focus mainly on the father.

3.3.2 ‘Responsible Fatherhood’ Initiatives

Responsible fatherhood programmes in the US (McHale *et al* 2012) predominantly focus on low income non-resident fathers and seek to encourage fathers to pay child support by helping them to find ways of improving their earnings and by enabling them to form and strengthen relationships with their children (via parent education). These programmes have been viewed positively by participating fathers and have reported some positive results in the form of more positive relations between parents. The Young Unwed Fathers Project, which provided fathers

with job training and sought to persuade men to acknowledge their paternity and to make child support payments did not have any significant impact (Cowan *et al* 2010). A similar project - Partners for Fragile Families Project - targeted fathers, whose relationships had dissolved but who were still in contact with the mothers of their children and it prompted increased child support payments but no other key changes (Cowan *et al* 2010).

3.3.3 'Understanding Dad'

The eight week 'Understanding Dad' intervention programme with mothers as its target group, aims to help along the mother's understanding of the father. The curriculum is aimed at increasing mothers' awareness and understanding about the importance and role of fathers. It also aimed to help "increase mothers' awareness of how their own family or origin impacts how they see fathers' roles and their relationships with fathers" (Fagan *et al* 2015, p. 583). This is hoped to increase mothers' self-efficacy in their communication skills with fathers and their coparenting abilities. The first five sessions focuses on the connection between the mothers' various relationships with others on their children while the last three sessions focuses on relationships skills which addresses issues such as communication. This is important in the context of research discussed in a previous chapter suggesting that mothers' beliefs about the role and importance of fathers have been shown to influence the level of paternal involvement.

Fagan *et al*'s (2015) study evaluated the programme. Mothers who volunteered to take part in the programme were given pre and post-test questionnaires, which ascertained mothers' pro-relationship knowledge, self-efficacy and attitudes. The findings suggest the promising effects of programmes such as 'Understanding Dad'. Mothers showed "moderate to large gains" (Fagan *et al* 2015, p. 587) in all of the outcome measures. The limitation to the evaluation however, is that the actual coparenting behaviour was not examined, though the authors note previous research which has shown that improvement in attitudes and knowledge predisposed to coparenting is associated with quality coparenting relationships. Other programmes designed to specifically focus on enhancing coparenting discussed in a later section but in the following section, the spotlight is put on quality of life interventions for non-marital families.

3.4 Quality of Family Life Interventions

3.4.1 Overview

Unmarried fathers face stereotyping derived from the assumption that they are uninvolved in their children's lives because they simply do not want to be. Marczak *et al* (2015a, p. 30) note the alternative perspective however, "... that fathers are interested in being involved in their children's lives but face various barriers and challenges that hinder their involvement". As highlighted by Marczak *et al* (2015a, p. 637) the evidence is such that a disproportionate number of unmarried parents, 'particularly fathers' face a multiplicity of structural barriers such as joblessness, homeless and substance abuse issues.

Jamison *et al* (2017) note that intervention programmes targeting low income unmarried parents may not be generating the positive results expected of them if they are not based on the correct identification of the problems that are impacting on their coparenting. If they are not providing help with basic needs, they may be failing to deal with the stressors poor families confront in their daily lives. Bolstering parents' abilities to obtain and manage resources (budgeting, identification of community and family supports) or instrumentally helping them to secure housing, child care assistance, job training etc. may serve families better as parents particularly when their relationships are strong and their motivations to coparent are already shown to be strong, as was evidenced in the sample they studied.

3.4.1 'The Parents' Fair Share'

An intervention focused on fathers entitled 'The Parents' Fair Share', incorporated employment training involving job search assistance and a temporary lowering of child support orders as well as mediation services. Its evaluation documented some achievements. Fathers increased their child support payment while fathers in the control group did not. The fathers who participated also increased their earnings and did more direct child care (Cowan *et al* 2010). While no interventions with poor unmarried parents and families were reviewed which are solely focused on addressing the (sometimes many) structural barriers impacting on their relationships and their parenting, both marriage, relationship and coparenting interventions include components (most often job search or job training support) and referral to other community support services with a view to helping fathers to overcome some of the challenges in their lives. The 'Co-Parent Court', discussed later in this chapter provides one such example.

Similarly, in instances where parents / fathers' self-image, self-efficacy and confidence are worn down by poverty and disadvantage, helping them to overcome obstacles which can make them feel better about themselves can also bolster a strengths based approach when engaging with poor unmarried fathers.

3.5 Programmes Focused on Early Years - Improving Outcomes for Children in Non-Marital Families

3.5.1 Overview

There are a range of programmes targeting young unmarried families that seek not to change the material circumstances of these families' lives, but to change family culture and parents' health behaviour, towards achieving better health for families and positive outcomes for children. 'Sure Start Plus' is inspired by programmes in Australia and is built on an earlier generation of area based programmes in the UK, designed to reduce the social exclusion resulting from teenage pregnancy by the provision of additional supports and community based facilities. The pilot study showed evidence of enhanced parenting skills and child care but little change in health damaging behaviours among the participating mothers.

3.5.2 'Family Nurse Partnership'

Developed in the USA as the 'Nurse Family Partnership Programme', the 'Family Nurse Partnership' was introduced in England in 2006 with the aim of improving outcomes for the health, wellbeing and social circumstances of young first time, unmarried mothers and their children (Owen-Jones *et al* 2013). The programme involves a structured intensive programme of home visits by specially trained nurses extending from early pregnancy until the child is two years old. In randomised trials conducted in the US, the programme was shown to improve prenatal health behaviours, birth outcomes, child and adolescent health and wellbeing. In contrast, in England, the findings of a randomised controlled trial, indicated no short-term benefit evident for the outcomes examined. The authors (Robling *et al* 2016) concluded that the study evidence provided no justification for the continuation of the programme in England.

There is qualitative research profiling fathers who engaged with the 'Family Nurse Partnership' programme, assessing their views and experiences of it through survey and interview methods

(Ferguson and Gates, 2015). Overall, the typical profile which emerged of the FNP fathers, who participated in the research was one of vulnerability to a range of personal, social and economic factors. The authors concluded that the early nature of the help offered by the programme, which was holistic, skilled and therapeutic in orientation, was critical for fathers' who held positive views and experiences of it. At least three main patterns of engagement by fathers in the FNP were identified (Ferguson, 2016) from immediate full-engagement to partial engagement and to non-engagement that did not change over time. The researcher argues that FNP father engagement or non-engagement is best understood as a product of several interacting factors important in vulnerable fathers' lives (Ferguson, 2016).

3.6 Coparenting Interventions

3.6.1 Overview

At the time of writing, coparenting interventions with non-marital families / unmarried parents are still relatively new and research on these interventions even newer. Indeed McHale *et al* (2012) in their review set out an ambitious agenda for both fields (coparent interventions and research on the interventions) to continue to fill important gaps in our information and understanding.

Outside of specific interventions on both coparenting and non-marital families, coparenting has tended to be an indirect focus of many marriage / relationship enhancement programmes, without it being an explicit systemic object of intervention or of research. McHale *et al* (2012) challenges the assumption however, that a positive coparenting alliance can be expected to logically flow from an enhanced couple relationship. This is particularly significant for unmarried families in the context that a subset of these parents may never have developed a romantic relationship with each other in the first instance and are therefore in this regard, substantively different to married and cohabiting couples. With the exception of the 'Co-parent Court' initiative discussed later in this section, other key coparent interventions are elaborated and discussed.

Further support for McHale's (2012) points can be seen from data from the Fragile Families Study (a national longitudinal study) in the US. Carlson *et al* (2008) examined the association between coparenting quality and non-resident father involvement with children over the first five years after a non-marital birth. The study concluded that if parents can work together in

rearing their common children across households, this keeps non-resident fathers connected to their children. The study provided support for programmes aimed at improving parents' communication competence regardless of what happens in their romantic relationships. The findings were also used to suggest that improving the quality of couple interactions at the time of separation may be beneficial to children and parents in the longer term. The research findings prompted the authors to argue for programmes designed to strengthen couple relationships and for curricula which incorporates coparenting. For unmarried or recently married sliding couples² with a child focus, it was suggested that interventions could begin with the potentially more involved fathers and more cooperative coparenting and then proceed to target increases in relationship quality (Hohmann-Marriott, 2011).

3.6.2 'Strong Start Stable Families'

Given the benefits of a positive coparenting alliance on both parents and children for both post-divorce-and unmarried parents, McHale *et al* (2012) reviewed the literature on explicit coparenting intervention studies with fragile families / non-marital families. The 'Strong Start Stable Families' programme intervened with unmarried parents before the birth of the child. The results were 'unremarkable' (McHale *et al* 2012) but it recruited effectively with both women and men whereas other programmes have struggled to successfully recruit and retain parents, particularly fathers, for such interventions. Fathers rated the classes favourably. In all, for McHale *et al* (2012), evidence still points to the potential of programmes that both mutually engage with women and men and which also include a focus on the practicalities of parenting as well as couple relationships. McHale *et al* (2012) take account of and are positively disposed toward the growing initiatives over time to explicitly address coparenting as a distinct family process "rather than an offshoot or subsidiary" (McHale *et al* 2012, p. 294) to broader relationship or father involvement programmes.

3.6.3 'Support Father Involvement'

The 'Supporting Father Involvement' (SFI) project recruited primarily low income couples with babies or young children from four California counties. One third of those recruited were

² 'Sliding' couples in this study are distinguished from 'deciding' couples on the basis that their relationships are contingent on events that happen (pregnancy) rather than on their shared desire for commitment. Therefore, sliding couples may be more child focused than the more relationship focused deciding couples.

unmarried, with a smaller percentage of the unmarried couples living separately (Cowan *et al* 2010). An evaluation of the intervention showed differences in outcomes when the programme was delivered with couples and with fathers only. This study was also successful in recruiting fathers. McHale *et al* (2012, p. 295) notes that the evaluation put this down to the fact that “the investigators describe making a concerted effort to convince men that they were wanted and needed.” McHale *et al* (2012) notes that the programme was more successful in increasing father involvement when it was delivered through the couples’ group rather than the fathers’ only group. The limitation in drawing further conclusions regarding this programme is that it was delivered to low-income couples in already committed relationships and the authors argue for programmes to be implemented with fragile families where the parents’ relationships have ended. Furthermore, it is important to note that despite the focus on father involvement, coparenting issues were not explicitly addressed in the curriculum and improving coparenting quality was not a particular object of SFI (McHale *et al* 2010).

3.6.4 ‘Family Connections in Alabama’

The ‘Family Connections in Alabama’ (FCA) study was the first intervention noted by McHale *et al* (2012) to focus directly on coparenting attitudes and practices by delivering the ‘Caring Form My Family’ (CFMF) curriculum to low income unmarried parents and by measuring attitudinal and behavioural change in the coparenting domain. The individual and relational changes effected were positive for coparenting. Although the intervention was attended by mostly women and the coparenting outcomes were assessed by self- report data gathered very soon after the intervention, McHale *et al* (2012) note that individual coparenting attitudes and actions can potentially help or hinder a coparenting alliance. The FCA was the first study indicating that programmes designed to specifically target coparenting can effect improvement in coparenting attitudes and practices (McHale *et al* 2012).

While coparenting programmes can struggle to recruit couples and fathers, a pre-birth coparenting programme, which targeted fathers specifically and was considered relatively unique in this regard, is included in McHale *et al*’s (2012) review. This programme recruited fathers aged between 15 and 25 years through the mothers as they attended maternity hospitals. Fathers who received the coparenting intervention reported more attitude and behaviour changes conducive to coparenting and more engagement with their babies than the control group of fathers, who received birth preparation but no coparenting intervention. However,

although mothers reported positive changes, these were mothers who were residing with the fathers, suggesting that for non-resident fathers, their perceived attitudinal change did not translate to behavioural change or at that mothers did not see the behavioural change if it did happen. The study is also viewed as significant for showing that high risk young fathers are well disposed to a coparenting intervention (McHale *et al* 2012).

3.6.5 ‘Young Parents Programme’

The group based young Parenthood Programme / Young Parents Programme (YPP) (Cowan *et al* 2010; McHale *et al* 2012), which also targeted high risk young parents and did not exclude fathers engaged in partner violence, substance abuse etc., found that the parents who availed of the coparenting intervention reported more positive coparenting attitudes and behaviours than the control sample. They also reported better couple and coparenting relationships with mothers 18 months after the birth of their children. McHale *et al* (2012) emphasises the need to attend to differences in age of persons engaged in coparenting education on the basis that the needs tend to be different; younger parents may need help to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy relationships or may have other coparents or want other coparents involved (e.g. grandparents / aunts etc.) whereas older parents may need more support to help them manage relationships as they proceed to form new families with new partners. In this context, he argues that multiple frameworks to assist coparenting rather than a one size fits all approach may be required, a point that was reiterated in Lopez *et al*’s (2015) evaluation of the ‘Building Everyday Life’ parenting programme in Spain.

3.6.6 ‘Building Everyday Life’

The starting point of Lopez *et al*’s (2015) study is the evidence of positive outcomes generated by various parenting programmes. For example, they highlight the popular Triple P-Positive Parenting Programme, which has been found to decrease child behaviour problems by enhancing parents’ knowledge, skills and confidence. They argue that parenting programmes have been shown to effect change in gendered beliefs about parenting roles and responsibilities.

The ‘Building Everyday Life’ experiential parenting programme was established with the objective of developing “family co-responsibility” (Lopez *et al* 2015, p. 174) in terms of the tasks that mothers and fathers undertake in the upbringing of their children. The programme

places emphasis in deconstructing the gendered differentiation of tasks by helping fathers and mothers to identify and reflect on their own beliefs around parenting. The programme requires both parents' participation at all sessions.

Lopez *et al* (2015) analysed the results of implementing the programme in a period extending from 2011 to 2013 with 35 mothers and fathers (19 women and 16 men) recruited through schools. Three single parents (all three women) participated in the research. The research team carried out an assessment before the programme to ascertain each family's situation including the family strengths and weaknesses. This was then repeated six months after programme completion to explore the change experienced in families in such areas as parental communication, division of labour, conflict resolution. The other instruments used included a questionnaire exploring satisfaction with programme implementation and parents' perceptions of the usefulness of the programme and its relevance in their family lives. The key limitations of this study include the lack of a control group and missing data, resulting from the loss of families between the beginning and the end of the programme.

The six month following up evaluation showed that parents indicated that their confidence and competence had improved in relation to child upbringing. Parents also reported changes in beliefs around mother and fatherhood. The programme also improved communication skills which the authors note as a "crucial aspect" (Lopez *et al* 2015, p. 180) of the programme since it is a key feature throughout the programme and a basic part of other parent education programmes. Consequently, parents also reported positive changes in their abilities to resolve conflict between them. Parents also found that the material guidelines provided as part of programme "were a useful tool for consultation or recall of the main contents of the programme" (Lopez *et al* 2015, p. 181). The authors conclude that the programme demonstrated positive results and can be beneficial for families, although they accept that the results point also to the need for follow up sessions and support processes for families to sustain the positive changes over time and the need also for parenting programmes to be tailored more appropriately to diverse family forms.

3.6.7 'Figuring it Out for Child'

McHale *et al* (2015, p. 621) reported on the effects of a coparenting intervention 'Figuring It Out for the Child' (FIOC), which "aimed to heighten awareness about the beneficial impact of positive coparenting for young children." Twenty unmarried African American families, who

had an income of 200% of more below the poverty line, took part in six sessions of the programme. For the FIOC intervention, couples were evaluated before and three months after completing the programme (McHale *et al* 2015). This involved the evaluation of coparents' rapport, communication and problem-solving skills based on an evaluator's coding of couples observed interactions when asked about two areas of unresolved difference between them.

The evaluation of the intervention programme reveals that there were 'significant' declines in conflictual interpersonal dynamics between parents and 'significant' improvements in rapport and problem-solving communication (McHale *et al* 2015, p. 627). These effects were 'largely independent' of mentor competence and adherence, although mentor competence was linked to greater declines in coparental negativity and conflictual exchanges. Crucially, Mchale *et al* (2015) notes that the sustained participation of fathers in the programme contrasts starkly to programmes which have focused on marriage and relationship enhancement. For Mchale *et al* (2015), this shows that parents are enthusiastic about programmes if they speak to their concerns relating to the wellbeing of their children. For Mchale *et al* (2015), it points to the need for intervention programmes to meet coparenting couples 'where they are at' and where the focus is on the child and the child's wellbeing rather than the couple's relationship. Mchale *et al* (2015) argue that while more research in this field is warranted, it would seem that coparenting underpinned by a family strengths approach may comprise the best offering for high risk families.

3.7 Family Court Interventions and Non-Marital Families

3.7.1 Overview

In the following section, initiatives taken in family law courts to respond to the needs of non-marital families are the key focus. Most of those elaborated emerged from the US family law system which intersects with the work of the child support agency. The Family Law Courts in the United States have received much criticism for not keeping pace with changes in family forms and for being unresponsive particularly to the needs and issues experienced by non-marital families coming before the courts, many of whom are very poor (Boggess, 2017; Huntington, 2015; Pearson, 2015). The preoccupation in policy with child support payments has been castigated for being too narrow and many have called for a wider policy infrastructure which can better support unmarried parents' relationships with each other and with their

children. Initiatives taken to respond to this call are elaborated and discussed in the following sections.

3.7.2 Parenting Time Orders / Parenting Orders / Family Relationship Centres

Pearson's (2015) article attempts to describe how parenting time has been treated under the US child support programme. She highlighted that in the United States context, at the time of writing there was "no systematic, efficient mechanism for families to establish parenting time agreements of children whose parents were not married at the time of their birth (Pearson, 2015, p. 254). Pearson (2015) highlights how courts have traditionally treated parenting time (i.e. child parent contact / parent access) and child support as distinct issues so that courts can order child support for parents of children born outside of marriage but simultaneously not make any order pertaining to parenting time arrangements. As Huntington (2015) notes, the mismatch between a marital family law system and non-marital family life can exacerbate acrimony in already challenging situations and impede opportunities for the development of positive coparenting relationship transitions. Failure to establish and enforce parenting / visitation orders in the family law system gives the message to non-custodial unmarried parents, typically fathers, that a financial contribution to the child rather than time and attention is all that is required of them, thus reinforcing traditional gender norms and doing nothing to facilitate coparenting. Pearson (2015) argues for the importance of addressing parenting time in promoting child parent contact and parent support for the child and ultimately for the generation of positive outcomes for children.

Although child support collection has improved in the US, Pearson (2015) argues that child support collection could be far higher but that instead of enforcement as a strategy, making the family courts and child support system better and more responsive for a growing never married poor population might prove to be more effective, a point that also reiterated by Boggess (2017). Indeed, Boggess (2017) bemoans the lack of creative ideas and proposals for change to better meet the needs of poor unmarried parents caught in the intersection between family law and child support. Pearson (2015) takes note of the conflicting findings in research studies in the relationship between the payment of child support and parenting time but at the same time, the direct correlation between payment of child support and better child welfare outcomes. She also argues that over time child support workers know of the many problems in families relating to parental access and visitation and that it is correct that a greater

expectation be placed on the child support agency to enhance access and visitation. Huntington (2015) advocates wage support programmes for poor non-custodial parents (e.g. the Noncustodial Parent Earned Income Tax Credit) which could potentially increase employment rates and compliance with child support but she proposes that this needs to be combined with other reforms that redress the social norm that only fathers are providers.

Pearson highlights the cases of demonstration and evaluation projects in Colorado, Texas and Tennessee. These aimed to help parents develop a parenting plan that would provide for parental time arrangements for those who had difficulty with access and visitation. An evaluation of the three sites found that the services provided were highly valued by noncustodial parents. Furthermore, “in two of the three sites”, “child support payments improved significantly the parenting time intervention” (Pearson, 2015, p. 250).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the question of whether it is in the child’s best interests to spend equal or significant amounts of time with each parent is a matter of some debate. Smyth (2009) highlights that shared care was one of the central issues that informed “sweeping changes” in the Australian family law system. The debate centred on ‘shared care’ arrangements after separation. Following the 1st of July 2006, the Australian family law courts were given the responsibility to make orders for children to “spend equal or else substantial and significant period of time with each parent” (Smyth, 2009, p. 38). Whether this is in the best interest of children has been previously and is still the subject of some debate.

One part of this debate has centered on ‘father absence’ and whether shared care could help build meaningful father-child relationships. Smyth (2009) draws on Kruk (1993) to argue that paternal disengagement can be explained through the complex and intersecting practical factors relating to legal processes themselves and psychological factors. While Smyth (2009) took note of the increasing numbers of parents sharing the care of their children in the UK, the US and Australian contexts, as he noted, shared care arrangements are still generally uncommon arrangements in families. The Australian Family Law Amendment Act set out to encourage shared care for post-separation parents and to put emphasis on the ‘benefit’ of shared care for children. According to Smyth (2009), the law marked a ‘paradigm shift’ in that the discourse used in the Act focused more on ‘relationships’ rather than legalist terms in relation to ‘responsibilities. For Smyth (2009), the legislation moves away from the ‘one home, one authority’ idea that one parent should act as the primary caregiver in contrast to the minimal role of the other parent in their child’s life. Parenting plans are given emphasis in the legislation

and these serve to outline the responsibilities that parents will undertake with respect to the child. Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) (community based mediation centres) are located in shopping centres and other accessible locations (Huntington, 2015) and they provide support for the development of these plans. This, Smyth (2009, p. 42) argues, is one of the key strengths of these centres. They also refer persons to other services to address their specific needs such as addictions etc. The plans are short-term and not legally binding so that a couple can become accustomed over time to work together to make their own arrangements that meet the changing needs of their families. Another advantage of the FRCs is that they are not part of the legal apparatus; they provide assistance to parents transitioning into a coparenting relationship in the hope that these parents will not need to go to court.

One aspect of the broader debate in relation to shared care (as highlighted in the previous chapter) is that of the quantity of parenting time versus the quality of it. For Smyth (2009), the research on children's best interests show that the quality rather than the quantity of the child parent contact is what should be emphasised in any reforms relating to shared care.

Some states in the United States have moved toward developing and incorporating parenting time with family violence safeguards in child support orders (Pearson, 2015). Toward this end, Pearson (2015) notes that there has been the development of four different approaches: shared parenting time; self help; mediation and comprehensive services. The first of these approaches is the 'Standard Parenting Time Schedule', which delineates how a child's time will be divided between parents. This court ordered schedule only comes into effect if parents cannot develop and submit a mutually agreed plan themselves. It has had the benefit of being part of the child support order and thus, has no cost and little delay. It has been criticised for being a "one-size-fits-all approach to parenting time" (Pearson, 2015, p. 251) and parents who wish to adjust the schedule are faced with fees.

Self-help Resources

The second approach has been through the provision of self-help resources that parents can utilize on their own to aid the development of parenting plans, which are subsequently filed with the court. There are also options for 'safety-focused plans'. Another resource is a visitation hotline, which is staffed by legal aid attorneys who assist parents who have questions. The benefit of this approach is that they "serve large numbers of parents with minimal cost and delays" (Pearson, 2015, p. 252). The drawback is that few parents use the resources and the

resources themselves can often be complex and parents report that they prefer one to one assistance with follow-up actions.

Mediation

A third approach is the use of mediators who can be based in various agencies, within courts themselves and who can provide assistance in the development of parenting plans. Pearson (2015) notes the benefits of such resolution processes for other groups, but its effectiveness in relation to unmarried parents “has not been extensively evaluated” (Pearson, 2015, p. 253). Mediation is also costly and there are numerous problems with attempts to establish which parents may or may not be suitable for a mediation process. There are also concerns relating to intimate partner violence. Pearson (2015) highlights for example, that safe practices such as supervised visitation / child parent contact need to be court activated. These arrangements tend to be expensive, not widely available, require return trips to court to modify or change orders and they may not be effective in protecting against all types of violence (e.g. emotional abuse / control).

Comprehensive Services

A final approach is the ‘comprehensive services’ approach, which involves grant funded programmes that provide help to parents relating to a number of dimensions such as economic problems, parenting skills and parenting relationships. One example is the ‘Co-Parent Court’ (discussed in more detail in the next section) which provides numerous services. This has been found to be successful in helping parents develop a parenting plan, but such “multiservice programs are costly, serve only a few families, and rely heavily on grant funding” (Pearson, 2015, p. 254). They can also experience problems in recruitment and in attrition.

Pearson (2015) highlights a number of approaches in the family law courts, which have aimed to help unmarried parents with their relationships and parenting. She argues that in the US context, there needs to be “meaningful collaborations among courts, domestic violence programs and child support agencies” and that policy needs to “consider a broad range of issues including accessibility to the unmarried child support population” such as “ease of use, understanding, cost, time factors, as well as family violence safeguards” (Pearson, 2015, p. 255). She also highlights the need for robust empirical research toward resolving ongoing debates and issues pertaining to father child engagement, custodial parent safety and child

wellbeing. In the next section, the ‘Co-Parent Court’ outlined in Pearson’s (2015) article, is discussed in more detail.

3.7.3 The ‘Co-Parent Court’

The ‘Co-Parent Court’ was established in Minnesota in 2010 due to findings from a needs assessment, which found that that one third of noncustodial single parents wished to spend more time with their child but only 10% of these parents filed a parenting time petition with the court to do so. The survey also found that parents would like to see support in the form of education, employment and childcare assistance. The ‘Co-Parent Court’ was founded by community and judicial partners with the mission of building a “model for paternity establishment that supported coparenting to improve positive outcomes for children and their unmarried parents” (Marczak *et al* 2015a, p. 631). The ‘Co-Parent Court’ involved 12 hours of coparenting education which involved workshops that focused on the building of coparenting skills and changing attitudes to promote participation in the child’s life. The project also involved the provision of case management and referrals to different community organisations to facilitate coparents. Coparents were also helped to develop a coparenting plan.

The ‘Co-Parent Court’ model is also made up of a number of elements. ‘Co-Parent Court Navigators’ interact with parents in court to identify their needs and to appropriately refer them to relevant project partners (Marczak *et al* 2015a). The navigators maintain contact with parents and provide the judge with progress reports at court dates. Social services provide case management services to meet the needs of parents and a family facilitator each for the mother and father help parents in ascertaining their needs in areas such as education, relationship development and domestic violence to name a few. The programme also involved a court mandated coparent education program which was specifically designed for unmarried parents. This programme involved six sessions lasting two hours each. The curriculum for the programme was adapted from the Michigan State University’s coparenting programme for unmarried parents entitled *Together We Can: Creating a Healthy Future for Our Family* (Michigan State University, 2009).

Following attendance at these workshops, parents were then provided assistance with the development of a parenting plan to deal with issues such as custody, parenting time and decision making. This plan is intended to help parents establish a plan that suits their circumstances and is legally binding. Parents who cannot agree to a plan are referred to conflict

resolution services. Continued disagreement results in a decision by a Judge. The last element of the programme is the provision of supportive services which help parents to participate in the programme.

The 'Co-Parent Court' model was evaluated using a quasi-experimental, mixed methods design examining the impact of court cases where the model was implemented (454 participants) against a control group where the model was not implemented (208 participants). Participants completed a survey pre and post intervention (six months after) and a year after completion of the intervention. Attitudes relating to the fathers' role, fathers' income and child support data were also measured (Marczak *et al* 2015b).

The results indicated that the majority of parents completed the coparent education component with mothers completing classes at a higher rate. Fifty seven percent of parents agreed with their parenting plans. While the remaining parents were still in the process of developing a parenting plan at the data collection point, the authors noted that most of these did eventually complete a plan with the aid of mediation services (Marczak *et al* 2015b). Marczak *et al* (2015b) found that there were no statistically significant differences between child support payment paid by fathers who participated (which includes those who both completed the programme and those who participated but did not fully complete the programme) in the programme versus those in the control group. In terms of child support payments, fathers who *completed* the 'Co-Parent Court' paid 21.22 % more child support owed than those who did not complete the programme. Marczak *et al* (2015b) note that there are difficulties in interpreting these data however, as fathers who are more likely to pay child support may be those fathers who were also willing to complete the classes.

Both the survey data and follow-up interviews also showed that parents believed that father involvement in their children's lives are important and that such involvement constituted more than paying child support. Rather, they "agreed that any intervention to improve father involvement must work to enhance quality of life issues for fathers, including employment, housing, and mental health supports" (Marczak, 2015b, p. 276). This, the authors claim, shows the importance of broader community partners and services in such interventions with fathers.

In contrast to the control group, which constituted parents who experienced the usual process of the family court, results show that mothers reported a 'marginally' greater frequency in how often the father saw the child. Fathers, who completed that 'Co-Parent Court' project were "significantly more likely to report being satisfied with the amount of time they spent with their

child”, “showed a marginally significant change in satisfaction with their involvement in the child’s life”, “were significantly more likely to believe they were doing well in several quality of family life outcomes” (Marczak *et al* 2015a, p. 636) and reported more positive changes in their educational attainment and job levels. Since mothers reported the ‘clearest’ benefits of father involvement from the intervention, the authors point to the importance of future programmes in presenting messages about the importance of fathers to both fathers and mothers. Furthermore, other coparents (such as grandmothers) are also identified as persons who need to be given these messages, on the basis that although these other coparents are “valuable, they do not replace the role of fathers in the lives of their children” (Marczak *et al* 2015a, p. 637). Marczak *et al* (2015a) also state that the project aims to convey to fathers they matter in their children’s lives, since the typical granting of custody to mothers may convey the impression to fathers that their role where their children are concerned, is marginal or at very least much less important than that of the mother’s.

3.8 Summary Points

- There is a strong case put forward for pre- or post-birth relationship and coparenting interventions on the basis that couples can be well disposed to each other at this time and may be romantically involved. They can be strongly child focused and they may both be at the time involved with their child and desire that this continues into the future (Cox and Shirer, 2009; Cowan *et al* 2010; McHale *et al* 2012). A corollary of this is that altering patterns of interaction, behaviour and parenting when parents are long separated and non-resident, estranged or in conflict, can be expected to be a much more challenging endeavour. This is also accepted in the literature (e.g. Cowan *et al*, 2010; Cox and Shirer, 2009).
- Assessing where unmarried couples are at in terms of their commitment to each other and/or their children is important in terms of deciding what might be most beneficial. To assist unmarried families in the best way requires learning about the family’s strengths and challenges before rushing to make decisions about the kind of support needed.
- A ‘One size fits all’ approach to working with unmarried parents / non-marital families is very unlikely to be broadly effective given the diversity in age, circumstances and the challenges that feature in these families.

- Family Relationship Centres, because they are community based, financially and physically accessible are presented in the literature reviewed as offering a superior alternative to family law courts by helping along parents' relationship transitions and by setting the groundwork for positive coparenting alliances without resort to courts.
- Interventions for non-marital couples, which are directly focused on coparenting are relatively new and have been subjected to limited research to date. The research that has been conducted however, has shown promise (Cowan *et al* 2010; McHale *et al* 2012).
- There is a lot of argumentation in the literature for the need to make family law courts much more accessible to non-marital families by introducing the required changes to help along the establishment of positive coparenting relations between parents, rather than to cultivate animosity between parents. Co-Parenting Courts are one of a number of measures outlined that potentially made courts more accessible to non-marital families.
- The significance attached to optimising the early years of children's lives in research and policy has prompted a vast number of surveillance / support interventions targeted at parents (many of whom are poor and unmarried) with the object of improving parenting knowledge and behaviour to effect positive child outcomes. Enhancing positive coparenting can be seen as a good fit with this wider policy and practice agenda.
- The weight of the evidence points to the value of coparenting interventions underpinned by a family strengths approach for high risk/fragile families (McHale *et al* 2012).

Chapter Four - Unmarried Fathers and Shared Parenting: Setting the Social, Legal and Policy Context in Ireland.

4.1 Introduction

The lone parent family is an umbrella term for families in which parents can be single, widowed, divorced, cohabiting or separated etc. It is single parent families however, which make up the greatest proportion of lone parent families in Ireland. It is argued that the lone / one parent family is something of a misnomer; that it best categorises households rather than families and that a variety of caring and familial configurations and practices (and how these transition over time) are unlikely to be captured by the particular name as it is employed (see Letablier and Wall, 2018; McKeown, 2001). It is also ill-equipped to account for families as they may transition over time into different living arrangements. Within the lone parent population studied by Corrigan (2014), the diversity in one subset (solo parents) studied is conveyed in the five categories (strivers, thrivers, high flyers, strugglers, poor single mothers) elaborated to capture the variety of relationships these parents (predominantly mothers) had with paid employment and the welfare state in Ireland. In this chapter, the focus is broadly on the lone parent family in the Irish context. However, a narrower lens is employed where possible, to attend to the non-marital family in Ireland, the position and status of the unmarried father in that family as well as the possibilities and obstacles for unmarried parents to share parenting.

4.2 Contextualising Shared and Unmarried Parenting in Ireland

4.2.1 Non-marital Family Forms

Since the 1970s there has been a notable increase in non-marital births, which accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s. The increase has continued but at a slower rate since the late 1990s (Fahey and Curran, 2016). In 2015, births outside marriage comprised 36% of all births (Fahey and Curran, 2016) and in 2017, 37.6% of all births (CSO, 2018). However, this trend has also to be considered in the context of greater support for cohabitation as a trial before marriage (Fine-Davis, 2011) and indeed a rise in cohabitation also been significant since the 1990s (Fahey and Curran, 2016). Just under 59% of births outside of marriage in 2014 were to cohabiting parents and in Census 2011, cohabiting couples with children represented 10% of all couples (Fahey and Curran, 2016). In the Growing Up in Ireland child cohort study (large scale survey of 9

year old children in 2008/09) of the never married lone mothers (9.6% of the sample), almost 1 in 4 were cohabiting with the father of the child at the time of birth (Hannan, 2018). However, cohabitation tends not to be a long-term arrangement for couples in Ireland, rather with the passing of time, the tendency is for cohabitation to either transition in to marriage or for the relationship to dissolve (Fahey and Curran, 2016).

Serial family formation is still rare in Ireland – step families only accounted for over 3% of families of 9 year olds in ‘Growing Up Ireland’³ (GUI), a percentage which is low by international standards (Fahey and Curran, 2016, p. 52). Births to teenage mothers have been consistently declining since 2000 when they peaked at 93%. By 2015 the rate had fallen to 62%. 1041 teenage girls had babies in 2017, 1022 of whom were over 16 years (CSO, 2018). Solo parenthood or parenthood in unstable cohabitation is more likely to be the experience of poorer women, who become mothers at a young age (Fahey and Curran, 2016). The majority of lone parent households are headed by mothers (86.4%) with fathers comprising 13.6% of lone parent households (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017). After separation, the majority of children in Ireland reside with one parent, typically the mother and the other partner typically is a joint legal custodian with access / visitor status (Mahon and Moore, 2011).

4.2.2 Austerity, Post-Austerity, Labour Market Activation and Lone Parent Families

In Ireland in the early 1970s, families headed by lone parents (predominantly mothers) came to be viewed as deserving of state support on the basis of the absence of a male breadwinner. However, mothers parenting alone has never been beyond scrutiny - policy responses have in the past and continue to categorise them as more or less deserving - based on their marital status, their relationship to the state and its institutions, public attitudes and judgements by professionals and increasingly their relationship to the paid labour market. In the 1990s there came the gradual erosion of state support for lone parents and their re-categorisation as workers with the expectation that they engage in paid work outside the home. For lone parents, entitlement to state benefit has been increasingly mapped on to the age of their youngest child. A Department of Social and Family Affairs - Government Discussion Paper in 2006 recognised

³ Growing Up in Ireland is an Irish Government-funded study of children being carried out jointly by The Economic and Social Research Institute and Trinity College Dublin. The study started in 2006 and follows the progress of two groups of children: 8,000 9-year-olds (Child Cohort) and 10,000 9-month-olds (Infant Cohort). The members of the Child Cohort at the time of writing were aged 20 years and those of the Infant Cohort were 9 years old.

“... parental choice with regard to care of young children but with the expectation that people will not remain outside of the labour force indefinitely” (Department of Social and Family Affairs, 2006, p. 97). The same discussion paper promised voluntary rather than compulsory activation of lone parents, coupled with the vital package of supports, which it was acknowledged, would be required to accompany such a significant policy change. The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2012 further reduced the period of cover for which lone mothers would be eligible to claim one family payment. Once their children are aged 7 years, lone parents are targeted for labour market activation.

However, the lack of a comprehensive package of vital wraparound supports required for careful as distinct from careless activation of lone parents has been the ongoing problem with significant implications for lone parent families (Millar and Crosse, 2016). Substantive issues impact on lone parents seeking employment and sustaining themselves in employment in Ireland: low levels of education among a cohort of parents; a lesser capacity to be work ready and to reconcile work and care responsibilities, a deficit of available good quality employment which pays well enough and a lack of inexpensive and accessible public childcare. Thirty-one percent of lone parents in education, training and work, assisted by the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, when surveyed, reported relying on their own parents to provide childcare and this was the most common childcare arrangement amongst those surveyed (Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, 2013). One Family (2018a) identified a number of policy measures needed to improve access to different kinds and levels of education for lone parents and Byrne and Murray (2017) documented the many barriers and challenges that exist for lone parents accessing and participating in the higher education sector and made a substantial number of recommendations to address these. Corrigan (2014) found that educational improvement between waves of GUI was associated with higher likelihood of transition into work. The Report of the Joint Committee on Social Protection (2017) also accepted the case made by Murphy and Crosse (2016) that it is the Irish ‘work first’ rather than ‘education first’ approach to activation which does not serve lone parents well. Rather it increases the risk for many of them becoming trapped into a triple burden of poorly paid employment, care and domestic work. Labour market activation of lone parents was pursued in a context of prolonged austerity when key supports for lone parent families were curtailed or abolished entirely (Madden, 2014) exacerbating poverty levels among lone parent families. An ESRI report assessing the impact of the changes made to social welfare policy between 2011 and 2014 to activate lone parents of children over 7 years found that employed lone parents suffered small income losses of

between 1 and 2%, while no income loss was experienced by non-employed lone parents. It was also found that when childcare costs were taken into account 16% of lone parents are financially better off not working. This figure reduced to 13% when the new childcare subsidy scheme introduced by Government was taken into account (Regan *et al* 2018).

4.2.3 Children in Non-Marital Families

There is a dearth of large scale studies on children or on families in Ireland as well as a scarcity in good quality quantitative data required for the conduct of research. Hannan (2018) documented the differences in wellbeing of children across family types using the GUI data, highlighting that children in never married one parent families had lower school attendance and performed less well in maths. Yet, she argued that the adverse consequences of growing up in a lone parent family are better explained by the pre-existing socio-economic disadvantages of the parents / mothers in the families rather than on the particular family structure (Hannan, 2018). In this context, she highlighted the limitations of the promotion of marriage as a policy response. An association between receipt of lone parent payment in families and lower participation by children in cultural but not in other kinds of social, community and sporting activities was found in one study based on GUI data (Coughlan *et al* 2014). Based on the same data source, children in one parent families are also identified as being at greater risk of experiencing poverty and deprivation (Watson *et al* 2018) as well as socio-emotional and behavioural difficulties than children in other families (Nixon and Swords, 2016). Lone parenthood is identified as a key factor in accounting for the high child poverty rate in Ireland (Watson *et al* 2018). Indeed the risk of poverty is greater in solo parent families than other categories of families (Corrigan, 2014). Since 2012, SILC data shows that consistent poverty amongst lone parent families rose from 17.4% in 2012 to 26.2% in 2015 (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017).

4.2.4 Unmarried Fathers in Ireland

The social exclusion experienced by unmarried fathers in Ireland has been documented by researchers (Corcoran, 2005; McKeown, 2001; O' Connor, 2009). McKeown (2001) argued that single fathers in particular constituted a much stereotyped as well as an alienated and disadvantaged group in Irish society, many of whom have both experienced adverse life experiences and encountered significant institutional barriers. Ferguson and Hogan's

study (2004), which featured non-resident fathers who had used the courts to have contact with their children, reported feeling that courts were much too restrictive in the access they afforded them. Corcoran (2005) noted in the case of non-resident fathers that they encountered many barriers to adopting a positive fathering role. Nixon, Green and Hogan (2012) found that the majority of children of non-resident fathers, who did not have meaningful contact with them did not feel connected to them. Single lone mothers and fathers as well as their children are often constructed negatively in Irish official and popular discourses (Leane and Kiely, 1997). For example, in 2011, a founding president of the University of Limerick, Ed Walsh, was reported as calling for DNA testing to be used to track runaway dads, who dodged financial responsibility for their offspring (Woulfe, 2011).

A recent qualitative study was undertaken with a small number of diverse fathers using supervised access programmes to have contact with their children (Kiely *et al* 2017). Problems identified and particularly pertinent to this research related to parental gatekeeping / inter-parental conflict, concerns about legal discrimination as well as legal costs associated with family law courts and access services and fears that restricted access arrangements which changed little over time were too minimal to support fathers to be fathers and to do fathering in meaningful ways (Kiely *et al* 2017). Fathers also identified limited income and poor accommodation as well as other adverse experiences, which militated against professional perceptions of them and their own self-perceptions as viable fathers (Kiely *et al* 2017). Most fathers also believed that decision makers and professionals held views that they were less needed by children than their mothers and that these views informed their engagement with them (Kiely *et al* 2017).

Social constructions of the ‘good’ father have changed over time in Ireland as in other contexts. The relatively absent breadwinning father has given way to a ‘new’ more involved father, as gender equality has gained momentum and as mothers engage in paid employment in greater numbers. While the shift towards the ‘new’ father is evident empirically in Ireland, a genuine relatively equal sharing of caring responsibilities is not so easily or readily achieved by Irish couples with children for a variety of social, cultural and family reasons. The gender pay gap, the lack of a strong gender equality policy framework and costly childcare are just a few of the reasons why the care of children in Ireland continues to be significantly gendered. Just over 1% of paid child care workers in Ireland are male

while the European Commission target is 20% by 2020. The intake of male students on early childcare degree programmes at third level is also miniscule (Wayman, 2016). Unlike other countries, there is no significant effort made by Government to address this gender inequality. Internationally, Ireland is characterised as a country with a very unequal gender responsibility for caring for children when compared with other countries; just under 7% of unpaid childcare is done by men compared with Sweden the most gender equal country, which had 63.37 female to male ratio in childcare (Samman *et al* 2016). Government policy tends to provide some supports to women to do childcare and household work combined with paid work without taking sufficient measures to redistribute the work involved to men.

4.2.5 Shared Parenting in Ireland

In Ireland shared parenting has been given little research attention. Research undertaken with children whose parents had separated found that children's expectation was that the non-resident parent (most often the father) would continue to be a parent to them regardless of any changes in their fathers' lives (e.g. re-partnering) (Hogan *et al* 2002). The first national survey of shared parenting was only undertaken in 2016 (One Family, 2017b). It found that for most of the respondents whose children did not live with both parents, the children did spend time with both parents on a weekly basis. It documented the shared parenting successes as well as the many and varied challenges which make shared parenting difficult. It also made a significant number of recommendations for the development of services, family law courts and for policy changes to better support shared parenting. In this survey, parents reported that what made sharing parenting difficult for them were communication problems, a lack of control over contact arrangements and the other parent's disinterest in contact with perceived implications for children (One Family, 2017b). The re-partnering of parents varied in that it could make shared parenting more difficult or easier to achieve depending on the circumstances. Factors identified as making effective shared parenting more difficult included child maintenance payments, accommodation problems, social welfare and taxation issues (One Family, 2017b). Research from the perspectives of children who experience parental separation shows that children feel that they are being helped to have better relationships with both parents when their parents show mutual respect for each other and co-operate after separation. The study advocated a family policy approach that promotes lifelong parent responsibility for children, continuity of parental involvement in children's lives and parental co-operation after separation (Hogan *et al* 2002). Mahon and Moore's research (2011) studied post-separation parenting

based on the separation and divorce arrangements made in the family law courts. The study found that courts play a key part in implementing the contact rights of children. Attitudes to ‘coparenting’ in Ireland have been found to be positive with over half of a sample studied by Fine-Davis (2011) believing that both men and women should ideally work part-time and coparent. Leave that is transferrable between parents after the birth of a baby had moderate support and paid parental leave had strong support in the same study of attitudes to family formation (Fine-Davis, 2011).

4.2.6 Non-Marital Families and Shared Parenting

The GUI data shows that shared parenting is the least common in never-married lone parent families (26%) than other family forms and that this cohort also has the lowest frequency of contact overall (Fahey *et al* 2012). Also noted, based on analysis of the GUI data, is the evidence showing unmarried father disengagement from children in Ireland with the passing of time (Corrigan, 2014). There is Irish evidence (from the GUI study) showing a positive correlation between shared parenting and children’s physical development by the age of three years (Corrigan, 2014). Similarly, research findings have found that children in Ireland (growing up in single mother households where fathers were non-resident from an early stage in the children’s lives) who experienced contact with fathers which was too detached from caregiving and which was not amenable to real involvement in each other’s lives, reported in interview that they found it very difficult to feel connected to their fathers (Nixon *et al* 2012).

4.3 Irish Law, Children and Unmarried Families

4.3.1 Child Maintenance

Under Irish Law, there is a legal obligation on both parents of a child(ren), irrespective of their status to financially support their child dependents up to the ages of 18 or 23 years, or beyond these ages in instances where children have disabilities etc. Child maintenance involves a regular contribution made by a non-resident parent towards the financial cost of raising a child to the parent who resides with the child. It has been noted that in Ireland a comparatively low level of maintenance is paid to residential / custodial lone parents from the other parent and there is also a poor record enforcing payment of maintenance (One Family, 2018b). In Corrigan’s (2014) study of lone parent (unmarried-cohabiting and solo mother) families using

GUI data, more than half of the solo mothers were not receiving any financial contribution from the fathers of their three year old children. Thirty-five percent of lone parents in Ireland are in receipt of child maintenance payments (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017, p. 27). Insufficient or unpaid child maintenance were the most common financial problems identified by respondents to the *National Shared Parenting Survey* undertaken by One Family (2017b). Resident parents can seek maintenance orders from the court and can also utilise the court system if there is an issue of non-payment. Changes made to tax credits in Budget 2013 presented challenges to shared parenting arrangements and to maintenance payment by non-resident parents as they made the payment only payable to the primary carer (Corrigan, 2014). The policy of activation, which saw the age limit for receipt of one parent family payment for a child reduced from 14 years to 7 years, had the unintended effect (which had to be corrected later by legislation) of conveying to non-resident parents that they were only liable for maintenance for a child up until the child was 7 years. In this context, the value of proofing policies and plans for their potential positive or negative impacts on shared parenting is underlined.

One Family (undated a) has criticised the inconsistency and lack of transparency as to how courts decide how much maintenance should be paid by a non-resident parent. In this context Sinn Féin has proposed statutory guidelines for courts setting maintenance payments (Brady, 2018). The long waiting lists in Irish courts is also identified as a problem by One Family (undated a) as is the court route being the only option for parents not in agreement about maintenance, which can serve to exacerbate family stress and conflict (One Family, undated a). The lack of any kind of state funded child maintenance service, which could act as an intermediary and alleviate the burden on resident parents, particularly those who have experienced domestic violence and are seeking maintenance, is also highlighted (One Family undated a).

The onus put on resident parents to seek payment and to issue court enforcement proceedings is thought to be too great as well as the onus put on the custodial / resident parents by the state to demonstrate evidence of having sought a maintenance order or to show proof of maintenance payments to obtain the One Parent Family Payment. This it is argued, puts undue stress and pressure on the resident parents, according to representative organisations and other interests and abdicates the state of any responsibility to support lone parents in this endeavour (Bayliss, 2017; One Family, undated a). The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recommended that the Irish state “consider establishing a statutory

maintenance authority and prescribing amounts for child maintenance in order to reduce the burden of women to litigate for child maintenance orders” (CEDAW, 2017, p. 15), a recommendation that was accepted by the Joint Committee on Social Protection (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017). Overall, there have been number calls for a more robust child maintenance system in Ireland, one similar to the English model (the Child Maintenance Service), to help address the child poverty experienced in one parent families (Bayliss, 2017; Brady, 2018, One Family, undated a). The political Party Sinn Féin has proposed the introduction of the model as it operates in Northern Ireland (Brady, 2018). The party has also argued that child maintenance should no longer be configured as household income calculated as means when persons seek to access other state supports, if it is to be used as an effective child poverty reduction strategy in the Irish context (Brady, 2018). This has also been accepted by the Joint Committee on Social Protection (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017). If the British model or one similar is introduced into Ireland, every effort needs to be made to ensure that the flaws in what is otherwise acknowledged as a good model are addressed to ensure that it works effectively for survivors of domestic violence (Rabindrakumar and Allbeson, 2017).

4.3.2 Family Courts Service

Criticism of the family law courts in Ireland relate to the costs involved, long wait times to appear in court and long wait times while in court, delays and perceived inefficiencies, poor case management and progression, inadequate facilities and a lack of services needed to help judges to make decisions (Coulter, 2007; One Family, undated b; Law Society of Ireland, undated). Indeed, Coulter in 2007 reported that notwithstanding some improvements, the unequal two-tier system of family justice (identified in the Law Reform Commission Report LRC, 52-1996) had become increasingly entrenched. The two-tier system refers to the poorer often unrepresented litigants, who seek summary justice in the District Court and their wealthier counterparts, who apply for the more sophisticated Circuit Court solutions. Similarly, while mediation has been perceived as the preserve of middle class married parents (Conneely, 2002), the profile of parents using the District Courts is typically unmarried, male and working class seeking to challenge obstruction of access to children (Quirk, 2011).

In the *Shared Parenting Survey* (One Family, 2017b) many parents perceived the family law courts to be unfit for purpose and very costly. The negative impact solicitors had on parental relations was noted and respondents had mixed experiences of mediation, both positive and

negative. That family law courts have been perceived or experienced as biased toward the mother by fathers has been documented (McKeown, 2001; Corcoran, 2005), prompting campaigns for parental equality or justice for fathers as well as successful legal cases taken by fathers in Irish higher courts or European courts (O'Connor, 2009). Coulter (2007) found no evidence of systematic bias against fathers in family law courts but did elucidate some of the reasons why fathers, particularly those on modest incomes who experience marriage / relationship breakdown, could perceive that such a bias exists against them as judges tend to make practical decisions for children and families. She also claimed that from what she witnessed that the tender years principle, which holds that very young children need their mothers was not a key factor in judges' decision making (Coulter, 2007).

In terms of supporting shared parenting, Coulter's report (2007) is also insightful. She claimed that in the event that there were no compelling reasons not to give access, some judges tend to grant access to fathers almost automatically conceiving of it as a right of the child to have access to both parents even if the access is supervised. In contrast, it seemed that others took the view that the granting of access is not automatic and in this context the burden of proof falls on the parent seeking access. She claimed that joint custody where sought also tended to be granted if there were no compelling reasons not to grant it and if there were no concerns about a parent's capacity in this regard and as long as the joint custodial arrangement was feasible and perceived to be in the best interests of the child (e.g. a child's education / schooling was not going to be too disrupted etc.). The dominance of the mother was explained by the mother being the primary carer pre- and post-separation and the spouse most likely to be living in the family home with the child(ren) post-separation, allowing for continuity for the child(ren). This finding was reiterated in a study of post-separation and divorce cases in the family law courts conducted by Mahon and Moore (2011) for the Office of the Minister for Children. Coulter (2007) also noted that in disputes pertaining to custody, access and maintenance, an increasing number of litigants were representing themselves in court, which tended to put them at significant disadvantage.

Since the 1990s, there have been numerous calls for comprehensive properly resourced family courts service in Ireland to appropriately respond to individuals and families' needs, particularly those who are most vulnerable (Coulter, 2007; Coulter *et al* 2015; One Family undated a). One Family (undated b) has called for a comprehensive court welfare service that includes among its key services, the following:

- Mediation including shuttle mediation and mediated parenting plans
- Specialists to hear the voice of the child
- Specialists to represent the interests of the child
- Specialists to undertake parenting capacity assessments
- Specialists to undertake assessments re the functioning of the family, extent of domestic abuse, risks for children etc.
- Counselling for parents, together or separately
- Parent mentoring to focus on the best interests of the child and improve parenting skills
- Specialist parenting programmes such as those provided by One Family and other non-profit organisations
- Play therapy for children
- Child Contact Centres.

4.3.3 Children and Family Law Courts

A number of articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasises a child's right to have contact and a relationship with both parents, articles which influence Irish judicial decision making. Over time the key standard as it is set out for legislation, policy and practice is the child's 'best interests' principle in terms of making key decisions pertaining to the child in the family and relating to such areas as access, guardianship, custody, care etc. Indeed the Law Reform Commission (2010) recommended that terms like 'parental responsibility', 'day-to-day care' 'residence' and 'contact' be used in place of terms such as 'guardianship', 'custody' and 'access' so that the rights, needs and interests of children, rather than their parents, inform decision making in legal, policy and practice fields. The terminology still in use in Ireland is not conducive to promoting and supporting shared parenthood and is out of step with the shift in discourse in other country contexts. While hearing the voice of the child prior to making decisions which have implications for them has been given greater emphasis over time, Mahon and Moore (2011) identified the distinct lack of children's voices in family law cases pertaining to divorce and separation in their study. The lack of a prescribed framework as to how children's voices should be heard in family law practice means that it is done somewhat inconsistently (Coulter, 2007).

4.3.4 Alternative Dispute Resolution Approaches

Mediation has been legally available in Ireland since 1989. In 2003, when the Family Support Act provided for the establishment of the Family Support Agency, the family mediation service came under the remit of that agency. Family mediation services are available free of charge, yet uptake of family mediation services in family law cases remains very low (Conneely, 2002; Coulter, 2007; McGowan, 2018). In 2011, Mahon and Moore (2011) reported that in 2006, only 1,500 couples used the Family Mediation Service, as compared with 27,000 who went to the District and Circuit Courts. In 2007 Coulter argued the case for family mediation and collaborative law practice to be used much more extensively in Ireland as it is in other countries.

The Law Society of Ireland considered how Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) could be embedded in Irish family courts, on the basis that it is mainstream in some countries (e.g. Australia, New Zealand) and has become increasingly significant in others (England and Wales, USA, Canada). The Society noted that mediation is the most prevalent form of ADR used in Ireland, with arbitration and collaborative legal practice much less utilised despite the increasing number of lawyers in different counties with the requisite training in collaborative law. The Society recommended that all forms of ADR should be available to clients and that mandatory ADR meetings should be made compulsory by law prior to any client issuing proceedings. Mandatory ADR meetings were also recommended by Coulter (2007) and the Law Reform Commission (2010). The Law Society of Ireland's submission also called for the establishment of a specialised family law court structure, using the UK Family Justice Service Review (Justice UK, 2011) as the blueprint, a less adversarial approach to family law proceedings and a more efficient disposal of cases. The 2017 Mediation Act commenced in 2018 and while it raises the profile of mediation as a route for families, it did not follow through on recommendations to make engagement in mediation compulsory, possibly due to resource constraints (McGowan, 2018). The legislation only goes so far as to require solicitors to provide information to clients on ADR options and it puts a greater onus on clients to use ADR where possible. Unfortunately, as fathers who use the courts may not always have legal representation or they may be waiting to obtain legal aid, the risk is that they thus miss out on finding out about the alternative options available to them. Coulter's (2007) study drew attention to the lack of information among the general public about the full range of options, other than court proceedings to address family discord. The underlying objective of the

Mediation Act is to promote mediation as a viable, effective and efficient alternative to court proceedings, thereby reducing legal costs, speeding up the resolution of disputes and reducing the stress and acrimony which often accompanies court proceedings (Department of Justice and Equality, 2018). However, it is argued that the legislation does little to support innovation in dispute resolution services and that mediation is best understood as an additional process rather than as an alternative to lawyers and litigation, particularly for divorcing couples, because the legal framework governing divorce and judicial separation requires court based resolution of disputes (McGowan, 2018). At the time of writing it is too early to assess the success or otherwise of the legislation in this regard.

4.3.5 Legislation

Over time client / family profiles utilising the courts and other services in Ireland have changed. For example, client profiles of the Family Mediation Service were predominantly married heterosexual couples separating but by the 2000s the client profile had diversified considerably to also include same sex couples separating, never resident together couples with children, separating couples in their second / third relationships with children and couples from other countries living in Ireland. (Bennett, 2011). Over time the legislation needed to be updated to keep pace with family change and diversity in Ireland and non-marital families have benefitted accordingly. The Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 requires the father's identity to be registered on a birth certificate unless compelling reasons for withholding this information exist. This gives legal recognition to fathers not married to the mothers of their children. The Children and Relationships Act 2015 also afforded unmarried fathers, particularly those who cohabited with the child's mother greater status.

4.3.6 The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015

The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 has marked a significant step in updating Irish family law. When a court is deciding what might best be in the interests of a child, a checklist of factors, which are pragmatic and child focused, is included in the legislation for courts to make such a determination. The checklist also includes factors designed to promote parent or guardian agreement and co-operation between them in the best interests of their children (Harding, 2015). For the first time the non-marital father automatically becomes a guardian of the child if he has cohabited with the child's mother for 12 consecutive months,

including not less than 3 months after the child's birth. This provision is not retrospective meaning that the 12 consecutive months must occur after the 18th January 2016, the date when this subsection of the legislation was commenced. That the allocation of guardianship does not happen upon the birth of the child and the cohabitation requirement does little for the child whose parents do not live together have been identified as significant limitations of the legislation (Bracken, 2017). The non-marital father, who qualifies for automatic guardianship can apply to the court for a declaration of such to demonstrate his rights in this regard. An unmarried father can obtain guardianship of his child at any time following the birth by signing a statutory declaration with the mother in the presence of a practicing solicitor, Peace Commissioner, Commissioner of Oaths or Notary Public. If there is more than one child, a separate declaration is required in respect of each child. As there is no central register of declarations, they have to be kept safe by the parents. In a situation where a mother does not consent to the father becoming a legal guardian or the length of the period of cohabitation is disputed, the father can make an application (without legal representation) to the local District Court to be appointed a guardian of his child. This application can be made with or without his name appearing on the birth certificate. If the court awards guardianship, it does not impact on the guardianship of the child held by any other person unless the court orders otherwise.

There is provision also in the legislation for non-parental guardianship where certain conditions are met and when the guardians of the child and the applicant concerned consent to this. However, a court can dispense with the provision for consent if the court determines it is being unreasonably withheld or it is in the best interest of the child to make an order. A child can therefore have a number of guardians if the court determines this to be in the child's best interests and the intention is that guardians share rights and responsibilities with each other by putting the best interests of the child first. A court also has the power to remove from office a guardian of the child. For the first time in Irish law, the rights and responsibilities underpinning guardianship are listed and they include the capacity: To decide on a the child's place of residence; To make decisions regarding the child's religious, spiritual, cultural and linguistic upbringing; To consent to medical, dental and other health related treatment for the child in instances where a guardian's consent is required; To provide consent under specified enactments relating to children (e.g. child passport application); To place the child for adoption and consent to the adoption of the child.

When the parents of a child are living apart and a court appoints a non-parent as guardian, this guardian will generally have more restricted powers limited to day to day matters depending

on their relationship with the child and the child's best interests. These powers are decided by the court. When unmarried parents cannot agree on custody arrangements in respect of a child, the biological father can apply to court for joint custody, which involves the child residing with each parent for a stipulated time that does not cause disruption to the child's life. A parent or guardian granted a court order for custody or access and has been unreasonably denied either of these, may apply to the court for an enforcement order. A court has to be satisfied that the enforcement order is warranted and that it is in the best interest of a child. A parent who persistently does not comply with a court order for access or custody, can be required by the court to compensate the other parent for travel or other expenses incurred by them when the other parent travels and is denied access; to give the parent additional time to build up or rebuild a relationship with a child, to attend a parenting programme, to avail of counselling or mediation as a means of addressing issues. Under this legislation the court can order payment of maintenance by the cohabitant of a child's parent for the support of the child, when the cohabiting parent is the child's guardian. Under the 2015 Act, there is a provision for unmarried fathers who are not cohabiting and do not meet the cohabitation requirement outlined earlier, for an arrangement whereby unmarried parents can sign the statutory declaration for joint guardianship when registering or de-registering their child's birth. Should parents marry after the birth, the father automatically becomes a joint guardian provided that the father's name is on the child's birth certificate. If a father is a joint guardian and the mother of the child subsequently marries or enters into a civil partnership, the father remains the joint guardian. Adoption of the child by the mother and her new partner requires the father's consent and consent means the father forfeits his right to guardianship.

The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 is a significant piece of legislation that responds to varying degrees to the needs of different family forms in Ireland. However, overall it has been assessed as having done little to respond to the needs of children of unmarried fathers unless the fathers fulfil the cohabitation requirement (Bracken, 2017; Cronin, 2016). In a situation where a mother refuses to facilitate joint guardianship, an unmarried father has no choice but to resort to the courts to make an application (Cronin, 2016). The failure to establish a Central Register for Guardianship Agreements and for a registration process (that would permit fathers to demonstrate that they have acquired guardianship rights without court involvement) are identified as significant limitations not addressed by the legislation (Cronin, 2016). Given that guardianship for unmarried fathers, unlike their married counterparts is not

automatic and can be achieved in different ways, it is hardly surprising that the greatest number of queries to Treoir in 2017 related to guardianship (Treoir, 2017).

4.3.7 Family Support and Shared Parenting

While there is an increasingly more relaxed approach to diversity in family form over time, it is evident that there is greater anxiety about family functioning and parenting, particularly parenting as it relates to outcomes for children (Daly 2013; Lee, 2014). Family and parenting support services have developed particularly since the late 1990s in the Irish context. The family support agency established in 2003 had under its remit, family mediation, counselling, the family resource centre network and a programme of family related research. Responsibility for these services later became the responsibility of the Child and Family Agency established in 2014. There is a need for better and more tailored family support services to respond to families generally and particularly to families in crisis and to appropriately service the needs of family law and child care law courts (Coulter *et al* 2015; One Family, 2017b). Children of parents who separate often need formal professional support (Hogan *et al* 2002) and nearly 60% of respondents in the *Shared Parenting Survey* (One Family, 2017b) sought help for their children after they separated. Parents who responded sought and emphasised the importance of parenting supports such as counselling and mentoring as well as programmes which addressed shared parenting. The *Shared Parenting Survey* (One Family, 2017b) underlined the need for more specialised parenting and family supports particularly to service the family law courts (One Family, 2017b). Other studies have acknowledged that family support services are overwhelmingly mother and child centred and that they need to become much more inclusive of fathers in their policies, procedures and practices (Whyte, 2017). The services in Ireland, which promote and support shared parenting are the subject of the following chapter.

4.4 Summary Points

- Legislation, social policies and unintended anomalies prompted by their introduction, can help or hinder father involvement in children's lives and shared parenting; to encourage father involvement and shared parenting, policy proofing is needed to examine intended and unintended effects.
- Unlike some other countries (e.g. Sweden, Canada, Australia), Irish courts still broadly adhere to a joint (legal) custody of children with children residing primarily with the

mother and access given to the father in family law cases, which can facilitate some form of shared parenting. This may be because this arrangement is simply normative or because mothers are more likely to be primary carers pre and post relationship breakdown and they continue to live in the same residence with children or because prior to court men are perceived to have limited enough day to day childcare experience than men in some other countries (e.g. Sweden). However, child's right to contact with both parents and the positive attitudes to coparenting / sharing parenting in Ireland should also be noted and it is likely that more egalitarian shared parenting arrangements will become increasingly the norm over time.

- The concepts of 'custody' and 'access' are parent focused rather than child focused terms and thus, do little to convey that the best interests of children are being served and are not conducive to shared parenting as they propagate unequal relationships between parents. There should be greater effort made to abandon using such concepts in legal and other discourses in Ireland, as has already been recommended by the Law Reform Commission (2010).
- Given the high rate of child poverty in lone parent families, there is good reason in Ireland to reform the child maintenance system to make the required changes toward improving the anti-poverty effectiveness of child maintenance. The Nordic systems (e.g. Norway or Sweden) or the recently reformed British system provide models useful for the reform of the Irish system.
- Every effort should be made to encourage and support family based child maintenance arrangements including the provision of financial incentives to parents and the provision of comprehensive information (see for examples, the English Child Maintenance Options website and the Sorting out Separation web application). A child maintenance calculator can be successfully used by parents to work out a fair arrangement (see for example, <https://www.cmoptions.org/en/calculator/index.asp>). A statutory child maintenance scheme (similar to the UK /Sweden / Norway) for parents who fail to work out an arrangement should be established. Reform of the child maintenance system to provide a range of options for parents could help to facilitate coparenting and shared responsibility for children without parents having to resort to court proceedings, which is likely to exacerbate conflict.

- As the cohabitation requirement undermines the rights of children born to non-cohabiting parents to relationships with their fathers from the time of their birth, the legislation should be amended so that this requirement is removed.
- Future legislation, policy and practice prior to being introduced should be assessed to explore how it can promote / incentivise shared parenting arrangements which can work well for children rather than hinder them for unmarried families.
- The need for a resourced courts service with required ancillary services for families who require them, is reiterated.
- If ADR is to become the default route for families in dispute about issues pertaining to establishing and sustaining shared parenting, it is unlikely that this can happen without much greater effort via legislation, policy and practice to divert persons from court involvement towards other options where practicable. For example, it is reported that in Sweden, in less than 2% of divorces / separations involving children the final custody arrangements is decided by a judge (Turunen, 2017). Most parents in Sweden make their own arrangements and a smaller number use mediation by social services, lawyers and court appointed mediators to come to agreement (Turunen, 2017).

Chapter Five – Family Support and Interventions in the Irish Context

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of some of the different interventions, programmes and services in the Irish context that are relevant to the purposes of this research. It first provides a contextual overview of parenting and family supports in Ireland, focusing on both the legal and policy context of such supports. The chapter then proceeds to outline four forms of family support and parenting support services, programmes or interventions. Each of the sections which pertain to services and interventions first begins with the ‘overview’ of the general state of play of each programme form. Following this, specific services, programmes of interventions are given greater focus. The description of these programmes are mainly drawn from their evaluations.

5.2 Contextualising Parent and Family Supports in Ireland

5.2.1 Legal context for parent and family support

Both the Irish Constitution and the The Child Care Act 1991 provide a legislative base for the activities of parenting support in Ireland. Family support services grew significantly following the Family Support Agency Act 2001, which enabled the establishment of the Family Support Agency in 2003. The Child and Family Agency Act 2013 provided for a range of existing services for children and families to become the remit of one agency called the Child and Family Agency/Tusla. Tusla was established on the 1st of January 2014 and acts as an independent legal entity that is “responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children” (Tusla, 2018). The establishment of Tusla removes the delivery of child protection services and responsibility from the HSE (Gillen *et al* 2013) and its establishment is part of a broader aim to improve child outcomes in Ireland (Connolly *et al* 2017).

The UNCRC, which Ireland has ratified, has influenced policy making in the Irish context (see next section) and has had a significant influence over family policy reform (Connolly and Devaney, 2017). The UNCRC provides a legal framework for rights based parenting support (Gillen *et al* 2013). For example, the UNCRC (United Nations/Children’s Rights Alliance, 2010, p. 13) argues that “States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from

one of both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis”.

5.2.2 Policy context for parent and family supports

In Ireland, there has been increasing emphasis within government policy on improving the welfare, wellbeing and ‘outcomes’ for children and young people. In identifying the factors that mediate child wellbeing, there is an acceptance of the ‘critical role’ of parents in contributing toward the attainment of positive outcomes in their children’s lives. Consequently, there has been increasing Government interest in the provision of ‘parenting’ and ‘family’ support interventions (Connolly *et al* 2017; Connolly and Devaney, 2017; Sneddon and Owens, 2012). This growing interest was reflected in the 1990s through the publication of *The Strengthening Families for Life: The final report of the commission on the family* (Commission on the Family, 1998) report, which made substantive recommendations for family and parent support.

Moran *et al* (2004, p. 6, cited in Connolly *et al* 2017) define parenting support as “any intervention for parents or carers aimed at reducing risks and/or promoting protective factors for their children, in relation to their social, physical and emotional wellbeing”. Such supports can be composed of direct parenting support services which aim to improve parental skills and capacities while indirect support helps parents in improving their life trajectory (Connolly *et al* 2017). They can also include “universal support in informal settings for self-referring parents” (Connolly *et al* 2017, p. 6) but more focused interventions may be and are provided for families with higher levels of need.

Parenting and family supports and services also have to take into consideration the diversity of families and changes in family structures and dynamics. Indeed one of the changes in family dynamics has been the increasing concern about fathers in relation to their role as parents in Irish society. Parentline (2018) notes for example, that over the thirty years since its establishment, the “number of fathers calling the helpline is increasing all the time”. It also notes that the content of the calls from fathers have changed with both men and women raising the same issues. Indeed as highlighted in the introduction to this report, unmarried fathers who make calls to Treoir are almost equal in number to mothers, again highlighting how fathers need for more information is becoming more significant.

Coupled with increasing attention given to parenting and family support services, there is also an emphasis on the delivery of services that are based on evidence of effectiveness (Connolly and Devaney, 2017). As Connolly *et al* (2017, p. 22) note:

Ultimately, evidence-based outcomes highlight the success of parenting programmes. Evidence of what works is key to service planning. In addition, evidence of what works with seldom-heard parents and those who are not served by current structures requires additional exploration.

Research for example, has highlighted the importance of parents being aware of services as evidence shows that they may not access them until they experience a crisis (Connolly *et al* 2017). In terms of parenting programmes and family support services themselves, research points to the benefits and success of ‘ongoing engagement’ in programmes, relationship building, partnership working and of the “importance of the practitioner... in the provision of parenting and family support (Connolly *et al* 2017, p. 21). Furthermore, Connolly and Devaney (2017, p. 5) note that in the Irish context it has been recognised that family support services should work jointly “to enable parenting capacity”.

In Ireland, child and family welfare falls under the responsibility of a range of ministerial bodies and is underpinned by “a broad range of strategies, action plans and policies” (Connolly *et al* 2017, p. 10). One such strategy is the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* policy (DCYA, 2014). *Better Outcomes* (DCYA, 2014, p. 3) emphasises the “benefits of positive parenting” in promoting child development and commits to increase the level of supports to all parents “through universal access to good-quality parenting advice and programmes, and access to affordable quality childcare, as well as targeted evidence-based supports to those parents with greatest needs” (DCYA, 2014 p. x). It also highlights that such parenting supports should enable ‘positive parenting’, assistance with child discipline and parenting skills in order to support the health and education of children. The policy recognises that all parents should be supported to care for their children and argues for a “clear legal relationship between the child and the adult(s) in their lives who” are carrying out the parenting role (DYCA, 2014, p. 77). However, the policy does not take note of the particular needs of unmarried parents and even more specifically, fathers, in the barriers they face toward being involved in sharing the care of their children, such as the lack of automatic guardianship as a factor in this barrier.

The provision of family and parenting support is underpinned by a variety of philosophical models, such as principles of prevention and early intervention. Theoretically and conceptually

parenting support is also underpinned by ecology systems theory (Connolly and Devaney, 2017). In the Irish context, parenting and family supports in Ireland is characterised by a diverse provision of direct and indirect model of supports, services, approaches and method of delivery (Connolly *et al* 2017).

The delivery of parenting supports in the Irish context has been traditionally provided by statutory, voluntary and community agencies serving a variety of population groups (Connolly and Devaney, 2017). A range of parenting and family supports are provided and funded at the statutory level by Tusla through the provision of grants to non-statutory services, exemplifying the partnership model that is a “fundamental aspect of Tusla’s strategic and practice approach” (Connolly *et al* 2017, p. 14). A part of Tusla’s remit is to ensure that parents are provided with supports within their community. The DCYA’s (2015) *High-Level Policy Statement* recognises the role of parents as ‘key mediators’ of their children’s welfare and outlines that Tusla should give most prominence to ‘parenting and family support’ in as part of the broader government aim to support parents in their parenting capacity.

Tusla’s *Parenting Support Strategy* (Gillen *et al* 2013) is the first national policy on parenting support in Ireland. The objective of the Strategy is to outline how Tusla can fulfil the DCYA’s (2012) *Statement of Strategy*. As part of a number of objectives to improve child outcomes, the *Statement of Strategy* (DCYA, 2012) commits to providing support for parents and families. Tusla’s *Support Strategy* (Gillen *et al* 2013) emphasises a continuum of support through universal and targeted support across as well as recognising the ‘lifecourse’ of parenting and the differentiate needs children based on their age. The *Strategy* (Gillen *et al* 2013, p. 9) conceptualises ‘parenting support’ as activities which assist parents and carers rearing of children, while ‘family support’ is conceptualised as a set of activities which aim “to promote and protect the health, wellbeing and rights of all children, young people and their families”.

It is noteworthy that the Tusla’s *Strategy* (Gillen *et al* 2013) does not explicitly mention the importance of ‘shared parenting’. The *Strategy* also focuses on ‘positive parenting’ and highlights that ‘positive parenting’ is based on a ‘rights based’ approach has a number of characteristics such as being “authoritative, not authoritarian” (Gillen *et al* 2013, p. 10) and involves the enactment of duties and responsibilities such as the giving of physical and verbal warmth and being “a good role model” (Gillen *et al* p. 21). Given that ‘positive parenting’ is based on a rights based approach, which in itself emphasises the right of the child to maintain “direct contact with both parents on a regular basis” (United Nations/Children’s Rights

Alliance, 2010, p. 13), one of the other ‘characteristics’ of positive parenting could be a willingness to help the child be involved in the other parent’s life, or at least to refrain from putting up unnecessary barriers to shared parenting. Furthermore, although the *Strategy* recognises a range of family forms, it does not explicitly recognise that “tailored parenting support” (Gillen *et al* 2013, p. 12) may be needed for unmarried parents, or at least that existing support should be sensitive to their needs. A booklet, which is co-produced by Tusla and Barnardos (2015) and is part of the *Parenting Positively* series, is aimed at separating and divorcing parents of children, aged between 6-12 years. In all however, a discourse or language of ‘shared parenting’ or ‘coparenting’ is absent from both Government and Agency policy discourse.

Outside of Tusla itself, support for parents is also provided by both the Irish community and voluntary sector. Service and supports provided by this sector may be fully or partially funded by Tusla or other organisations such as Pobal and through donations and fundraising. Furthermore, the Health Service Executive also provides parental and family support, exemplified in its Sexual Health Crisis Pregnancy Programme, through public health nurses based in local health centres who visit newborn infants and their mothers within six weeks of birth.

5.3 Programmed Parenting Courses

5.3.1 Overview

In Ireland, there exists a range of parenting programmes that are generally termed ‘programmed parenting courses’ as they are “typically based on a programme of activity that is believed, or known to be helpful to those who participate” (Connolly *et al* 2017, p. 75). These ‘programmed parenting courses’ are varied and can focus on specific parenting or family issues and be directed at specific groups of parents for different child age groups. They can also be located in different settings (see Connolly *et al* 2017) and be provided by a number of different agencies. Some courses and parental training programmes are provided by private companies for example, such as in the case of ‘Practical Parenting’ which offers one-to-one sessions while others such as ‘Help Me to Parent’ offer a mixture of both one-to-one private coaching sessions and group workshops

One general parenting programme is The ‘Mol an Óige Common Sense Parenting’ programme which was set up in 2007 by the HSE West Child and Family Services in Counties Mayo and Roscommon. Its aim is to “teach parents practical and effective ways to enhance their parenting skills and strengthen their children’s potential and quality of life” (Reddy and Canavan, 2017, p. 11) and is delivered by two trained facilitators in six weekly two hour workshops. In 2014, 15 programmes were delivered across eight Family Resource Centres (Connolly *et al* 2017) and a mixed method evaluation study (Reddy and Canavan, 2017) provides the evidence for the effectiveness of the programme.

Another programme is the ‘The Incredible Years Programme’, which “is designed to prevent and treat emotional and behavioural difficulties in children” (Archways, 2018). A total of 19 programmes were delivered across six FRCs with 115 parents completing the programme (Connolly *et al* 2017). The programme consists of between 12-20 weekly group sessions and the programmes are grouped according to age. The programme was developed by Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton in the University of Washington Seattle and is delivered in the US, the UK, Canada, Norway and Ireland (Archways, 2018). Archways was established in 2007 to promote the rollout and evaluation of the programme. The programme has undergone ‘rigorous evaluation’ (Archways, 2018) over the past 30 years and the research points to the benefits of the programme. As Connolly *et al* (2017, p. 24) point out:

Multiple studies, including RCTs and follow-ups, demonstrate positive outcomes Benefits for parents as a result of taking part in the [Incredible Years] programmes included improvements in overall well-being, and increased confidence and skills for managing challenging child behaviour.

Furlong and McGilloway’s (2011, p. 625) research, consisting of one-to-one semi-structured interviews with parents who participated in the programme, highlights the need for providers of such programmes to be sensitive to the “cultural, personal and environment challenges that exist for parents within disadvantaged settings”. Some parents for example expressed ambivalence and even discomfort with the idea of giving ‘praise and rewards’ which the authors noted should be understood in a historical context of predominantly punitive parenting practice in Ireland.

A similar parenting programme is the ‘Triple P – Positive Parenting Program’. Triple P is a universal access backed up by more than 35 years of ongoing research” and helps provide parents with strategies to “help them build strong, healthy relationship, confidently manage

their children's behaviour" (Triple P, 2018). The programme is group based and lasts for eight weeks. The programme must be delivered by accredited trainers. In 2014, a total of 29 programmes were delivered in 17 FRCs in Ireland with a total of 234 parents completing the program (Connolly *et al* 2017). Tusla, the HSE and a number of voluntary and community organisations collaborate to deliver the programme on a universal access basis.

5.3.2 Case Study: Parents Plus Programme– Parenting When Separated Programme

As part of the research for this report, the research team sought to ascertain whether there exists shared parenting programmes for unmarried parents and programmes that work with fathers in Ireland. At the time of writing, we could identify no shared parenting programmes which specifically targets unmarried parents. There are however, courses for parents who are separated or divorced, such as the 'Parents Plus – Parenting When Separated Programme' (PP-PWP).

The PP-PWP is part of suite of parenting training programmes provided by Parents Plus (PP) an Irish charity that develops and delivers evidence-based parenting and mental health programmes. The charity trains professionals to deliver the programmes in both communities and clinical settings. The other programmes in the suite include the Early Year, Children, Adolescent and the Working Things Out programme, which is a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy programme for young people aged 11-16.

Carr *et al* (2017) highlight a number of features that distinguish PP programs from other group parenting training interventions such as the Incredible Years and Triple P programmes. They highlight that the programmes are particularly suited to the Irish context since the video modelling materials were developed in Ireland. Crucially, one of the key distinguishing features is the "systemic and solution-focused approach" which makes the programmes useful for family therapists to utilize (Carr *et al* 2017, p. 665). In their review of 17 evaluation studies involving over 1,000 families who partook in Parent Plus programmes, Carr *et al* (2017, p. 664) report that the programmes "have a significant impact on child behaviour problems, parental satisfaction, parental stress reduction, and therapeutic goal attainment". Carr *et al* (2017, p. 665) report that across these 17 studies, father involvement in PP programmes "was relatively low".

Sharry *et al* (2015) highlight the importance of the PP-PWP. For parents themselves, divorce can disrupt friendship networks, lead to economic stress and can have a significant impact on parental psychological well-being. This can lead to ‘less effective parenting’ and while some parents are able to develop ‘co-operative co-parental relationships’, other parents may experience a conflictual coparenting relationship or may disengage entirely from communicating with the other parent. Sharry *et al* (2015) highlight research which suggests that separated parents programmes should be child focused and skills based as opposed to information based. Such programmes should be conducted over the longer term, use multiple pedagogies of learning and promote communication and conflict resolution skills between parents. Furthermore, they highlight that ‘effective’ separated parents programmes should “Foster a greater willingness for residential parents to encourage their children to spend more time with the non-resident parent” (Sharry *et al* 2015, p. 62).

A total of 50 Parents Plus programmes were delivered across 25 FRC’s in Ireland with 439 parents completing the programme (Connolly *et al* 2017). *One Family* also provides the PP-PWP programme. Keating *et al*’s (2016) study is currently the only evaluation of the PP-PWP. The PP-PWP was designed from the basis of information from focus groups conducted on separated parents, a review of curricula from other programmes and research on protective and risk factors for children following separation or divorce. The programme is the first intervention for separated parents designed for use in Ireland (Keating *et al* 2016). It is also designed for mothers, fathers and for both custodial and non-custodial parents and is delivered by mental health professionals for groups of between six to twelve parents over six weekly two hour sessions (Keating *et al* 2016). Parents are taught how to “solve co-parenting problems in a positive way that focus on the needs of children” and how to develop and enhance their communications skills with both their children and the other parent (Parent Plus, 2018). Parents also are helped in improving their personal coping.

Keating *et al*’s (2016) evaluation of the programme used a randomised control trial methodology. One hundred and sixty-one parents participated in the study where 82 parents were assigned to the PP-PWS treatment group while and remaining 79 were put on the waiting-list control group (following the study this group was then offered a place on the PP-PWS). One hundred and two (88%) of parents were separated while the remainder were divorced. It is interesting to note that most of the participants were female (n=115, 71%), single (n=118, 79%) and had custody of their children (115, 71%). Only 5% had shared custody of the

children. However, Keating *et al* (2016) report that 112 parents stated that children had ‘regular contact’ with both themselves and the other parent.

Both groups were assessed using a variety of measures at baseline and six weeks later. The result show that compared to the waiting-list control group, “the PP-PWS programme led to significant improvements in a range of domains” (Keating *et al* 2016, p. 11). The results show increased parenting satisfaction and adjustment and a significant decrease in child emotional and behaviour problems and lesser interparental conflict. For Keating *et al* (2016, p. 12), one further benefit of the programme may have been that the inclusion of parents of both genders and of parents who had and did not have custody of their children may have had “a positive impact on reducing interparental conflict” and propose that future studies could examine the effect of this diversity of parent circumstances further.

Keating *et al* (2016, p. 12) point to several limitations of the study however, such as the possibility that one of the benefits of the programme may have been the intermingling of parents themselves “in a supportive atmosphere” rather than the content entirely per se. Keating *et al* (2016) also note that only one-third of participants were fathers and that the study did not examine facilitator adherence to the programme manual itself.

5.4 Interventions for fathers

5.4.1 Overview

Family Resource Centres provide parenting support groups such as fathers groups, however, Connolly *et al* (2017) noted the absence of any data on these. In terms of parenting programmes for fathers specifically, the research team has identified two such programmes that have been conducted in the Irish context. Although researchers consistently note the positive impact of fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives, Panter-Brick *et al* noted in 2014 that “parenting interventions rarely target men, or made a dedicated effort to include them” (Panter-Brick *et al* 2014, p. 1209). For example, there is limited evidence of the success of interventions aimed directly at fathers, despite evidence that fathers are increasingly involved in caregiving and concerned about their roles as parents (Connolly *et al* 2017). The Australian based Social Policy Research Centre (2010) points out for example, that although discourses of gender have progressed, evidence shows that services still fail to engage fathers. The Centre (2010, p. 20) suggests that this can be attributed to how parenting and childcare services are “usually framed

around mothers”. Thus, interventions of the kind discussed below are an under developed area of practice (Jenkinson *et al* 2016) and McAllister *et al* (2012) argue that within family service provision, the word ‘parent’ has been synonymised with ‘mother’. Maxwell *et al* (2012) and McAllister *et al* (2012) note that it is best practice to design groupwork programmes purposively for men as they more likely to engage with them and their parenting needs may be different from those of women.

5.4.2 Case Study One: The Da Project

The aim of the ‘Da Project’ is to “increase the participation of fathers in family support services and in their children’s lives” (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 1). The project was instigated from a recognition that family support projects supported by the Springboard Initiative⁴ engage little with fathers, although research points to the “benefits associated with increased paternal involvement and better parental relationships” (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 3). Indeed, in the setting up of the ‘Da Project’, a profiling exercise by staff of the fathers of the families they were working with within the Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project showed that there was a “lack of knowledge about fathers among the staff” (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 22). Furthermore, what staff did know about fathers was mainly ascertained through mothers. Interviews with fathers and mothers for the evaluation report confirmed that most of the fathers involved with the ‘Da Project’ had little personal experience with family support services and also identified that fathers themselves rarely felt they needed them.

Working With Men⁵ (WWM) was asked by Barnardos to evaluate the Da Project, which is based within Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project⁶, Dublin. The evaluation was based on activities between September 2004 and December 2005. The evaluation relied on 12 interviews with 7 fathers, 6 interviews with their partners or ex-partners, staff, members of the ‘Da Project’ advisory group and representatives of other agencies involved in the project as the primary mode of data collection. Some fathers were interviewed twice, both at the time they begun engaging with the project and toward the end of the evaluative period.

⁴ Springboard is a family support initiative in Ireland that aims to improve family wellbeing through support projects.

⁵ Working With Men is a UK based charity that supports positive male activity, engagement and involvement.

⁶ This project provides “intensive interventions to children and families in Cherry Orchard where children are deemed to be at risk” (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 18).

A part of the delivery of the 'Da Project' was to explore how fathers and fathering was perceived within the community and members of the families, who were connected with the Barnardos Cherry Orchard Project. This involved consultation with four groups, which included mothers and children. The mothers held stereotypical views of fathers' roles in families whereby the mothers acted as homemakers and the fathers as breadwinners. They also acknowledged the importance of fathers in children's lives however, by relating to their positive experiences of their own fathers. Notably, the report notes that mothers who were in a relationship with the father of their children and those who were separated from them held "distinct differences" (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 30) in their views relating to paternal roles. Mothers who were still in a relationship with the father saw some scope for change in the father's role in domestic labour and day-to-day care of children, while those who were separated did not. There was also a link between mothers' perceptions around fathers' abilities to parent and the constructions of fathers' masculinities, as mothers highlighted how fathers' concealing of their emotions could be productive of problematic father-child interactions.

The evaluation also found that for both fathers and mothers, the "most important characteristic of fathering" (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 31) is the emotional bond that is cultivated between father and child. Consequently, for both fathers and mothers interviewed, a common theme which emerged, was a perception of the importance of fathers in their children's lives and in the maintenance of some contact between fathers and their children. Indeed, the report notes that, from the interview material, "there was abundant evidence that fathers fulfilled, and enjoyed fulfilling a role in their children's lives as playmates" (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 34).

In terms of the 'Da Project' programme itself, the model is based on the building of good trust and rapport between staff and fathers, which serves to lay the basis for the development of individual in-depth casework. The project caters for the diversity of fathers needs by facilitating different activities for fathers and their children and these activities were successful in the building of rapport between staff and fathers. An important element of the staffs' role was also to communicate to the mothers both the "rationale and aims of their attempts to engage with fathers" (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 41) and the importance of father involvement in their children's lives in order to reassure mothers and to address concerns they had with the fathers involvement in the project. Staff also provided some support in a 'low-key' manner such as advice giving. The report found that 'deeper' engagement on issues was more difficult

for fathers to articulate and identify, although at the time of the report's publication, the 'Da Project' had only begun exploring some of these issues with fathers. In engaging with fathers, staff also focused on fathers' positive attributes "and stressed the role these could play in their children's development" (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 43).

Although the evaluation conducted and written up during the "developmental stage" (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 51) of the 'Da Project', the evaluation identified important outcomes: "increased positive contact between fathers and children" (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 52); greater practical support for fathers; an altering of fathers' attitudes toward welfare and support services; mothers' increased awareness of the benefits of paternal involvement in their children's lives and a greater desire for fathers to be positively involved in their children's lives. In terms of the wider community, Barnardos/Working With Men (2006) report that there was a greater discussion and awareness around the importance of fathers in their children's lives.

In summing up the report, Barnardos/Working With Men (2006) observed that there is a general deficit of services that engage with fathers in the Irish context. They also noted that there is both a general lack of confidence and competency amongst staff in family support projects in engaging with fathers and that "procedures and practices" within such support services may only "contribute to the marginalisation of fathers in the assessment of family's needs" (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 50). From both a wider literature review and the evaluation of the Da Project itself, the report (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, p. 9) outlined a range of issues that constitute barriers to engaging with fathers: professionals' anxieties in engaging with fathers from lack of confidence, perceived skill and support; a general low priority in working with fathers; fathers' perceptions that services are unwelcoming or inappropriate for them; fathers' perceptions that the use of services are signs of weakness or personal failure and a perception that work with fathers can detract from work with mothers and children. In contrast, the report (Barnardos/Working With Men, 2006, pp. 9-10) highlighted numerous best practices in relation to promoting "successful engagement with fathers" such as emphasising to fathers the benefits of their involvement in their children's lives and being clear about the purpose of the work and ensuring that fathers can relate to it by linking it with their needs. Indeed, as a result of the pilot run and evaluation process, Barnardos (2007) published the *Involving Fathers in Family Support* practice tool.

5.4.3 Case Study Two: Just for Dads: A groupwork programme for fathers

‘Just for dads’ is a 10-week groupwork programme based in Cork, which is “aimed at supporting fathers and those with fathering roles in exploring and strengthening their relationships with their children” (Swirak, 2015, p. 1). In a broader sense, group-based parenting programmes have become popular and evidence suggests that parents benefit from working and meeting with other parents (Connolly *et al* 2017). The programme explores themes such as ‘listening to our children’, ‘ingredients for good relationships with our children’ and ‘exploring family relationships’. The latter component focuses on things such as ‘myths about conflict’ and the programme explores the impact of conflict and children and some myths that may be held about conflict. This component of the programme also uses a photograph exercise to get fathers to think about their broader family dynamics and how it may have impacted their children.

The impetus for the ‘Just for Dads’ programme came from a group of professionals, who noted the lack of specific support services for fathers. The programme was designed “from scratch” due to the lack of programmes which could be used “off the shelf” (Swirak, 2015, p. 4). Swirak’s (2015, p. 3) evaluation report of the programme notes the evidence that “fathers are central to children’s lives”, yet there remains a lack of services which target fathers explicitly, with research finding that a lack of knowledge and awareness of services and the organisational marginalisation of fathers, constituting some of the main barriers to engaging fathers. Indeed, in the evaluation report, fathers noted that the general context of fathering in Ireland is characterised by a lack of support for fathers (Swirak, 2015). The evaluation of the programme involved focus group discussions with facilitators and participants, evaluation sheets completed by participants and learning journals maintained by programme facilitators.

Each session is 1.5 hours in length and occurs each week in the Knocknaheeny Family Support Centre, Cork. Each session is led by a main facilitator who is supported by other professionals. A key element of the model is the building of trust and rapport with participants. The programme also adopts a strengths based approach, which facilitators of the programme felt to be important given the negative encounters which men may encounter with other service providers. For the pilot run of the programme, ten possible referral agencies attended an information day. This meant that the Just for Dads programme could be seen as part of an integrated approach and these referral services acted as further networks of support for both participants and facilitators.

The pilot run of the programme was attended by a variety of men with different relationship statuses, including men who were married, separated and single. The men articulated that some of the main reasons for attending was to learn more about how to be a father and to show their concern as fathers. They also articulated taking away a variety of benefits from the programme, such as learning about the importance of self-care and of managing body language in the presence of their child. They also reported that other fathers constituted one of the most importance sources of learning through one-to-one and small group discussions and Swirak (2015, p. 11) also notes how the creative methods used throughout the programme “prompted most interaction”. This space for discussion was also facilitated by the break time where relationships between participants and facilitators could be further strengthened. Reflections on their own upbringing and learning through their own parents’ practices made up some of the other source of learning. Fathers also reported that they appreciated the non-judgemental atmosphere, which was maintained throughout the programme by staff. Indeed, facilitators expressed the importance of ‘building bridges’ throughout the programme and in building a sense of solidarity amongst fathers.

In *Just For Dads: groupwork programme for fathers*, Jenkinson *et al* (2016, p. 4) produce and outline the complete ‘Just for Dads’ programme “in order to make it readily available to others interested in running a groupwork programme for fathers”. The comprehensive resource gives full detail of the session plans and includes all of the supporting and promotional material for those wishing to facilitate a similar programme.

5.5 Young Parent Programmes

5.5.1 Overview

The Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) was established in July 1999 in recognition of the vulnerability of families headed by young lone parents and their need for practice advice and supports (Keilthy and Morris, 2013). The Programme is funded by Tusla Child and Family Agency and the HSE and consists of eleven projects located throughout the country within statutory, community and voluntary organisations (TPSP, 2016). According to TSPS (2016), there were 322 new referrals to the Programme in 2015, bringing the total number service users to 6,800 since it was established.

The TPSP is a universal service for both young female and male teen parents and engagement is voluntary. Within its catchment area, each TPSP targets all young parents (mothers and fathers) who are aged 19 years or under at the time of the pregnancy and offers them support until their youngest child is 2 years of age (Keilthy and Morris, 2011, p. 16). The TSPS works in collaborative partnership with other agencies such as schools, health services and housing agencies (TPSP, 2016). The programme is based on a holistic model of support. Young parents can avail of interventions that promote and enhance the well-being of both themselves and their children (TPSP, 2016) and each project conducts a needs assessment to classify young parents according to low, medium or high level of need.

The programme also emphasises the importance of the role of fathers and they are encouraged and supported to have contact with their children. Such emphasis is important as international research shows that young teenage women's attitude and perceptions of towards their pregnancy is "strongly linked to their perception of the father's attitude" (National Youth Council of Ireland [NYCI], 2012, p. 9). The support of young mothers by the fathers has also been linked to better mother adjustment and more positive and caring parenting toward their children. In sum, interventions and programmes can "support teenage mothers by supporting teenage fathers" (NYCI, 2012, p. 10).

Keilthy and Morris (2011) analysed data from 1522 young parents who participated in the TPSP between July 2005 and December 2008 in order to present a socio-demographic profile of the parents involved in the Programme. The data was collected from every young parent who engaged with the programme and at intervals of 6, 18 and 30 months after. Although the data relates to parents who engaged with the TPSP, Keilthy and Morris (2011, p. 21) note how the data "does offer an indication of the profile and experiences of teen parents in Ireland".

One element of the data collected ascertained the level of contact mothers and fathers had who engaged in the TPSP with the other parent of their child. The data presents the views of 1279 mothers and only 14 responses were collected from fathers and contact between the 243 remaining parents was unknown. The data shows that at the time of first engagement with the TPSP, 59% (757) of parents "had regular contact" (Keilthy and Morris, 2011, p. 47) and includes those parents who were cohabiting, married or who were sharing parenting. Two percent of parents had contact through formal child access arrangement, 19% had sporadic contact" while 20% (259) parents "and no contact" (Keilthy and Morris, 2011, p. 47). Eighteen months later data was collected from 402 service users and showed that 68% of parents had

regular contact while 6% of parents had no contact, in comparison to 20% initially. Keilthy and Morris (2011, p. 82) noted that mothers who experienced repeat pregnancy “were more likely to have some form of contact with the fathers of their children compared to first time mothers”.

There were differences between contact that Irish and non-Irish mothers had with the fathers of their children. A total of 177 non-Irish parents engaged with the programme between 2005 and 2008. For example, 21% (31) had regular contact compared to 41% (513) of Irish mothers and 30% (43) did not have any contact compared to 20% (247) of Irish mothers (Keilthy and Morris, 2011). In sum, taking Irish and non-Irish mothers as a whole, although most did have some form of contact with the fathers over an eighteen month period, one in five parents did not have contact with each other, which was identified as “a cause of concern for the children involved” (Keilthy and Morris, 2011, p. 86).

Relationship difficulties between both parents also effect father-mother contact, father involvement in the programme and father involvement with their children. For example, in the *Three-Year Annual Review* of the Cork TPSP, TPSP (2009) noted that only the young mothers attended the programme if her relationship ended with the father. For the Cork TPSP (2009, p. 31), it was noted that this meant that fathers could not receive the support that they might have needed, meaning that “shared parenting became difficult”. The Cork TPSP reports that the contact fathers had with their children varied. Sixteen percent of fathers had no contact, 25% had ‘sporadic’ contact, while 20% shared the parenting of their child which included overnights and/or time spent in the family home. Forty-one percent of fathers had ‘regular’ contact while the remaining 8% were living with the baby and partner (TSPS, 2009).

Keilthy and Morris (2013) also analysed the data collected from 73 fathers, who first engaged with the service. The data shows “statistically significant differences” between “the educational achievements of mothers and fathers” (Keilthy and Morris, 2013, p. 54). Fourteen percent (9) of fathers had completed their Leaving Certificate compared to 31% (364) of mothers. Twenty five percent (16) of fathers had no formal qualifications compared to 14% (162) of mothers, while 37% (26) of fathers were engaged in education or training at initial referral compared to 14% (623) of mothers. In total, 51% of the seventy three young fathers were early school leavers. In terms of employment, 41% were not in any employment, education or training. Thirty percent where in education and training while 22% were in fulltime employment.

Fathers could also receive a variety of supports through participating in TPSP. The data shows that fathers received similar levels of support for emotional issues, parenting and social welfare entitlements. However, in comparison to mothers, there were ‘statistically significant differences’ for other supports. For example, 67% (49) of fathers received support with their relationships compared to 46% of mothers. Fathers also received more training support, but less health and education support in comparison to mothers (Keilthy and Morris, 2013). There was also significant differences in terms of the sources of referrals for fathers. Seventy percent of fathers made contact with the TPSP either through family members, peers or through their own self referrals.

In summing up the findings, Keilthy and Morris (2011 p. 85) note that the data indicates that young parents are a “diverse group” who come “from a variety of backgrounds, with widely different life experiences before becoming parents and with varying levels of need”. Keilthy and Morris (2011) draw particular attention to the 73 fathers for which data was available. They note that these fathers “presented as very disadvantaged” given their high rates of early school leaving and unemployment compared to mothers. Given also that there was a high up-take of fathers in the aspects of the Programme addressing support with relationships and parenting, the data suggest that young fathers are in need of support of this kind “in order to be involved in the lives of their children and to share parenting with the mothers of their children” (Keilthy and Morris, 2011, p. 86). Thus, in making suggestions for improvement of the programme, Keilthy and Morris (2011, p. 89) suggest that the TPSP should be “resourced to develop strategies to engage with young fathers and to deliver appropriate supports to them”. Furthermore, given that most fathers made contact with the TPSP directly themselves or through their close social or family networks, Keilthy and Morris (2013, p. 86) suggest that there is a “need to raise awareness of the needs of young fathers among other potential sources of referral.”

5.5.2 Case Study: The Teen Parents Support Programme

An evaluation of the Teen Parents Support Programme was conducted by Riordan and Ryan (2002) where the programme was piloted in three locations; Dublin, Galway and Limerick and were funded for an initial three year period. A range of research methods were used by the evaluation team, including quantitative monitoring systems which were developed by the

evaluation team and completed by the staff, site visits, observations, 52 interviews with various professionals and 72 in-depth interviews were conducted with young parents, who engaged in the Programme.

A total of 415 referrals were made to the programme and 359 engaged with the three pilot Programmes and were primarily mothers. Riordan and Ryan (2002) noted that there was a low rate of referrals of fathers to the Programme by professionals. The majority of young mothers were single (i.e. never married) and comprised 51% (212) of those referred. Over a third (34% or 141) remained in a relationship with the father of their child while 5% (22) of young parents were married (Riordan and Ryan, 2002). The majority of participants were young mothers, but a number of fathers did also participate. The data also suggests that a number of the young parents were ‘parenting alone’ i.e. without any significant contact with the father of their child. However, a large number were still in contact or in a relationship with the young father and a number of these couples were cohabiting and the support which fathers did provide “varied from daily participation in the care of the child, to providing some small amounts of financial support, or assistance with childcare” (Riordan and Ryan, 2002, p. 105).

Each of the pilot projects offered a similar range of support services which included one-to-one support with young mother and fathers. Parenting courses were also provided in one of the pilot sites so that queries from young parents on a range of parenting issues such as child diet and illnesses could be addressed. In general “the evaluation illustrated the importance and value given by young parents to having a support service such as the TPSP” (Riordan and Ryan, 2002, p. 168). Each of the projects also saw the interagency co-operation and collaboration as “critical to success” (Riordan and Ryan, 2002, p. 133)⁷. Such interagency work enabled the required service to be developed through the collaboration of multiple agencies towards fulfilling unmet needs. It also helped staff to ‘signpost’ other agencies to parents.

The pilot projects produced similar positive outcomes for participants and the majority of participants noted that they identified many outcomes, which they felt they would not have attained elsewhere such as greater educational and training opportunities and greater happiness in their parenting. Out of 116 survey responses from the young parents, 28% percent found ‘support with parenting’ to be the ‘most helpful’ type of support.

⁷ Riordan and Ryan (2002, pp. 134-136; pp. 138-139) provide a full list of the agencies and the type of collaborative work involved in the projects.

Although the data suggested that the programme was responding well to the needs of young mothers, there was uncertainty expressed by referral agents as to whether the programme was working with young fathers as “Just under a half of referrers who responded to the evaluation were either ‘not sure’ or ‘didn’t know’ if the project had had an impact in terms of responding to young fathers support needs” (Riordan and Ryan, 2002, p. 82). Each project actively encouraged fathers to participate in the project, but success was varied. One ‘common’ finding across the three pilot sites was that young fathers were pursuing either employment or training, which meant that they were not available in the daytime when the project activities were undertaken. Thus, Riordan and Ryan (2002) argued that future projects should work at appropriate scheduling for fathers and provide appropriate resources and activities for them.

The issue of young fathers who do or do not participate in the TPSP was the subject of the first national conference of the TPSP (TPSP, 2007). The conference aimed to explore the learning and practical experiences of people who work with mothers or fathers. The report notes that one of the main reasons why young dads face “enormous obstacles” in maintaining involvement in their children’s lives is the they are mostly not living with the mother of the child (see Ferguson and Hogan 2007), can ‘often’ be constructed as a ‘villain’ and can be dependent on the beliefs and attitudes of both sets of families and the professionals and services they come into contact with.

Fergus Hogan presented some insights from his research on crisis pregnancies for the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (see Ferguson and Hogan, 2007) at the conference. He noted that one of the interesting issues which emerged from the study was that a ‘number of the men’ he spoke to explained that although both themselves and the mothers did not want to be a couple, “they wanted to keep the child and keep the pregnancy and support the mother” (TPSP, 2007, p. 11). Thus, in the original report of the study, Ferguson and Hogan (2007, p. 87) note that this material was evidence of “interesting post-traditional possibilities’ in relation to coparenting. Ferguson and Hogan (TPSP, 2007, p. 11) also noted that international research showing that maternal grandmothers are ‘key gatekeepers’ and that “there attitude to the teenage fathers is crucial in influencing the future contact between the father and the child”. In relation to support services, Hogan also reported that most of the young men he had met for the purposes of the research (Ferguson and Hogan, 2007) were not aware of support services such as family support, meaning that “some of them felt excluded” (TPSP, 2007, p 11) and felt that professionals were orientated more towards the mother. In other words, young fathers perceive various family related support services “as women’s services” (TPSP, 2007, p. 11).

5.6 Child Contact Centres

5.6.1 Overview

Child Contact Centres are defined as “safe, neutral, welcoming venues which exist to promote and support regular contact between parents and children who do not live together” (Scottish Executive, 2003, p. 5, cited in One Family, 2009). The term ‘child contact’ has been increasingly used in place of the term ‘child access’ to emphasise the child’s right to have contact with parents rather than the parents right to access the child (One Family, 2009). Child Contact Centres normally provide three basic services; ‘handovers’, ‘supported contact’ and ‘supervised contact’. ‘Handover’ services involve “the dropping off and picking up of children under supervised conditions” but where “the actual visit itself takes place elsewhere and is not supervised” (Murphy and Holt, 2013, p. 14).

‘Supported contact’ services enable contact between the parent and child in a neutral venue whereby it has been felt that other venues for a variety of reasons (see One Family, 2009, p. 6), may not be suitable or where the parent client may need to avail of some support in their contact with their child(ren). Finally, ‘supervised contact’ services are “normally used when it has been determined that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering harm during contact” (One Family, 2009, p. 6; Murphy and Holt, 2013) and involve supervision being conducted by trained professionals. The level of supervision required may vary between families and can change over time and staff can use various guidelines which (see for example One Family, 2009, pp. 9-11) help them ascertain what level of contact is appropriate.

The Contact Centre model “is well established internationally” (Murphy, 2017, p. 15). Child Contact Centres have been well established historically in the US, but “have emerged internationally as a much needed resource where there are concerns about children losing contact with their non-resident parent” (Murphy and Holt, 2013, p. 13). In terms of the profile of users of the contact centres internationally, research from the UK, Australia and New Zealand indicates that the majority of visits were by a father and that the majority of children, who use the service are 10 years or under. In the UK context, although the National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) do not collect socio-economic information, they estimate that the “majority of clients comes from lower socio-economic groups” and similarly, Australian research shows that the “core client base” (One Family, 2009, p. 50) are families who have limited financial resources. Nevertheless, other socio-economic groups do use

Contact Centres in each of these countries. One Family (2009) reports that there is little information on the marital status of the parent clients, but anecdotal evidence from Contact Centres in New Zealand suggests that the majority were never married. Research from contact centres in the Scottish context shows that there is generally a “high level of personal and relationship problems amongst parents using contact centres” (One Family, 2009, p. 50), such as a history of domestic violence, parental contact, mental illness and substantiated or alleged child abuse. One Family (2009) also notes research pointing out the importance of therapeutic services within contact centres as a way of cultivating quality contact between children and parents. Indeed, One Family (2009) notes the arguments made by some researchers that supervised contact services should also aim to address the underlying issues between parents and families. Research also emphasises the importance of trained staff in acting as supervisors of contact instead of other family members, who arguably cannot act as neutral supervisors (One Family, 2009).

In *Supporting Child Contact: the Need for Child Contact Centres in Ireland*, One Family (2009) examined the need for such centres in the Irish context. The report argued that based on the population levels at the time of writing, 0.14% and 0.3% of children in Ireland may require the services of a child contact centre, equating to 1,300 to 2,700 children each year and around 29 centres providing supported contact and a further eight centres providing supervised contact. In light of the evidence from One Family’s (2009) study (discussed below), One Family (2009) has recommended for the establishment of 37 such centres in Ireland for two reasons.

First, the report highlights statistics which show how significant changes in the Irish family structures suggest that the number of non-resident parents are increasing. The report notes the rise of both divorces granted and of judicial separations, the increase in applications for access orders, guardianship by unmarried fathers and for the use of family mediation services throughout the 2000s. Although these statistics do not indicate the actual level of need for contact centres, One Family (2009) argue that they do highlight the increasing likelihood of such a need. Second, both the international research literature and One Family’s (2009) report highlights evidence from parents, children and staff and stakeholders of contact centres themselves as to the benefits of contact centres. For their report, One Family (2009) conducted interviews with both parents and a variety of different professionals as well as focus groups with Women’s Aid and representatives of fathers groups to explore the potential need for contact centres.

Fathers interviewed for the study articulated their wish to see their children and spoke of the popular stereotype that they do not want to do so. Some fathers also spoke of feeling suicidal due to the absence of contact between themselves and their children (One Family, 2009). The father interviewees also revealed some of the perceptions of the barriers to contact with their child that non-resident parents may face. Some parents articulated that the financial burden of the legal system as well as the stress of multiple court sittings can “create an unmanageable burden which may result in a non-resident parent losing contact with their children” (One Family, 2009, p. 92). Thus, parents expressed that contact could be further increased if the financial expense of gaining contact was reduced. For parents who did proceed and continue with gaining contact through the courts, they also reported on the significant delays with the process. Thus, while stressing the need for a quicker decision process, interviewees also expressed the “need for interim facilities to supervise contact while a report was being completed or a court case being heard” (One Family, 2009, p. 94).

Given their perception of bias in the legal system, such as having to have supervised contact with an absence of proof of the necessity of such supervision, fathers also spoke about the role of child contact centres in (re)assessing the need for supervised contact and as neutral spaces where contact could be facilitated. For parents who are able to gain contact through a court order, as One Family (2009, p. 93) noted, “A number of fathers, both unmarried and married” who were interviewed “reported that when their former partner, despite a contact order, refused them contact with their children they were not able to enforce these rights”.

Interviewees noted the poor quality of existing contact centres in the Irish context. They pointed to the need for such contact facilities to help minimise conflict between parents by facilitating ‘drop-offs’, make it more difficult for false allegations to be made and to support the building of a relationship between parent and child. Some interviewees spoke of how their experience of a contact centre in Dublin facilitated the “experience of being ‘moved on’ from supervised contact” (One Family, 2009, p. 108) to one where they were permitted to be alone with their child. Both resident and non-resident parents also agreed that conflict negatively impacts children and they articulated the importance of a service that facilitates ‘handovers’ in order to protect them from abuse from the other parent, to minimise the potential for conflict and to reduce the emotional upset of meeting the other parent, especially during if the relationship had recently broken up. Resident parents also spoke about how it provided them with a feeling of reassurance as to the safety of their child in contact with the non-resident parent through the use of the centre. Parents also expressed the benefits of having supported contact within a centre

as providing them with a service that is cheaper than outside. Both resident and non-resident parents articulated that contact centres could be places which could also support them with issues relating to separation, child contact, shared parenting, practice advice around parenting, counselling including child counselling and mediation services.

This broader literature suggests that non-resident parents highly value child contact centres; that children feel safe in contact centres; that non-resident parent and child contact increased over time through the use of contact centres; that the neutral and non-judgemental approach of staff in contact centres are of particular value to parents and finally, that contact centres provide resident parents with a sense of reassurance of their child's safety (One Family, 2009). In summing up the implications of the review of the international literature on child contact centres, One Family (2009, p. 62) argue that "child contact centres have been found to be an effective means of providing quality child-parent contact where there is a need for such contact to be facilitated and have also been successful in moving contact on where possible".

One Family's (2009) recommendation to set up contact centres has not been implemented. At the time of writing, One Family (2009, p. 71) reported that "Specialist child contact centres and related services to support child contact are largely unavailable in Ireland" and indicated that the only purpose built contact centre in Ireland is Time4Us (discussed below). Similarly, the research team has found that Time4Us remains the only purpose built Child Contact Centre. Barnardos and One Family (see below) did jointly operate a Child Contact Centre between 2011 an July 2013 but further funding was not provided following the end of the pilot for this Centre.

In Ireland, at the time of writing, the only other child contact services are those which operate under the remit of other services. For example, the research team identified that there are three Family Resource Centres (FRC) which provide child contact services in Ireland at present. Family Resource Centres are located in disadvantaged areas and provide both universal and targeted support, including information, advice, refers and the delivery of educational and training opportunities (Connolly *et al* 2017). These FRC's may also host after-school clubs and men's groups. There are 109 Family Resource Centres nationwide supported by Tusla.

One Family (2009) reported that the HSE requested the Ballymote Family Resource Centre to provide supervised contact and handovers in one specific case. At present, the Ballymote FRC Sligo facilitates both supervised and unsupervised access and these visits are arranged through Tusla Child and Family Agency. The Sligo FRC offers space for access visits for separated

families, while The Gorey Family Resource Centre in Wexford facilitates supervised access only, for children who are in foster care. Social workers from Tusla Child and Family Agency supervise the visits. To cover the costs of the resources needed for the visits, there is a five euro charge per visit. Through email correspondence, the Centre informed the research team that approximately 33 visits are facilitated each month.

Facilities for supervised and supported access are provided by the Men's Networking Resource Centre in Ballymun, Dublin. The Centre was originally established in 1994 toward addressing the issue of marginalisation and isolation that men may experience in Irish society, but the Centre now "provides a range of services to support disadvantaged men, women and families equally" (Men's Networking Resource Centre, no date, p. 1). The Centre mainly provides supervised access either through in response to a Court Order or by mutual agreement between parents (Email correspondence). This access is supervised by a trained member of staff who is present in the room throughout the meeting. Other staff also monitor the meeting through CCTV. The Centre also provides 'supported access' in cases where for example, the non-resident parent has not had contact with the child for a long period of time. In these cases the staff member is present to help promote interaction. The service does not receive funding from the Courts Service or Government bodies and the service is voluntary and free of charge.

In Cork, there are two a supervised access/contact programmes. The Togher Family Centre, which provides a range of family support services, operates a supervised child contact centre. The Centre used to provide contact services for cases referred through the courts, but since 2017 this is no longer the case due to lack of funding and the Centre now only takes referrals from Tusla. Another supervised contact centre, which has international accreditation, is provided by The Bessborough Centre. The Centre provides numerous family support services which are unique. The 'Lime Tree' for example, a specialised outreach family support service provided by Bessborough and includes an out-of-hours service. The service includes interventions such as improving 'parenting capacity' in families where children are at risk of being taken into state care. A parents and infant unit in the centre has residential accommodation for families in crisis equipped with a range of therapeutic and assessment services to address their needs.

Kiely *et al* (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews with five fathers using the supervised access programme to explore how they perceived and experienced the programme. Fathers were positive in their views of the access programme. Fathers praised the supervisors and staff

of the Centre, in particular, the honesty and good communication skills of the supervisors. A few of the grievances which fathers expressed however, was in relation to instances where access visits did not occur or cases where access was more restricted than it should have been due to overbookings. Fathers also generally disliked having their contact with their children supervised. They reported that both the monitoring of their interactions with their child and the ‘unnaturalness’ of the environment contributed towards a feeling of anxiety when interacting with their children (Kiely *et al* 2017). Fathers interviewed spoke at length about the relational losses they felt due to the limited nature of their contact with children (Kiely *et al* 2017). They reported building their lives around their contact visits with children. All expressed strong desires to be reunified with their children placed in state care or to share parenting with the children’s mothers and they identified what they were doing in their lives to achieve this goal. While all disliked their contact with their children being supervised and felt it to be intrusive and stigmatising, they valued supervised contact for allowing them to spend precious time with their children (Kiely *et al* 2017). The only father interviewed, who used the courts to gain access, was engaging in supervised contact to build a relationship with his infant child, who he did not know due to the relationship ending before the child’s birth. He drew attention to the significant costs for fathers utilising supervised access and the courts to have contact with their children.

5.6.2 Case Study 1: Barnardos/One Family Pilot Child Contact Centre

Following One Family’s (2009) report which explored the need for child contact centres in Ireland, funding was applied for and 510,000 euro was granted for a pilot of a Child Contact Centre which was run jointly by Barnardos and One Family. The Centre operated from October 2011 and concluded as scheduled in July 2013 in three locations in Dublin. As part of the pilot, Murphy and Holt (2013) evaluated the Centre. The service consisted of two full time staff members who were responsible for referrals, assessment and reviews and the provision of contact opportunities. Two part-time staff members also provided family supports to help clients move toward ‘self-arranged’ contact. The centre provided supervised and child supported contact, a handover service as well as a range of family support services which included mediated parenting plans, parent mentoring and play and art therapy for children.

The majority (90.3%) of the resident parents were female and 42.1% of resident and 58.7% of non-resident parents were recorded as 'unemployed'. Seventy-nine percent of the families were recorded as 'unmarried' while just under 11% were recorded as either legally separated or divorced with the remaining recorded as married. Fifty-eight percent of families had 'access orders', 28% were going through court proceedings while the remaining 10% had no court orders or proceedings. In relation to non-resident parents' contact with their children, the evaluation found that 23.1% of children had resided with their non-resident parent in the past year, 13.7% of children had never resided with their non-resident parent and 32.4% had not resided with them in the past three years (Murphy and Holt, 2013). For the 118 families who were referred to the service, 61% of non-resident parents had no contact with their children, with an additional 9.3% having irregular contact. Approximately 30% of non-resident parents had regular contact with their children at the time of referral (Murphy and Holt, 2013).

With regard to the relationship between resident and non-resident parents who were referred to the service, Murphy and Holt (2013, p. 39) note that a significant number of parents had "potentially problematic attitudes to meeting with the other parent". For example, when asked about their willingness to meet the other parent, 50% of resident parents said that they were 'never' willing to meet with the other parent while 26.6% were unsure if they would ever be willing to meet. In sum, the profile of families who used the centre were "characterised by high risk, high need, volatile inter-parental relationship and fragile non-resident child relationships" (Murphy and Holt, 2013, p. 38). Indeed, all of the ten parents interviewed as part of the evaluation reported conflictual relationships with the other parent before using the centre due to issues relating to alcohol and drug use and domestic violence and concern around child protection.

Interviews with both the five resident and five non-resident parents indicated that the pilot service was beneficial. Both non-resident and resident parents reported that the centre helped to significantly improve bond between the non-resident parent and their child and parents' valued the support and advice around parenting provided by the service. Furthermore, in terms of the children, "the majority of parents... and some of the children interviewed were able to clearly articulate and identify improvements in their child's happiness following Child Contact Centre Involvement" (Murphy and Holt, 2013, p. 42). Non-resident parents also felt more at ease and assured with the supervised contact offered by the centre. Significantly, the evaluation found that resident parents "became increasingly accepting of child contact with the non-

resident parent” (Murphy and Holt, 2013, p. 71) and felt that such contact was safe for both them and their children. For eight of the parents interviewed, their engagement with the courts had “significantly diminished” (Murphy and Holt, 2013, p. 45) and thus, parents felt better supported in the development of parenting plans that were acceptable to due to the lack of intervention by the courts.

Feedback was also obtained from staff and outsider stakeholders. Staff reported that although the contact centre was working well, the complexity of the clients and families circumstances who were using the centre meant “that the families referred to the service were unlikely to move to self-arranged contact due to the complex nature of their circumstances” (Murphy and Holt, 2013, p. 54). Nevertheless, the staff took a different interpretation of the term ‘move on’ as they considered things such as the reduction in conflict between parents and improved relationships as examples of ‘moving on’.

All the staff reported seeing improvements in the well-being of the children who attended the centre such as the improving of relationships between children and their non-resident parents. Such improvement, the staff reported, was due to the reduced stress of the resident parent and the improvement of parenting skills (Murphy and Holt, 2013). Staff reported that they observed an improvement in the well-being of non-resident parents and saw ‘huge differences’ (Murphy and Holt, 2013, p. 56) in how these parents related to their children over time. Relatedly, staff reported that one of the key strengths and aspects of the centre was in the provision of family supports which enabled parents to develop better parenting skills and acquire more confidence in parenting (Murphy and Holt, 2013, p. 13).

In summing up the pilot, Murphy and Holt (2013) argue that it demonstrated a clear need not only for specialist contact services for families with a high levels of conflict over contact, but also for families who require specialist assessment and family support services in order to ensure that the best interests of children in contact disputes are professionally identified and met. Further evidence of the need for a contact service is demonstrated in the fact that there was a “significant level of unmet need within the catchment area alone” (Murphy and Holt, 2013, p. 81). For example, the service received over 400 enquires. One hundred and twenty-eight families were provided with a service from the centre, twenty five families moved on to avail of supervised contact, another 18 availed of supported contact sessions within the service and 31 had or were receiving assessment of a pre-contact service (Murphy and Holt, 2013).

5.6.3 Case Study 2: Time4Us Galway

Time 4 Us (2018a) is conveniently located in Galway city and describes itself as “a play centre for children to meet with their parents in situations where one parent does not live in the family home”, but other family members can also use the service to spend time with the children they do not live with. The idea for the service came from a number of different sources. There was a recognition that fathers needed a service to help increase their involvement in their children’s lives and the then Minister for Children Frank Fahey T.D instigated a meeting which put “the issue of services for fathers on the agenda” (Kearns and Coen, 2008, p. 88). The social work department of the Galway HSE also identified a gap in terms of attempting to arrange access visits outside of operational times. Indeed, the service is now open from 12pm to 8pm Tuesday to Friday and from 12pm to 6pm Saturday and Sunday. A steering group was established and engaged with the expertise of an individual who acted in a support capacity for a Contact Centre Network in the UK (Kearns and Coen, 2008). The proposal for the centre was drawn up in 2005 and began operation in March 2007 on a pilot basis.

Interviews with the management and staff from the Kearns and Coen’s (2008) evaluation of the centre reveal that there is good contact kept with partner organisations of the service such as the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the HSE amongst others. Time4Us “adopts a cross-sectoral, inter-agency approach to its governance” (Kearns and Coen, 2008, p. 89) and an operational committee is responsible for the day to day running of the service, which include financial arrangement and the support of and supervision of staff. The service is free of charge and users are those who have either self-referred or who have been referred by solicitors, judges, guardians or social workers. Data from an evaluation of the service between March 2007 to April 2008 show that three quarters of non-resident respondents were formally referred to the service while the remaining self-attended (Kearns and Coen, 2008). As Kearns and Coen (2008) point out however, these referrals do not mean that the service will be used as these referrals are not mandatory.

In terms of the model of support which underpins the service, the service operates on the basis of a universal approach in that all families whereby one parent does not live with the child can avail of the service. Cases are assessed by the staff in order to explore the level of support needed (see Kearns and Coen, 2008, p. xii-xviii) and to ascertain the appropriateness of the

service for the potential service user. Owing to an emphasis on maintaining neutrality for example, cases which require supervised access are not suitable.

Staff members discuss the relationship prospective users have with their child and on the first access session “might stay in the room and observe the access taking place so as to get a fuller picture of what that relationship is like” (Kearns and Coen, 2008, p. 95). Further support is given if needed and staff withdraw from such observation if the parent is comfortable with their child(ren). Any support that is given however, is “very much non-intrusive” (Time4Us, 2018b) since the service places emphasis on ensuring that quality time is spent between parent and child. In sum, Time4Us “fits more with the supported model of contact rather than a supervised one” (Kearns and Coen, 2008, p. 112).

The needs of service users are assessed again during their use of the service over time and provide the management with information or advice that helps in the delivery of the service (Kearns and Coen, 2008). Staff attempt to keep a dialogue with service users and their role is to facilitate a safe, comfortable and positive atmosphere for parents and children (Kearns and Coen, 2008). Furthermore, although the majority of users are non-resident parents, the staff attempt to build relationships with the resident parents in order to ensure “peace of mind” (Kearns and Coen, 2008, p. 94) for the resident parent. The service used to run ‘parenting when separated’ courses but the service informed the research team through email correspondence that the service no longer runs the course and do not intend to do so in the future.

In terms of the mechanics of the access, the handover policy is designed to prevent a situation where the child may witness conflict between parents. A member of staff collects the child at the door of the centre from the resident parent and brings the child(ren) into the playroom where the non-resident parent may be waiting. Another member of staff then speaks with the resident parent. At the end of access, one member of staff speaks to the non-resident parent until the resident parent or guardian has left, while another brings the child to the door to be taken home by the resident parent.

The pilot process of Time4Us also involved the issuing of a request for tender for an evaluation of the service. The resulting evaluation (Kearns and Coen, 2008) focused on the service between March 2007 and April 2008. Kearns and Coen (2008) used a multi-method approach. Questionnaires that contained open ended questions were distributed to the 48 service users who were using the service between March 2007 and April 2008. Interviews were also conducted with non-resident parents, staff and representatives of the key referral agencies in

Galway City and observations at the Time4Us centre were conducted. The authors note that a key limitation to the study is the low 33% (16 of 48) response rate for non-resident parents and the 19% (9 of 48) rate for resident parents in the returning of the questionnaires.

The questionnaires showed that in terms of the demographic profiles of non-resident parents, all of the non-resident parents using the service were male, mostly aging 30 years or over while all of the resident parents were female, again mostly aging 30 years or over. Over half (53%) of the non-resident parents were single while 33% were separated. For resident parents, the figures stand at 45% and 22% respectively. Thirty-six percent of the non-resident parents had some form of third level qualification as their highest educational attainment. Nineteen percent had a Leaving Certificate, Inter/Junior Certificate and Primary Level education respectively. In contrast, 67% of resident parents reported being educated up to third level. Regarding accommodation, 60% of the non-resident father were renting, which includes both private and council renting. Thirty-eight percent lived alone, 19% with a partner and 31% shared their accommodation with tenants or friends.

Participants were also asked about why they begun using Time4Us. The responses indicate a variety of reasons and some respondents indicated multiple reasons. Thirty percent indicated that the service constituted a safe place to meet with their children, 26% indicated they used it to spend more time with their children while 18% indicated a court order underpinned their usage of the service.

Regarding the perceived benefits of the service and its impact on relationships and level of access, Kearns and Coen (2008, p. 53) summarize that “the data” from non-resident parents “reveal a noticeably positive impact” on relationships between both parents and children and between parents themselves. Non-resident respondents reported that their relationships with their children significantly improved in different respects and 74% of non-residential and 56% of residential parents ‘agreed’ with the proposition that ‘In general, the children seem happier’ from engaging with the service. Kearns and Coen (2008, p. 55) also note that although the:

... majority of non-resident fathers agreed that there was less conflict, more trust and better communication with their child/ren’s other parent/guardian since using Time4Us... it is noteworthy that over a third indicated that there was no change in these areas, highlighting the strained nature of many familial situations using Time4Us.

Residential parents also reported positive changes in their relationship with the non-resident parents. One of the most ‘striking’ changes noted by Kearns and Coen (2008) is the level of

access fathers had gained since using Time4Us. Half of non-resident respondent had either no or low access prior to engaging with the service, whereas they all reported having had some access from engaging with the service, a finding supportive by the resident parent responses (Kearns and Coen, 2008).

The questionnaire data also shows that the “most commonly mentioned benefit” (Kearns and Coen, 2008, p. 58) related to how the space provides fathers a place where they could have contact with their children. Parents from places as far away as Athlone, Sligo “and even Cork” use the centre (One Family, 2009, p. 72). Respondents also reported that the environment of the space itself was beneficial for the children in terms of safety and activities. The staff were also highly praised by respondents, in particular the staffs’ high level of support given to non-resident parents and the quality of such support. Finally, regarding non-resident parents’ future involvement, 75% indicated they envisaged using the service in the long term. These results were also generally on par with data from the resident parents. Kearns and Coen (2008, p. 71) conclude that the data shows a consensus amongst both non-resident and resident parents in terms of the benefits of the service and the positive impact on families.

Interviews were also conducted with staff, stakeholders and seven service users. In terms of the staff and stakeholders, Kearns and Coen (2008, p. 91) note that interviewees noted the importance of how Time4US afford parents the opportunity “to be directly involved with their children as opposed to watching them play on a ‘child-only’ activity”. The seven service user interview data cohered with the questionnaire responses. In relation to the staff for example, the participants spoke of the benefits of the staff taking a neutral approach in engaging with both parents. Participants also cited how the regularity of access which the centre provides constitutes one of the main benefits of the service. Relatedly, interviewees reported that such access not only helped strengthen the parent child bond, but also helped them to develop as parents.

Summary

Contextualising Parent and Family Supports in Ireland

- Family and parent support services in Ireland are underpinned by law and the UN Convention on Human Rights.

- Although government policy recognises the ‘diversity’ of families, policy in relation to parenting supports and children and young people has not given explicit consideration to the particular situation and circumstances of unmarried parents.
- The UNCRC emphasises the rights of children to maintain contact with both parents if they wish to do so.
- The Irish state has become increasingly interested in the provision of parenting and family supports given the perceived importance of parents in mediating positive outcomes for children.
- Irish government policy does not explicitly recognise the importance of father involvement in mediating positive child outcomes.
- Irish policy documents do not explicitly recognise how the involvement of *both* parents in the lives of their children counts as another mediating influence in child outcomes.
- Although policy documents recognise that parents are key mediating influences in their children’s lives, these policies and strategies do not recognise that some parents will encounter greater challenges to participate in their children’s lives.
- At the time of writing there is no ‘coparenting’ or ‘shared parenting’ discourse in key government policy documents in relation to parenting and children and young people. The discussion on ‘positive parenting’ currently pertains to parenting within the context of the single parent-child interaction.

Programmed Parenting Courses

- Many parenting courses that are available in Ireland focus on the parent-child interaction in relation to learning how to manage child behaviour and far less on shared/coparenting.
- Some parenting courses have been evaluated and have shown to have positive outcomes.
- There are no known programmes in the Irish context, which focus specifically on unmarried parents and sharing parenting.
- There are no programmes in the Irish context which focus mainly and predominantly on shared parenting/coparenting.

- As far as the research them could tell, the ‘Parents Plus – Parenting When Separated Programme’ (PP-PWSP) is the only specific parenting intervention for separated parents designed for use in Ireland. ‘Coparenting’ forms one element of the programme.
- An evaluation of the PP-PWSP points to its effectiveness in terms of parenting satisfaction and adjustment, a significant decrease in child emotional and behaviour problems and lesser interparental conflict. Further research is required to pinpoint which processes are important in producing these outcomes.
- The majority of participants on the PP-PWSP was female and across 17 studies which evaluated Parents Plus Programmes, father involvement was relatively low.

Interventions for fathers

- The evidence base on the success of interventions supporting fathers is generally limited.
- There is a general agreement both in the Irish context and internationally that family support / child welfare services are generally focused on mothers and children and have not done enough to engage with fathers and to work at being father inclusive.
- There is some suggestion that fathers perceive the use of services as a sign of weakness and can be reluctant to engage with services for diverse reasons.
- Two interventions/programmes that have focused specifically on father are the ‘Da Project’ and ‘Just for Dads’ and the evaluations of both these projects point to fathers’ desire to be involved in their children’s lives.
- There is a general deficit of interventions and services that focus on fathers specifically and fathers themselves have identified this deficit in Irish research (Swirak, 2015; Barnardos/Working with Men, 2006; Kiely *et al* 2017).
- Evidence from interviews conducted for the ‘Da Project’ found that mothers held some traditional perceptions and beliefs about fathers’ roles.
- The ‘Da Project’ employed a strengths based approach in engaging with fathers and strengths based approaches have shown promise in work with fathers (Kiely *et al* 2018).
- An evaluation of the ‘Da Project’ identified programme benefits including increased positive contact between fathers and children.
- It is perceived important to convey to fathers, the benefits of their involvement in their children’s lives.

- There is some evidence to suggest that fathers do value meeting other fathers and benefit from learning from each other.

Young Parent Programmes

- In the Irish context, young parents have been supported through the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP).
- Interagency collaboration and co-operation has been useful in the deployment of the Teen Parent Support Programme.
- Teen fathers' roles and their attitudes toward teen pregnancy shapes the mothers' perceptions of their pregnancies.
- Young mothers have been shown to benefit in their parenting if they are supported by the fathers.
- One in five young parents do not have contact with each other.
- The TPSP has proven to be effective in increasing parents' contact with each other.
- Father engagement with the TPSP significantly reduces if the relationship with the mother ends.
- There are significant differences between the educational achievements of teen mothers and fathers, with fathers having less educational qualifications.
- Fathers who participate in the TPSP generally present as very disadvantaged.
- Fathers are mainly referred to the TPSP through family members or peers. The lack of referrals from other services draws attention to fathers' low engagement with formal services.
- The Teen Parent Support Programme provides parenting support, advice and parenting skills, but it does not address shared parenting specifically.
- There is evidence that young fathers are in need of greater support in the parenting of their children.
- A 2002 evaluation of the TPSP programme found that referral agents were uncertain as to the impact of the TPSP on responding to fathers' needs.
- The obstacles that young fathers face in being involved with their child was noted at a 2007 TPSP conference which had 'fathers' as its theme.
- The importance of the maternal grandmothers' attitude toward young fathers has been noted as a key mediating influence on young father involvement.

- Research finds that young fathers perceive family support services as ‘women’s services’.

Child Contact Centres

- Evidence from Irish evaluations of contact centres suggest the need for such centres in the Irish context due to both the benefits they afford and the increase in the level of need given changing Irish family structures and population levels (Kearns and Coen, 2008; One Family, 2009; Murphy and Holt, 2013). It has been recommended that based on 2011 census population levels and changing family dynamics, 29 supported and eight supervised Child Contact Centres are needed in the Republic of Ireland (One Family, 2009). Research indicates that the interest and use of Child Contact Centres can extend (well) beyond the intended catchment area of the service – further indication of the need for such centres.
- The evidence shows that the majority of non-resident parents who avail of Child Contact Centres are male and a significant proportion are unmarried or single (Kearns and Coen, 2008; Kiely *et al* 2017; One Family, 2009; Murphy and Holt, 2013).
- The evidence suggests that while contact centre users can come from a variety of different backgrounds, the general profile of clients and families is that they are experiencing high levels of relationship problems, and come from a lower socio-economic background.
- The international and Irish literature shows that parents highly value Child Contact Centres. Non-resident parents report being able to build a bond with their child and see their child more often (Kearns and Coen, 2008).
- The evidence points to the benefit of contact centres in facilitating parents to ‘move on’ to self-managed contact. The discussion on Child Contact Centres however, does not explore how parents may be further supported in the sharing of parenting during this self-managed contact phase.
- Evidence suggests that the relationship between the non-resident and resident parent may, but not necessarily, improve from the use of Child Contact Centres (Kearns and Coen, 2008).

- Evidence suggests that the resident parent can feel more assured of the child's safety and can become more accepting of the non-resident parent's contact and involvement in the child's life from use of Child Contact Centres.
- Although some contact centres of family access services only provide a space for contact to take place, be it supervised or supported, the provision of other services within Child Contact Centres has been shown to be highly beneficial and valued by service users.
- Evidence points to the benefits of 'handover' services offered by contact centres. Such services are important given the literature showing the harm for children witnessing recurring high level interparental conflict.

Chapter Six: Views and Experiences of Unmarried Fathers in Ireland Sharing Parenting

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter we present shortened accounts garnered from interviews conducted with seven fathers about their experiences of trying to or successfully sharing parenting over time. We point out the key features of each father's experience and in the latter part of the chapter we discuss what might be usefully considered from this particular dataset. We are mindful that a small number of fathers were interviewed and for that reason we caution against generalisation. If anything, the interview data reveals the diversity in this small study group and their liminal experiences as they are located outside the normative identity category of married father.

6.2 Case Study 1: Rob

Coparent Biography

Rob has two children, one when he married and was living in another country and another child with a different partner after he returned to live in Ireland. Rob's first child is now in their early twenties but Rob spoke of how he had to cope after he was left to sole parent the child after the child's mother left them. Rob had his second child aged 5 years with a different partner in Ireland. At the time of interview there were ongoing court proceedings. Rob and the mother of his son were together for two years, did not marry but cohabited and the relationship ended six months after their son was born.

While he and his second partner were together Rob took on a social parenting role with his partner's children. Since the relationship ended Rob's contact with his son has been limited. This he attributes to the individual characteristics of the mother, her gatekeeping behaviour and his wish to avoid conflict with her. Rob felt that his child's mother did not want him to be a part of his child's life despite his attempts at communicating with her to have contact with his child. He had difficulty having contact, which was exacerbated since he did not have guardianship. He feels that not having automatic guardianship plays a huge part in discouraging fathers from trying to be involved with their children when obstacles are put in the way. From his perspective a shared parenting arrangement involves *...looking after the best interests of the child or children with the resources of both parents, complementing each other* but he believed that it necessitated a relationship between separated parents that was not in conflict. Otherwise he stated he thought parallel parenting could be the more appropriate arrangement.

With the mother of his second child, he refrained from reacting too much to *intentional provocation* since he feared the mother could place a restraining order on him and further justify her claim that he should not have access to the child. He stated that he was unexpectedly summoned to court by his child's mother to pay maintenance, though he argued he had in lieu of paying maintenance bought the food, paid bills etc. Once his child's mother secured a court ordered maintenance payment, he

claimed that she saw *no need for me anymore*. Thus, Rob avoids *all contact with the mother at all times* due to his intention to avoid face to face conflict with his child's mother. By making an application to court, Rob managed to gain contact with his son for a four hour period each week in an Irish based Child Contact Centre. While he has found this to be beneficial, he feels the environment is not ideal and would like to be *...in a natural environment rather than in a little cell room, and to be able to go out and play with him and kick a ball and do things, you know, and be with his friends and the other parents, you know, and get back to normal life, you know*. He also believes that his child's mother is doing her utmost to disrupt the contact visits and she has made allegations that he has threatened and abused her when she attended the contact centre. He claims that while the staff supervising the contact know this to be untrue, they adopt a neutral stance and do not make reports to court because the contact is supported not supervised.

Throughout the time he was married and parenting alone, Rob kept a diary that was signed by the other tenants in the house where he lived so that he could keep as a record of his caregiving through the years. This diary helped when he was subsequently pursued for child support after his child's mother alleged he was an absent father, who did not support his child financially. The signed diary proved he was doing all the day to day caregiving of his child.

What Rob valued at this time when he was parenting alone were the various parenting workshops and supports which were available to him where he was living: *I was able to avail of all types of courses on a regular basis*. He also spoke of benefiting from parenting groups where single parents could share advice and resources. Developing the skills to facilitate successful coparenting was a strong feature of these parenting groups. One of the *key things* Rob learned from these courses was the usefulness of refraining from criticising the other parent. His ex-wife, who at one time made untrue allegations against him subsequently supported him in the family law court by attesting to his *sincerity* and his *abilities as a father*. He believed that had he not learned to try and avoid engaging in conflict with the other parent, she may not have supported him subsequently when he needed it: *So it shows at times if you can just withstand the emotional times that eventually they may be there to support and help you when they come around*.

Rob doesn't feel that mediation could help reduce the tension between himself and his child's mother and he thinks that there is a lack of understanding among professionals that interventions such as mediation may do more harm than good if the relationship between the couple has shown itself to be particularly acrimonious or difficult.

Rob reiterated the benefits of having done parenting courses and workshops while he was living outside Ireland and he thought that there is a deficit of such parenting programmes and workshops in Ireland: *a hundred percent. I mean, like what is available? Let me know what's available. There's nothing for parents...* He would welcome opportunities to meet with other unmarried parents, suggesting that there should be an information point or internet facility which could facilitate parents to come together online or meet in person. While he has accessed advice and information from Treoir, which he found to be a reliable and professional service, he stated that *I don't think there's a huge amount of information out there for unmarried dads, you know*.

Analysis

Rob's interview clearly shows how he has benefitted from the information and supported provided by parenting and shared/coparenting workshops, which he attended when living outside of Ireland.

Rob identified the conflict management skills he acquired as being particularly valuable. Rob's use of a diary of his caregiving is also interesting and it provided a way of proving parenting both to the child, the other parent and a child support agency / court (pursuing unpaid maintenance). While this was not identified in the literature, it clearly had a practical and useful purpose in this instance. A lack of automatic guardianship rights and the determination on the part of his partner not to support his application for guardianship are barriers for Rob to be involved with his child. The availability nearby of a Child Contact Centre has proven to be useful for Rob once access to his child was granted to him by the court. It would also seem that Rob may have benefited from a system where the payment of maintenance is bound up with parenting contact. Rob's account provided a strong case for more information and supports in Ireland both for unmarried parents and for the development and support of coparenting capacity in couples who separate.

6.3 Case Study 2: Mark

Coparent Biography

Mark separated from his partner when his two children were five and six years of age. His children are now 15 and 16 years and they are two boys, one of whom has a disability. Mark's ex-partner lives in a rural area where her extended family also reside close by. Mark also lives nearby but did not grow up in the area. He found Treoir to be a very helpful service, which he found by conducting an internet search to access information.

After his relationship ended, Mark was able to maintain involvement with his children from the outset. He saw his children frequently and felt that he was *very much involved in their lives*. Currently, he is able to see his two children *nearly every day* when he is not away working and generally has contact with them about five or six times a week. While the payment of maintenance is structured and formalised, the contact with his children has been unstructured, flexible and extensive in that he is not confined to only seeing them only at the weekends etc. He attributes his frequent contact with them to his close proximity and that the fact that they're now teenagers: [so] *they're much more mobile themselves*. Mark feels very positive about his involvement with his children and he described having a good relationship with them.

Following the relationship dissolution, he felt, rather paradoxically, that his relationship with his children got stronger: *I definitely feel looking back that I'm able to—you know, I think that my relationship with my kids is much healthier, you know what I mean. It's much more me. When I am with them I am me, you know, I am just being myself, you know what I mean. ... Once the friction was taken out of it I was able-yeah, after we split up I cultivated my own relationship with them*. The downside for Mark is that when a relationship ends there can be less *momentum or continuation* in the parent-child relationship. In this context he spoke of *feeling powerless, that you're not involved as much... as you should be*. He noted that his ex-partner has her mother and sisters who provide what could be described as a kind of coparenting support. He commented *... in some ways she would have all of those conversations [about parenting issues]... with her mum and her sisters*. He perceived that this is a useful support for her but problematic for him in that as a non-resident father he has to make more effort not to become increasingly marginal in his children's lives. He also pointed out *that it's not all negatives... not everything is black and white*, and acknowledged that the wider family members have been a source of support in the raising of the couple's children.

Mark feels that he generally has a good parenting relationship with the children's mother. Mark is confident that the mother trusts him and he believes that she is glad that he was around to share the parenting. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that there is conflict at times. Mark also highlighted how parenting practices and *practical things* can be a source of conflict, though he acknowledged that he and the children's mother have somewhat complementary parenting styles and agree and support each other in the making and maintaining of rules for their teenage children around socialising etc. Mark also spoke about his attempts of conflict management. He is careful not to *outstay* his welcome in his ex-partner's house and he exercises care in his communication with her. Mark argued that although he has had rows with the children's mother, he has tried not to let their differences go unresolved and cause bitterness.

Mark also expressed a desire when interviewed to enter into a new relationship but he fears that a future romantic relationship may impact negatively on both his children and on the shared parenting relationship he has established. He noted that a previous brief relationship was a source of much

conflict with his children and his children's mother. Indeed, Mark reported having holidayed in Ireland and Portugal with both his children and their mother two years previous: *You know some men, you know, if they split up with someone, they kind of meet someone else, have kids with them, you know what I mean, have a different family. I kind of feel like I've split up with the mother but I've [still] remained in that unit in a way. We kind of went on holidays a bit as well.*

In terms of society more broadly Mark perceives Irish law and the family law courts as being more favourable to women than to men in issues pertaining to parenting. He also spoke of feeling *stigmatised* as an unmarried father and feels this is symptomatic of a broader negative image of unmarried / separated men in society in general. Mark is conscious of the impact, which the end of the relationship may have had on his children and he tries his utmost to be a very good role model for them, now that they are teenagers. Mark believes that Irish society needs to have a broader conversation about parenting issues in general. He argues the given the diversity of families, parents and families *need a certain* guidance in relation to parenting and coparenting. He also argued that people should be helped to develop coping skills to deal with a relationship breakdown, especially *for men more than anything... men in general need to know that... if you do split up with someone... you don't have to crucify yourself over it.* Furthermore, he believed more effort was needed to deconstruct gendered beliefs about primary care of children following relationship breakdown so that the mother is not the default carer.

Analysis

Mark has a generally good shared parenting relationship with the mother and argues that his close proximity to his children helps them to maintain frequent contact with him. Highlighting how he thinks his children's mother wished him to share parenting, Mark's interview underscores how the sharing of parenting can be beneficial for the children, but also for the other parent, the mother in this instance. Mark's story is illustrative of couples who organise a shared parenting arrangement reasonably successfully between themselves without outside intervention. One of the interesting aspects about Mark's account is the proximity of the mother's extended family members and it exemplifies how significant others may impact on a shared parenting arrangement and can may become coparents in ways which can be both positive and negative. This underlines the importance of interventions or workshops which explore what constitutes shared parenting or father 'involvement' – that it does not only refer to day to day physical caregiving, but also involvement in decision making.

Mark's comment about that the absence of new partner does permit him to continue to be a part of the family 'unit' is consistent with literature showing that father involvement can decline after parents repartner (Tach *et al* 2010; Turney and Halpern-Meekin, 2017).

Relatedly, Mark desires to repartner but worries how this may have implications for both his involvement with his children and his shared parenting relationship. This shows a possible need for interventions to attend to the implications for all concerned, of the formation of new relationships for unmarried or separated parents. Similarly, in relation to workshops and interventions, Mark also believed that there needs to be advice and guidance in Irish society for all parents in relation to development of skills vital for parenting generally and for shared parenting after separation.

6.4 Case Study 3: Joe

Coparent Biography

Joe's son is three years and his relationship ended when his son was six months old in 2016.

Joe paid maintenance from the outset. Joe initially used court based mediation meetings to come up with a structure toward sharing the parenting. This did not work out and he attributed this failure in a mediated settlement to his ex-partner who he argued was *moving the goalposts* and disagreeing to what would have been agreed at a previous meeting. Joe attempted to attain guardianship by mutual agreement through statutory declaration but on the refusal of the ex-partner, he informed her that he would apply to the court for guardianship. His child's mother then agreed to make him joint guardian.

Joe has cares for his son every second weekend and once every week. He highlighted the importance of the support he receives from his wider family including his parents and siblings in helping him and his ex-partner in caring for their child. Joe highlighted the boundaries which he set with his family so that they do not make arrangements with the child's mother independently of him. He believes in the optimum shared parenting situation should be *fifty-fifty with a bit of give and take*.

The shared parenting relationship between Joe and his ex-partner is sporadic in that communication can fluctuate from being very good to being very poor. For example, he highlighted how he was able to go on a day outing with both his son and his son's mother recently and they spent a number of hours out together happily. In contrast, despite having *kind of a routine* and a *structure* in relation to the sharing of parenting, Joe and the mother *don't talk a lot* since *things are still a little bit kind of tense*. In the telephone interview at points he indicated that he fears broaching some issues with his child's mother in case conflict would ensue and Joe put this potential for conflict down to the individual characteristics of his ex-partner. For example he believed that his son is *thriving as a child* but sometimes he does worry over the mother's competency as a parent but he thinks to raise it as an issue with his child's mother will jeopardise his contact with his child: *And I do feel my hands are kind of tied in that regard a little bit, because if I do complain am I running the risk of her not letting me see him and that kind of stuff?* As a result, he believes that one of the things which can facilitate shared parenting is an *amicable relationship* with his child's mother.

Joe commented that his son *means the world* to him and in this context he differentiated himself as a parent from dads who he calls *fly-by-night dads* who *turn up once in a while* or who appear once every three or four weeks and bring the child to McDonald's for an hour. In contrast, Joe explained that he has a genuine interest in his child and wishes to be a parent to him. He believes that one of the challenges fathers confront in hoping to have access or to share parenting is the payment of maintenance. He acknowledges that fathers need to be consistent, responsible and honest in paying maintenance. In this regard, he believes that fathers should automatically have contact when they do pay maintenance and that mothers should not *hold all the aces and say, well, I'm going to stop you from seeing the child this week for another reason*. Joe argued that there could be many different reasons why fathers do not or cannot pay maintenance, such as lack of income and uncertainty over how the money is being spent.

Joe feels that fathers should be entitled to automatic guardianship: *I think a fairer system for dads is all a lot of dads are looking for. They're not looking for the sun, moon and stars, just I think a bit of recognition and to be recognised*. He feels that not having automatic guardianship plays a huge part in discouraging fathers from trying to be involved with their children when obstacles are put in the

way. He commented: ... *you could literally just walk away from the situation and deny everything and you're kind of backing the partner into a corner then—which is something I did consider when I couldn't get on the birth cert or on the guardianship form. But at the same time I couldn't walk away from him because, you know, I just couldn't do it.*

Joe feels that the lack of automatic guardianship is symptomatic of the devaluing of unmarried fathers in Irish society. Joe attributes that the devaluation of fathers is partly related to gender essentialism; that because a mother carries the child in the womb, she is viewed as the natural and principal caregiver. Indeed he felt that society generally emphasis that or assumes that mothers are more interested in babies than fathers. He recounted an event whereby products for babies were geared only with mothers in mind. He also believes there is more support for mothers generally: *there's a huge amount of support there for mothers and their kids and a huge amount of groups out there, but I think there's very little for the dads, you know.* Joe's friends are married and he felt the support he can obtain from them is limited due to their differentiated experiences. He also argued that fathers may be too embarrassed to talk to friends about the situation in which they find themselves after separation / relationship breakdown.

Part of this lack of support is the lack of information. Joe believes that there is a lack of information for unmarried parents but found Treoir to be very helpful given that being a separated unmarried parent is *a kind of grey area* and to find out about one's rights and entitlements *is a minefield*. He recalled that a solicitor he contacted for advice was unfamiliar with the issues confronting unmarried fathers and the necessary forms to complete in relation to attaining guardianship. Joe used the Treoir website for information and found it *one the most beneficial and kind of the most accurate, to be honest, and the most user-friendly*. He believes that unmarried fathers are not aware of their lack of automatic guardianship and they are generally poorly informed. He believes it would be highly beneficial for fathers, especially younger fathers, to have appropriate access to the services that are there, and believes that an *information pack* specifically for unmarried fathers could be useful in a hospital setting, since he believes mothers are provided with something similar.

Analysis

Joe's interview drew attention to the struggle and complications that result from the lack of automatic guardianship for unmarried fathers. Joe also highlighted the importance of adequate sources of information for unmarried fathers and he made a useful suggestion for the development of an information pack that could be provided for unmarried fathers in the maternity hospital setting. Although he found Treoir's information service very helpful, his search for information exemplifies the difficulties that come with the lack of awareness that unmarried fathers do obtain automatic guardianship rights. His perception that there is more support for mothers is consistent with points made by researchers that the primacy of the mother as primary caretaker is embedded within organisational practices and in wider Irish culture and society.

6.5 Case Study 4: John

Coparent Biography

John became a father in 2013 to a baby girl, Leah.

At the time he was living in his parents' house and the mother of his daughter was living with her parents. John explained *we couldn't afford to move out and live together* and he acknowledged this is not what he wished to do either: *Everyone needs their own space ... we were only 17, 18. We weren't capable of doing that.* For the first two years after their child was born, John was in a good relationship with his child's mother. From the outset, they established a very egalitarian shared parenting relationship that according to John suited both of them. Leah resided with her mother from Monday until Thursday afternoon and with John from Thursday until Sunday.

After two years the relationship deteriorated and they decided to end the relationship. John attributes the deterioration in the relationship to his decision to attend college, which effectively meant he was reliant on a student grant and after paying his rent and other expenses, he could not afford to pay any maintenance during college terms. This created conflict, which increased over time between John and his child's mother. On two occasions when John claimed that Leah's mother withdrew from the informally established shared care arrangement and denied Leah contact with him, he thought it best to apply to court to have the care arrangement they had in place formalised or as he put it *... set in stone.* He stated in interview that *...with court involved it just makes everything run ... more smoothly* but he acknowledges that it exacerbated the already poor relations between them as parents:

Just back and forward kind of major wargames, as I mentioned before. Just a load of rubbish really on both sides. My side digs at the other and like insults in the court proceedings and all these unnecessary things ... yeah, it's definitely got worse.

While the care arrangement was formalised as it had been prior to the court proceedings, what John describes having, at the time of interview, was a parallel parenting rather than a shared parenting arrangement. There is little or no contact between him and Leah's mother on parenting:

... we do our own thing independently. I don't even have contact with her so I don't know what she's doing, but I do my own thing. I have a set routine. Leah comes out. Reading, writing, pencil-holding, all that school stuff, and educational books to read. I don't know what she's doing but that's what I'm doing.

He stated in interview that their relationship had *... become so volatile ... all because of the financial issues. It's become very bad.* Leah's mother is now in a new relationship but John, though unsure, thought that her new partner was not involved in the day to day care of Leah. In the interview John was critical of the lack of automatic guardianship rights for fathers: *there's no guardianship straight away. So it's like fathers are straight away seemed, not to be deemed even a parent at the start unless their name is on the birth cert.*

In retrospect, he regrets that he had not applied for guardianship from the outset when he and Leah's mothers' relationship was going very well. However, he stated in the interview that given their young age, that their relationship was good and that he had no access to information, he never

thought about any of this or what the future could hold. He felt that given their young age as parents, that it would have been beneficial to both of them if had they been sat down by someone who could have given them vital information and encourage them to think about the future and how it could present challenges for them as a couple and as parents and how they could try to address those challenges. After he was denied access to Leah, he set about accessing information about what he needed to do to stay involved with his child. He first conducted an online search for information but feeling that the information he was accessing was not clear or reliable, he went to the local Citizens Advice office to obtain the correct information. He then sought advice about what to expect in court, how to present himself and to make his case etc. from older peers in college, who were also unmarried fathers with experience of the court process. Just some days prior to the interview he became aware of Treoir and a staff member where they ... *actually explained everything perfectly. It was actually really good.* He wished however, he had known about the existence of such an organisation prior to this and when he really needed information. He had not also heard of the One Family organisation.

Through his applications to court, John had secured legal guardianship of Leah and joint custody. At the time of interview court proceedings were ongoing relating to disagreements between John and his ex-partner pertaining to Leah's education. The court would now decide what was in Leah's best interests. His view was that the conflict between them as parents impacted on them being able to agree on anything with implications for Leah: *See, whatever they [Leah's mother and her family] say is right and if I argue it I have to go to court. Even if I could say something that's right they still argue with whatever I say... everything ends up in court, unfortunately.*

Projecting into what John would like the future to hold for him and his daughter, he commented:

I think it's a lack of maturity ... in ten years I hope to be, you know, as I said, in a house, Leah comes to me ... and there's no problems, there's no trouble, my financial situation is better and, you know, maybe we just need to grow up and all that and just establish some sort of grounds of respect. But no, at the moment there's no respect. It's just all rubbish. In ten years' time I hope there'll be peace, you know, and tranquillity for Leah.

Analysis

John's account again underlines the importance of automatic guardianship for parents. Increasing the student maintenance grant contribution for lone parents sharing parenting would be of benefit to parents like John, who have additional costs and responsibilities as parents. John attributed his decision to return to education and his resulting poor financial position to the breakdown of his relationship and to the challenges he encountered trying to stay involved as a parent.

It is unfortunate that what was once a shared care arrangement has become a parallel parenting arrangement due to relationship breakdown and ongoing conflict and court action. As John and his partner were young parents, involvement in a Teen Parent Support Programme with a shared parenting orientation could have provided them with the vital information and support and tools to help them plan for their futures as parents in a relationship or after their relationship ended.

Support toward shared parenting for John and his partner at the point where the relationship ended may have also been helpful. John's account illustrates how the court becomes the first port of call for

unmarried parents in dispute. It is unfortunate that adversarial court proceedings become the only option for such parents. Clearly court proceedings paradoxically permit parents like John to ensure that their children can continue to have meaningful relationships with them as parents but at the same time exacerbate the conflict between couples, making it increasingly likely that a parallel parenting arrangement to mitigate the conflict, rather than a shared parenting arrangement (as had been in place), is the likely outcome.

6.6 Case Study 5: Steve

Coparent Biography

At the age of 24 years in 1999, Steve became a father to a baby girl called Amy. He lived with the mother of his daughter at her mother's house at the time their child was born and for approximately a year and a half after. At that point his relationship with the mother of his daughter ended and he moved into his parents' house, which was nearby. He claimed that from the very beginning ... *I made it quite clear that I wanted to always be involved ... she knew it from me... we talked about it before we had the child... that I would always be interested, I wasn't ever going to leave her on her own.* In interview, he stated that he was determined to put his child's interests first and to try as best he could not to let other things get in the way of that.

Amy's mother put in place an arrangement that Steve would care for Amy in his parents' house at the weekends and as he lived nearby she permitted him to visit Amy at her home or collect her from school some weekdays. As he explained *That was set up for me and I went along with it not to rock the boat.* It was an arrangement that was not of his making but according to Steve *it tipped along like that nicely for all the years.* Amy's mother stayed single, living with her mother and has other children. While they are not Steve's children, in interview he described having *a very good relationship* with Amy's younger siblings. He said *I'd see them fairly regularly as well and often do things with them.*

Steve had difficulty seeing himself as sharing parenting on the basis that he was given no say in how Amy would be parented after the relationship ended. Steve had his own routine with Amy, which he would broadly outline to Amy's mother but not in any significant detail. He also claimed that he felt Amy's mother, as her mother, always *had more control* and as the non-resident father, one has to *toe the line a bit or bite your tongue*. What loomed in the background was the threat that the arrangement could be quickly and easily withdrawn by Amy's mother if their relationship became acrimonious. This could mean that he would not get to spend time with Amy. His reluctance to make applications to court resulted from his fear that *if I went down that road, it could have turned sour and I wouldn't have seen her.* In his view, Amy's mother made most of the decisions and in this context he was *in the background*. For example, he was willing to pay the maintenance requested by Amy's mother but though he thought it was possibly too much, he paid it *to avoid getting into conflict*. Steve was of the opinion that it was unmarried fathers' lack of any legal or official recognition gives the message to mothers that they can determine how they permit fathers to parent.

For instance he, stated that having his name on Amy's birth certificate and Amy having his surname did not mean he had any right to a say. He also stated that ... *what I found the strangest thing, for me to really have any say, I would have had to actually go and get guardianship of my own child.* He queried as to *Why is it automatic for one parent and not for the other?* He acknowledged that a lot of men can ... *easily walk away and fathers had a bad press because they were just able to walk away* but he questioned why the legislation should assist fathers in doing so. He thought that the key ingredient to making parenting work after relationship breakdown without taking legal action was for parents ... *to talk* and that *even if one person has a little bit more control, you have to give way for the interests of the child.*

In interview he pointed out that there can be significant challenges for fathers who wish to share parenting, one of them being financial issues. He said *in my situation, some weeks I financially struggle.* Accommodation proved to be an ongoing issue for Steve for some time as he could not

afford to buy a house, leaving him and his daughter with no option but to share a bedroom in his parents' house when she resided with him. Then he found it was very difficult as a single man, albeit a father, to secure a local authority house. He was eventually successful but it took considerable time. Steve campaigned against the change made in the budget in 2014, which saw the replacement of the One Parent Family tax Credit with a Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit which he stated significantly impacted on him due to his limited finances and the maintenance he had to pay.

Fortunately for him, his ex-partner who was not engaged in paid work agreed to transfer the tax credit over to him. This would not be the case for all parents affected. He claimed that the primary school his daughter attended would only send Amy's progress reports to her mother but that when she attended secondary school, the school authorities had no problem keeping him informed of her progress. When his daughter had a condition that needed hospital treatment, he found that he was not perceived as her parent. He pointed out the ways in which institutions sometimes explicitly and sometimes subtly gave non-resident and unmarried fathers the message that they matter little in their children's lives. Similarly, he argued that it can be difficult for separated fathers to form a new relationship and in his case, he stated that his role as both a biological and a social father were constructed as problematic by other women he dated. In his view, fathers can be stereotyped as only caring for their children if they continue to harbour affections for their ex partners. Furthermore, Steve highlighted the lack of readily available information for unmarried fathers and men's reluctance to seek help or information as key issues. He commented *I know it's not easy for men to go for help in general, but I wouldn't ever know after all I went through where to go to seek advice.* He claimed that the militancy and 'anti-women' stance of some fathers' activist groups did not appeal to him and in his view was *unhelpful to young fathers who may need this information and I suppose to respect the woman's point of view as well.* He found in his own case that the need for information and awareness raising is ongoing. For example, he noted that unmarried fathers need to be made aware of the importance of making a will to provide for their children after they pass away. As a father of an 18 year old at the time of interview he thinks that other people think of him as no longer having any commitment or responsibility but this is not how he sees it. He will continue to pay maintenance and he views what happens this year as marking another significant transition in his daughter's life that has to be successfully negotiated with all concerned.

Analysis

Steve's account puts a focus on how the lack of guardianship makes the parental relationship unequal from the outset so that a mother is given endorsement by law to decide how the father parents. Steve decided in large part to accept this inequality, to avoid conflict and litigation to maintain a co-operative relationship with his child's mother. Steve, being a father of an older child highlights how the need for information for the unmarried father persists throughout the life course. His interview, which drew attention to changes in the Budget in 2014 underlines the importance of proofing policy changes for their impact on shared parenting.

As Steve noted, the tax credit was very significant for him in terms of being in a better financial position to pay his child maintenance. Steve's interview raises questions as to what extent common interests exist among unmarried fathers. He is critical of the fathers who do not stay involved with their children and fail to take responsibility on the basis that they feed the stereotypes of the unmarried father as the feckless father. His comments draw attention to the reality that unmarried fathers like any other group occupy contradictory subject positions and have different capacities to cope with the demands of fatherhood or the thoughts and feelings they experience in relationship

breakdown. As Steve notes, forming a new relationship which makes room for the continuation of a shared parenting and a social parenting relationship can be difficult. The ways in which institutions recognise or render invisible unmarried fathers is also made evident in this account.

6.7 Case Study 6: Jake

Coparent Biography

When Jake's girlfriend became pregnant unexpectedly early in their relationship, Jake thought it best to *give it a go* and while it *wasn't the best idea in the world, it [the relationship] worked for ... years*. Jake has a 1 year old child and twins aged 5 years.

Jake provided day to day care for his children after the twins were born because his partner was in full time third level education pursuing the final year of her Degree. Jake continued to provide day to day care for their children as his partner proceeded to study for her Master's Degree but at this time the relationship ended and his partner moved out of the family home. At this stage Jake applied for and received the One Parent Family Payment and his ex-partner signed over the Child Benefit payment to him. He explained:

Well we tried to keep it amicable for their [children's] sake and I don't know if she [mother] was in a great place at the time. So, what would happen was basically she'd come and go as she pleased. I was always at home with the kids but most days she would be there for maybe two hours in the evenings. That was good for the children to have constant contact and I was with them the rest of the time.

His ex-partner spent all day Saturday with the children while Jake undertook a part-time course to enhance his employment prospects and she also spent Sunday with Jake and the children. However, Jake constantly worried that because he was financially dependent on the One Parent Family Payment and that his partner visited his home very regularly that his payment could be put in jeopardy. At the time, he was also feeling very isolated and unsupported. He desired to be earning and to be a better provider for his family but this was not possible. He had not wanted to be the primary carer but he felt he had no other choice. He explained *I couldn't afford to work with full-time childcare and afterschool for the older child*. Jake's partner had made it clear that she did not feel she could be a full-time mother. He feared that if he did not take on the primary caring role that his ex-partner, who was not Irish could return to her home country with their children and he could lose contact with them entirely. He also thought that upon hearing many men say that they wished they could spend more time with their children that he might possibly look back on this period of his life as a rewarding one, though he acknowledged he was finding it particularly tough at that time. Feeling very anxious, he participated in a stress management programme with a community based organisation, which he found very helpful. He claimed that if they argued his ex-partner would castigate him for not engaging in paid work and at times his children asked him why *I'm the only dad at parent-toddler groups*.

Their parenting arrangements however, were to alter a little to accommodate the changes in both their lives. Jake's ex-partner subsequently entered a new relationship. She moved in with her new partner and out of a house share situation. This meant she was in a better position to have the children overnight and she did have the children reside with her for two nights of the week at the beginning and this built up to three nights a week subsequently. Jake explained that her new partner *has a good bond with the kids in fairness*. Jake has also formed a new relationship but he does not share a residence with his new partner. From time to time there is conflict between Jake and his ex-partner. From his perspective, she does take the time or show an interest in seeking a creche or a school for the children or she does not attend student induction or school meetings, but then she may oppose the decisions he makes. He has not been accommodating his ex-partner's requests to increase her

involvement with her children because he thinks that they will spend more time with her new partner rather than with her, given her study commitments and that his perception of her lack of commitment to direct care giving. As he commented ... *so basically I'd be dropping them [children] off to him [mother's new partner] and then she'd be coming home in the evening... I want them to be with one of us, either her or me.* He also worries that if the children's mother's relationship was to end that this may result in her wanting to spend less time with the children and they could be subsequently hurt. Furthermore, he argues that she needs better accommodation if she wants to care for the children more than she does presently and she needs to establish a routine that works well for the children. He complained that the children are less likely to attend school or to do their homework when they reside with their mother because these are not priorities for her.

While very early on, Jake's ex-partner supported his application for guardianship and to obtain joint custody of their children. At the time he requested that the Judge also take note of his primary caring role but he claimed that no such note was taken. He says he now worries that if his ex-partner's new boyfriend was to become the children's guardian, that he and the mother of his children would have a greater say over the children's futures. He also worries that he has not obtained any maintenance from his ex partner. While in lieu of maintenance she paid some bills after she moved out. As her care giving increased, she stopped paying those bills. He has been too fearful to challenge her to pay maintenance as he believes this could potentially create great conflict between them. As he put it *I'm afraid to rock the boat with welfare, I'm lying and saying she is giving me maintenance because they were asking me to chase her for it... so they deducted money off me for that.* As a parent he feels that he has ... *to watch my step the whole time* as any evidence of poor parenting, no matter how minimal could potentially be used against him. His ex- partner told him at one point that she took photos of the untidiness in the house to use as evidence in court if the time came. Jake mentioned in interview that his children's mother recently mentioned that she was ready to try family mediation. However, he would prefer to wait to attend mediation until all the children are in primary school so that in the agreement parenting plans made can be stable and sustained for a period and can then be made rule of court. He has a desire for greater formality and structure in their parenting arrangements so that he can return to paid work. However, he worries that because he is a father that this will not be to his advantage. He commented *I suppose I still feel it. I still worry that because she's their mother that she will have them, that she'd automatically be looked at more favourably than me if she was trying to get more custody.* He also worries that if there was to be increased conflict in formalising arrangements through law that this could be damaging;

We avoided the fights... things flare up but I suppose we manage each other how we've learned to manage each other over the years and it settles again. I suppose just because I know her that once we get into the legal thing, she'd really get stuck in you know and that not only I lose, the kids will lose out because our relationship will deteriorate, what's left of it, you know.

In interview, Jake said that he would encourage other fathers like him engaged in primary caregiving to become involved in community activities such as parent-toddler groups to avoid becoming isolated. He said when he first attended he *was really nervous... I was worried would they be wondering what my motivations are for being there.* He acknowledged that fathers parenting on their own can obtain a lot of affirmation and support from other people and institutions, who perceive what they are doing to be highly commendable, simply because it is not stereotypical. However, he also feels that they can also be viewed with some suspicion because they are not conforming to what is expected of them as breadwinners. Indeed he found that he felt very ambivalent about it himself. In relation to what the future holds, Jake says he has ... *no idea. I'd be happy to have equal time with*

them [the children] but I don't know how that might work in their [children's] best interests, like I'd have to see you know.

Analysis

While Jake clearly believes in the significance of his involvement and presence in his children's lives and the value of his care as a parent, his interview clearly shows that not being able to financially provide for his family in the way he would like was at the same time a significant issue for him. Financially providing for children is still pervasive in conceptions of what fathers should do and just as reconciling paid work and childcare is not easy and at times entirely incompatible for mothers in Irish society. It can also be very difficult for fathers who are primary carers. His narrative is also instructive in terms of how fathers have to negotiate much carefully their way into female dominated and child friendly spheres in communities and how they experience the 'social gaze' of others when do they do. Jake and men like him tend to be viewed and treated in narrowly stereotypical ways as either exceptional or untrustworthy, which tells another story; that notwithstanding greater involvement of men in day to day caregiving of children, it is still viewed as women's business. Jake's interview also shows that gatekeeping is best understood as parental rather than maternal gatekeeping and it needs to be assessed and given attention in shared parenting interventions.

6.8 Case Study 7: David

Coparent Biography

David is a 25 year old father to a two and half year old child, Lily. At the time when his partner was pregnant, David was unemployed having just finished a work contract and his partner was spending a lot of time in the house he was renting but they were officially not living together. At the end of the pregnancy they both moved in with his parents in their house, recognising that their accommodation was not child friendly and they continued to live with David's parents for five months after their baby daughter was born. At that stage they moved out together independently of David's parents. At the time of interview, they were no longer a couple in a relationship but they continued to share a living space. This was for financial reasons, as David was unemployed at the time of interview. After the birth of their daughter, David explained that his partner ... *suffered very bad from post-natal depression and she had that for a long time and so I was taking care of the majority of things for a long time.* In this context David took on the primary care of their daughter until such time as his partner felt she was getting better and in a position to share more of the care. As he noted, *it slowly transitioned into shared care as her depression lifted.*

David described what they had at the time of interview was a very equally shared parenting arrangement but he acknowledged that this might not be entirely sustainable for practical reasons such as when Lily starts school or when his partner returns to college. He explained: *Usually when decisions like that come to the table, it usually comes down to practicality, avoid spending as much on the childminder as you can, that kind of situation.* The increasing shared parenting arrangement was worked out between the couple on their own but David explained that some communication had to happen anyway all the time because of issues arising from his ex-partner's depression. David obtained guardianship from the outset, prompted by the information he received from a Teen Parent Support Programme. His partner at the time wished him to be a joint guardian, concerned as she was about her health. From what David discussed at interview, the couple have ongoing conversational exchanges about caring for Lily, for disciplining her, about school choices for Lily into the future. David asserted that he felt his ex-partner has a lot of trust in him and that *if she's going away anywhere for a length of time she'd have absolutely not a problem leaving me with the small lady [Lily].* David noted that because of their young age when his partner became pregnant, they had a health nurse visit them. He commented ... *I found that a lot of the time ... the nurse was kind of dismissive of the father ... after a while it seemed she became more used to the fact that I was around, but at the start the default position seems to be assume that the father isn't around as much and it is the mother. There's a lot of that. I was more of an accessory a lot of the time.*

David also noted that he had to overcome many small hurdles when he was the primary carer. He commented *even going to the playground and it's 'Oh you're babysitting for the day'.* He commented that even among his peers and other parents he would hear a lot *'Oh fair play to you for sticking around' and fair play to you for changing a nappy'* comments that he argued reinforced traditional stereotypes of men and fathers and took little account of the gender convergence that sees men and fathers doing much more childcare than they did in times past in Irish society. He claimed that obstacles to fathers' involvement are their unawareness of their legal standing particularly after relationship breakdown and the lack of readily available information for them. He commented ... *the young fathers, a lot of them are overwhelmed and don't have support whereas there's a lot of supports for young mothers. ... they don't know what they can do. All they know [at childbirth] is they should go get a job because that's what their dad did or maybe they should propose right away...*

there isn't a support network for them. David and his partner were told about the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) and he found it to be a very father inclusive programme. He claimed that it was the only programme / service that he encountered that was ... *very supportive towards dads.* In contrast he found it difficult to feel comfortable in parents and babies groups because as he pointed out ... *you'd be the only dad there and they wouldn't be used to you and they wouldn't know what to do. They kind of just wouldn't even talk to you. They're kind of not prepared to handle a dad being a primary carer.* David was critical of the lack of any focus at all on the father in Irish perinatal mental health services: *Lilly's mother was linked up with a psychiatrist and stuff while she was pregnant and they never spoke to the dad – how are you feeling about all this? Not once in nine months did they ever ask the father.*

He argued that fathers are going through this huge transition in their lives and that it is lamentable that they are not offered even one counselling session. He observed that the notice boards in hospital are replete with offers of courses and classes etc. usually with no focus on men or fathers. He queried why information leaflets cannot be obtained in primary care clinics / GP's surgeries, in the maternity hospital for unmarried parents, at the very least providing information on guardianship. He argued that information and support could be offered because ... *fathers spend a lot of time waiting around standing, they notice the board.* He also believes in the value of having guardianship established early. As he put it ... *if everything starts amicably at the start and both parents aren't under too much stress and everything is sorted, it's a lot healthier going forward.* He found the TPSP to be much more father inclusive than the antenatal care the couple experienced. He felt comfortable attending the TPSP on his own. He commented ... *I went to a [TPSP] first-aid course on my own. I was in a room, there was two lads and fifteen girls there and it wasn't odd that we were there at all. ... there'd only be a small few fathers there, still we felt more welcomed by the way we were invited to these things.* He found it positive that offerings were made to parents, not mothers and their significant others, which is how he perceived other services to be offered.

David also pointed out that the welfare support system operates from the gender unequal presumption that the mother should be the primary carer and should take responsibility in relation to applying for the lone parent family payment, obtaining child benefit or a medical card etc. He argued that such a system is not amenable or conducive to both parents knowing they are both responsible for the care of the child. He also argued that the system is set up to view marriage as the default status of couples and the system has come to accommodate single lone parent mothers, but that it is particularly demanding of unmarried parents cohabiting in terms of the paperwork required and the length of time it takes to process applications for any kind of provision. Furthermore, when his partner was unwell but the person named on payments / accounts etc. David found it particularly difficult to obtain the evidence needed to apply for a medical card. In terms of the future, David hoped that Lily *would be doing well and flying in whatever she wants to achieve and I'd like the two of us to still be on good terms working together and still getting along. I'd want to make sure the two of us are still the same team we are now.*

Analysis

David is a young father who makes a strong case for operating from a presumption of equally shared parenting time and responsibility. While unmarried fathers are typically made visible because of their absence, it is unfortunate that in their presence they are not so visible. David's experience of being

treated as an accessory to his partner in some contexts supports the case for the development of gender sensitive and father inclusive practices particularly in the health, legal and social care fields in Ireland. While non-marital families are growing in number and families have diversified, it would seem that cultural and institutional Ireland still operates out of traditional gendered assumptions pertaining to care and the family. The absence of a focus on the father in the perinatal mental health field as has been noted by others (Singley and Edwards, 2015; Wong *et al* 2016) and it is also recounted as part of David's experience.

6.9 Concluding Discussion

The figure of the mother looms large in the interviews with fathers, an observation that has been made by others (Dermott, 2008; Doucet, 2006). The fathering identities and practices that continue to evolve over time for these fathers do so in relation to those enacted by the mothers of their children. In all the interviews, it is clear that the mothers played a key role in determining how these fathers take on the care of children. Indeed, women's hopes, desires and commitments relating to paid employment and parenting and their own wellbeing are also bound up with the men's accounts. While unmarried fathers may be perceived as a group with much power to choose how they involve themselves in their children's lives, what was common to these fathers was that they had a lot of involvement in the care of their children but not as they reported, always in circumstance of their choosing.

Clearly the fathers interviewed were positive about having opportunities to have involvement in their children's lives and to exercise a physical caregiving role. In this context, they can be seen as reconstructing masculinities through their involvement in childcare, a sphere of Irish life that is still dominated by women, as evidenced by the reactions the presence of fathers prompted. While welcoming of the opportunities, they have to redraw the boundaries of masculinities and fathering to encompass the care of children. It is clear also that employment and providing for children are 'materially and symbolically' (Roy, 2004, p. 255) central to the fathering identity as acknowledged by the interviewees, who reported struggling with the balance they could strike between paid work and child care obligations.

'Involvement' and 'shared parenting' are slippery and rather ill-defined concepts (Dermott, 2008) and empirical measurement of these is not possible in a qualitative interview based study with fathers. All fathers interviewed were involved fathers from the outset and they subscribed to a conception of shared parenting that involved equal or as proximate to equal decision making and physical caregiving as possible between the two parents. For the fathers involved in primary care giving, they expressed an openness to a more shared arrangement if they

perceived it to be in the best interests of children and in this context they highlight the importance of understanding gatekeeping as a parental rather than simply maternal concept and practice. The interviews also show that when fathering is practiced differently as it is when a father is primary carer and doing equally shared care, it is rewarding but also very challenging for the fathers involved and for those who encounter it, be they state agents, professionals or other parents. A few fathers described having what more closely resembled a parallel parenting arrangement or something that shifted between parallel and shared parenting arrangements and one father described what could constitute a social parenting role. The small number of interviews highlights the diversity in fathering / parenting practices that eschew simple categorisation.

The most significant issue common to all fathers interviewed was that unlike their married counterparts, they do not obtain guardianship automatically. Currently it seems that the law in Ireland requires unmarried fathers having to prove themselves worthy before granting them recognition. In contrast, as Collier and Sheldon (2008) point out, if unmarried fathers were to be granted legal recognition from the outset, this could rightfully put them on the path to being worthy. Aside from automatic guardianship, the other important recurring theme in interviews was the lack of information and support for unmarried fathers. Almost all of the fathers interviewed made recommendations toward addressing this deficit.

Clearly the interviews show that changes can be made to move towards a more gender equal legislative, policy and practice framework for parents in Irish society. Parents and families need support to shared parenting in the best interests of children. In this context the interviews usefully point to the ways in which shared parenting arrangements could be made easier to put in place and can be better supported. Currently in Ireland there is a need for a stronger discursive, legislative, policy and practice framework for this to happen. The final chapter of this report aims to respond to this challenge, by reporting findings and making recommendations.

Chapter Seven - Findings and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

Shared parenting is more likely to happen in higher income rather than low income families and among parents who work out their own parenting relationship rather than have it imposed on them after their romantic / intimate relationship ends (Bala *et al* 2017; Smyth and Chisholm, 2017). Shared parenting is recognised as a parenting arrangement that can present significant challenges to achieve for unmarried parents, particularly poorer unmarried parents in Ireland and other country contexts. Thus, the purpose of the research was to explore this further and to consider how shared parenting among unmarried parents, with particular attention being given to fathers, could be better facilitated and supported in Ireland. The primary research was confined to unmarried fathers. The rationale for this is the recognition that fathers are more likely to be, or to become, non-resident with their children when their relationships with the children's mothers end and because mothers often play an important role in determining the ways in which fathers can share parenting and have relationships with their children. Unmarried mothers and fathers tend to be stereotyped in negative ways in Irish society hence, the research also sought to eschew the unmarried father stereotype by giving them voice and an opportunity to speak in a 'language of care' which is too often the language expected of mothers. In this chapter, key findings are presented and recommendations are made for consideration by Treoir and other stakeholders for the purpose of enhancing shared parenting and involved fathering in the unmarried parent subgroup.

7.2 Terminology

'Shared parenting', 'co-parenting'/'coparenting', 'parent involvement' 'equal parenting' 'joint physical custody' are all terms used in this field of research and are generally ill-defined and can be used interchangeably with each other. 'Primary parenting', 'parallel parenting' and 'social parenting' are other terms used to refer to diverse kinds of parenting relationships and practices. A number of writers have sought to distinguish between some of these terms and to explain how they may be distinguished from each other. 'Shared parenting' is not in general use in the context of the USA where most of the research on unmarried parents has been conducted, rather it is 'co-parenting' where the capacity of significant others (grandparents

etc.) and not just biological parents to be co-parents, is also recognised. Sigal *et al* (2011), writing in the USA, distinguished co-parenting from a court ordered parenting plan and while they acknowledged the way the term is differently employed, they used it primarily to refer to the nature and quality of the parents' interpersonal relationship as they share parenting responsibilities. Joint physical custody (JPC) is the term most often employed in Northern European research to talk about shared parenting. In Ireland, the concept of shared parenting is more commonly used and in this study, shared parenting was understood broadly as parents' shared responsibility and caregiving, which is substantive, though not necessarily equal between parents and when the parents work together in the best interests of their children, regardless of what is happening or has happened in their relationships. This is what fathers also understood as shared parenting when interviewed and a few (predominantly) younger fathers perceived shared parenting to be shared if it is gender equal parenting or proximate to equal parenting.

7.2.2 Recommendations

- Because there is a lack of conceptual clarity when utilising concepts pertaining to post-parent relationship care arrangements for children, we recommend that concepts are defined when in use for the purpose of clarity.
- As a consequence of this study we would recommend the adoption of a definition of shared parenting as constituting parents' shared responsibility and caregiving, which is substantive, though not necessarily equal between parents and when the parents can and do work together in the best interests of their children, regardless of what is happening or has happened in their relationships with each other.

7.3 Abandoning terms not conducive to shared parenting

Considering that the child's right to have contact and a relationship with their parents is the key influence in Irish judicial decision making, the concepts of 'guardianship' 'custody' and 'access' are parent focused rather than child focused terms. They do little to convey that the best interests of children are being served and they are not conducive to shared parenting as they propagate unequal relationships between parents. The traditional language of

guardianship, custody etc. has been replaced in other countries with terms like ‘residence’, ‘contact’ etc. (e.g. Australia, Canada and the UK).

7.3.1 Recommendation

As recommended by the Law Reform Commission (2010), terms such as ‘guardianship’ ‘custody’ and ‘access’ should be replaced in family law discourse and practice with terms such as ‘parental responsibility’ ‘day-to-day care’ and ‘contact’.

7.4 Gender Equalising Paid and Unpaid Child Care

As in other jurisdictions, as fathers’ involvement in the care of their children continues to increase in Ireland, it is likely that shared parenting arrangements become increasingly normative socially and culturally and by order of court, through mediation or as a result of couples putting their own parenting plans in place. The fathers interviewed in this study highlighted the ways in which child rearing is still feminised in Ireland with significant implications for men engaged in primary or shared care of their children. The empirical evidence also indicates that men / fathers do more household work and child rearing than they did in the past but they still do significantly less than women in Ireland and their counterparts in many other countries (Samman *et al* 2016). In other countries, Governments put legal requirements in place for childcare employers to recruit more men to enhancing a more gender balanced childcare workforce. Greater gender convergence and equalisation in childcare is likely to provide a strong stimulus for shared parenting.

7.4.1 Recommendation

Toward enhancing father involvement in children’s lives and shared parenting, the Department of Justice and Equality should adopt a strategy aimed at gender equalising paid and unpaid care work in Ireland as part of a broader gender equality framework.

7.5 Providing For Automatic Guardianship for Unmarried Fathers

While in Irish society unmarried fathers have received more legal recognition, the research conducted shows that fathers still confront significant challenges when they are not afforded

an automatic right to guardianship as is afforded to unmarried fathers in other contexts, including Northern Ireland. The research suggests that unmarried fathers' lack of automatic guardianship is discriminatory as this is afforded to their married counterparts. The cohabitation requirement in the legislation is unfair to non-resident fathers (some of whom may be young fathers) and it does not uphold their children's right to contact with them. The status quo serves to reinforce the message to unmarried couples that they are not equal where their children's right to contact with them is concerned and that mothers have a greater right to determine how fathers (who wish to have a relationship with their children) parent and involve themselves in their children's lives. Unmarried fathers may be unaware that they are not guardians and the implications of this for their children, or they may not always be in a position to seek or gain the agreement of mothers to become joint guardians. This clearly undermines a parent together forever principle, which according to Weiner (2016), should be culturally conveyed to parents from the time of a child's birth. The interviews conducted for this study show that the lack of automatic guardianship for unmarried fathers is perceived by them to be a practical and symbolic obstacle to their involvement with their children and to shared parenting.

7.5.1 Recommendations

- As recommended by the Law Reform Commission (2010) automatic joint parental guardianship of children of non-marital fathers should be provided for in law. If necessary, the circumstances in which automatic guardianship would not be authorised should be identified.
- The research findings lend support to the Treoir recommendation that at the time of the registration of a child's birth, the General Registrar Office and the local Civil Register Offices inform parents who are unmarried, on the law on guardianship so that such a father can apply to become a joint guardian in a timely way with the agreement of the child's mother.

7.6 The Evidence in Support of Shared Parenting

In Ireland studies of public attitudes show that there is much support for men and women sharing parenting and for legislative and policy measures to enable shared parenting (Fine-

Davis, 2011). There is a significant body of research internationally supporting children's right to develop a relationship with both their mothers and their fathers and a significant amount of research highlighting the benefits of father involvement in children's lives when inter-parental violence and consistent high conflict are not a feature of their parents' relationships. There will be instances where the safety of children and their parents will require parenting time not to be equalised or shared, but rather to be managed, restricted, supervised or ended. An evaluation of the family law changes in Australia in 2006 (Kaspiew *et al* 2009) designed to support more shared parenting arrangements, reported that children in these arrangements fared better than children in maternal residence only, except in situations where mothers reported safety concerns.

It is also very important that equally or close to equally shared parenting time and responsibility will have to work in the best interests of children and not their parents. It is unlikely that equally shared parenting should be equal or can be equal, particularly when parents also have commitments outside the home in education, paid work and commitments which change over time etc. The merits of joint physical custody / shared hands on care has been the subject of debate and particularly for very young children, but there is also increasing emphasis on the importance of parallel attachments for children and a small but growing body of evidence (for example in Sweden, where the joint parental custody arrangement is more normative; Australia and Canada also) showing the positive effects for children of continuing day to day parental relationships after parents' relationships end (Bergström *et al* 2015; Bergstrom *et al* 2018; Fransson *et al* 2016; Kaspiew *et al* 2009; Turunen, 2017).

7.6.1 Recommendation

Considering that the evidence at the time of writing is limited but positive as to the outcomes of shared care arrangements for children, Treoir should continue to review the evidence of outcomes for children as the arrangements become more normative in different jurisdictions.

7.7 The Importance of Early Support for Unmarried Parents to Facilitate Shared Parenting

When a baby is born to an unmarried couple, that there is a strong desire held by both parents for the father to be involved into the future (Gaskin-butler *et al* 2012; Tach *et al* 2010). There

is also evidence that despite unmarried couples' very strong intentions to stay together at the time of their child's birth, that the likelihood the relationship will have ended by the age the child is 5 years is high (McLanahan, 2009; Osborne and Ankrum, 2015; Tach *et al* 2010) . While unmarried fathers are at risk of being stereotyped as uninvolved fathers relative to other categories of fathers, there is research which highlights the unfairness of this stereotype (Marczak *et al* 2015; Tach *et al* 2010) and research which highlights a variety of factors that can militate against father involvement (e.g. incarceration, alcohol and drug use, limited income and educational attainment, abusive behaviour) (Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz, 2010; Maldonado, 2014; Marczak *et al* 2015; McLanahan, 2009; Tach *et al* 2010; Waller and Swisher, 2006). Re-partnering by a father and particularly a mother is shown to correlate with the likelihood that the biological father will have less or no contact with his child (Tach *et al* 2010; Turner and Halpern-Meehin, 2017). Some fathers interviewed expressed concerns about possible implications for themselves or the mothers of their children re-partnering, for their shared parenting relationships with each other and their relationships with their children. There is a strong case emerging from the empirical studies reviewed and from some of the interviews conducted that providing information and relationship and shared parenting interventions for unmarried parents as early as possible is the optimum time for interventions (Cox and Shirer, 2009; Cowan *et al* 2010, McHale *et al* 2012; Weiner, 2016) and there was also support for this approach in some interviews with fathers. As early involvement by a father in a child's life is known to correlate with later involvement by the father, professionals in services engaging with unmarried parents pre-conception are ideally placed to assume, encourage and support shared parenting. The Australian Psychological Society advocates information and training for primary health care providers in the protective and risk factors for children and parents undergoing a family transition and knowledge of the appropriate pathways for referral (McIntosh *et al* 2009).

7.7.1 Recommendations

- Providers of shared parenting interventions (parenting interventions with a shared parenting focus) should aim to include parents in pre- and post-birth relationships (and not confine their target group to parents whose relationships have ended). These interventions should also attend to the implications for all concerned of parents re-partnering.

- A parent together forever principle (Weiner, 2016) should underpin parenting policy and all interventions with parents. Shared parenting interventions should also attend to the implications of re-partnering for one or both parents.

7.8 Accessible Community Based Supports for Shared Parenting

Well - resourced community based facilities (e.g. family relationship centres in Australia) (see Smyth and Chisholm, 2017), which are physically and financially accessible to couples, are in a position to provide a suite of relationship and shared parenting information and supports for unmarried parents (e.g. professional counselling and/or mediation services). Early intervention and ongoing support for parents and children experiencing family transition may help along the early establishment of a co-operative shared parenting relationship.

7.8.1 Recommendation

In the Irish context, family centres / family resource centres should explore the feasibility of developing and providing a comprehensive service to unmarried parents including professional assistance (e.g. per-court family mediation, programmatic interventions) with shared parenting.

7.9 Overall Policy Approach to Support Shared Parenting

The lack of any discourse on shared parenting in current policy was highlighted in this research (Chapter Five). The lack of any attention given to the specific challenges confronting unmarried parents in the fields of parenting and family support was also noted. The absence of shared parenting programmes or programmes / supports tailored for unmarried parents was identified in the study and was an observation made by fathers interviewed. Early years parenting interventions have grown in number with the policy objective of improving parenting knowledge and behaviour to enhance child outcomes. While enhancing positive shared parenting would fit with this wider policy agenda, the evidence reviewed for this research suggests that shared parenting is not a significant feature of this agenda. All of this highlights the lack of an overall policy approach supporting shared parenting arrangements and one which appropriately appreciates the challenges for non-marital families.

7.9.1 Recommendation

The Government Department of Children and Youth Affairs in conjunction with Tusla (Child and Family Agency) should devise a strategy to endorse and support shared parenting for unmarried parents. Treoir and other stakeholders should campaign for such a strategy.

7.10 Specific Policies Needed To Support Shared Parenting

Legislation, policy and practice can promote / incentivise shared parenting arrangements or hinder them and some of the ways in which shared parenting is hindered by legislation / policy etc. have been identified particularly in Chapter Four of this report. The following recommendations are designed to address this problem. The following recommendations are designed to ensure that shared parenting is strongly endorsed by Irish legislation, policy and policy.

7.10.1 Recommendations for Government Departments

- If non-residential parents /fathers are engaged in shared parenting, this should be considered by local authorities in assessments of their housing / accommodation needs.
- The parenting responsibilities of students need to be taken into account in student grant provision to ensure they are sufficient.
- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (in co-operation with the Departments of Justice and Equality and Children and Youth Affairs) should develop a child maintenance service that places the child at the centre, that promotes transparency and fairness and that ensures child maintenance can function as an effective child poverty reduction measure. It should empower parents to work out (with the assistance of information, online resources etc.) if they wish, an appropriate payment in their particular circumstances without having to resort to outside intervention. The Nordic systems (e.g. Norway or Sweden) or the recently reformed Australian and British system provide models useful for the reform of the Irish system. To make it work better for shared parenting arrangements, parents should not be encouraged or required by state agencies to pursue the other parent through the courts to obtain maintenance, rather it should be the responsibility of the state to look after families until maintenance

is secured and to pursue parents if required. In other countries, a state agency is charged with this responsibility.

- Maintenance and parent contact should be addressed conjointly in courts and in other settings where parents may be sorting out their arrangements, thus validating and supporting fathering beyond its narrow provider role.
- Tax credits should be paid to both unmarried parents engaged in shared parenting and other ways of incentivising and supporting shared parenting should also be devised on the basis of the association between fathers' income levels and their likelihood of sharing parenting.
- New / changed Government policies should be proofed to identify their implications for shared parenting and adjusted accordingly or abandoned.

7.11 A Shared Parenting Research Led Service Agenda

Non-marital families transitioning from relationship breakdown are a neglected group in research and service provision and can also be a more disadvantaged group relative to families transitioning from divorce and separation both nationally and internationally (Pearson, 2015; Maldonado, 2014). Shared parenting in the unmarried parent subset has not been given any attention in Ireland and with the exception of the One Family (2017b) *National Survey of Shared Parenting*, shared parenting itself has been subjected to very little research. There is a need for a research agenda which fills important gaps in our knowledge about shared parenting in non-marital families.

7.11.1 Recommendations

- Relevant State Agencies should provide funding for research to
 - Follow up with a cohort of family law litigants to explore what their experiences of court orders have been and whether court ordered parenting arrangements have held up over time or changed in accordance with the needs of their children etc.
 - Assess the views and experiences of children and the outcomes for them of different kinds of contact arrangements (including shared parenting) with parents / fathers and how the arrangements change over time.

- Identify international interventions showing promise / success in addressing maladaptive parental gatekeeping and conflict in inter-parental relationships.
- Follow up families who move on from child contact centres, from the Teen Parent Support Programme, from the family law courts and mediation etc. to explore how they fare in relation to parenting arrangements over time.
- The Irish Census and other relevant large-scale studies should include questions which request information about family transitions and contact arrangements, shared parenting arrangements etc.

7.12 Need for More Information and Father Inclusive Service Provision

All fathers interviewed would welcome more information and support throughout their lives as parenting issues and their concerns change but particularly at the stage when they are transitioning into and becoming accustomed to a parenting relationship during antenatal care, birth and postnatal care. The usefulness of accessible information provided for unmarried parents at locations such as GP surgeries / primary care clinics, maternity hospitals, local health centres was recommended by a number of fathers interviewed. The need for more information for unmarried fathers was a prominent theme in interviews conducted. The research findings emphasise the need for a comprehensive information service for fathers to meet their needs and for services provided to families to be more father inclusive in their orientation.

Considering that some fathers interviewed reported getting messages from their children's mothers and other professionals that it is their financial contribution to the child which is required of them more than their time and attention, this has the effect of reinforcing traditional gender norms and impeding active / shared parenting on the part of unmarried fathers.

7.12.2 Recommendations

- Treoir should review its information service for unmarried fathers and identify how it can be enhanced so that fathers know of Treoir from the outset and can easily access reliable information as they need it.
- Treoir should advocate for and support professionals in family support, health and welfare services to have a father inclusive approach in their engagements with non-marital families.

7.13 Alternative Dispute Resolution

There is not enough being done to ensure Alternative Dispute Resolution / ADR is the default route for families in dispute about issues pertaining to establishing and sustaining shared parenting. Ireland lags behind other countries in this regard. There are many good reasons for families why ADR rather than courts should become the default route for couples who need assistance. In the Australian context, the weight of the evidence suggests that mandatory mediation and expanded relationship support services can be credited with generating a steady increase in shared parenting much more than the legislation introduced in 2006 designed to increase the incidence of shared parenting (Smyth and Chisolm, 2017). It was found that the services have helped parents to become more positively disposed to sharing parenting when it is of value for their children (Smyth and Chisolm, 2017).

7.13.1 Recommendation

Following countries such as Australia, Canada and Sweden, more effort should be made via legislation, policy and practice to divert persons from adversarial courts towards other options which are feasible and practicable. Shared parenting would benefit from the role of community based supports, mediation and other services at pre-court and court stages being enhanced in Ireland, so that the role of courts can be minimised.

7.14 Services for Unmarried Fathers

There is a dearth of programmes and supports for fathers in Ireland and services provided to families which have a strong father inclusive focus are limited. There are no specifically tailored interventions for unmarried fathers and while there are parenting programmes in Ireland, few have shared parenting focus or are tailored to meet the needs of unmarried parents. There is only a limited number of child contact centres in Ireland, which further restricts opportunities for facilitating children's right to contact with unmarried non-resident fathers. Perinatal mental health is in its infancy in Ireland and there is a risk that as it develops, the focus could be overwhelmingly on the mother unless there is a conscious effort to include fathers and to adopt a whole family approach. The Teen Parent Support Programme is a vital

component in the landscape of parenting support, given its father inclusive orientation. It could develop its offerings on shared parenting, which would be of benefit to young unmarried parents.

7.14.1 Recommendation

There is a need to enhance service provision for fathers and specifically unmarried fathers. This research provides support for the following service developments: the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to provide an increased number of child contact centres; the Department of Health to ensure the progress of a perinatal mental health strategy with a wider focus than mothers and TUSLA (the Child and Family Agency) to provide an enhanced Teen Parent Support Programme.

References

- Abidin, R. R. and Brunner, J. F. (1995) Development of a Parenting Alliance Inventory. *Journal of Child Clinical Psychology*, 24(1), pp. 31-40.
- Abidin, R. R. and Konold, T. (1999) *Parenting Alliance Measure – Professional manual*. Odessa, Florida: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Archways. (2018) *Incredible Years*. [online] Available at: http://www.archways.ie/our_programmes/incredible_years/ [Accessed 17 /07/2018].
- Bala, N., Birnbaum, R., Poitras, K., Saini, M., Cyr, F. and LeClair, S. (2017) Shared Parenting In Canada: Increasing Use but Continued Controversy. *Family Court Review*, 55(4), pp. 513-530.
- Barnardos/Working With Men. (2006) *An Evaluation of The Da Project*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.barnardos.ie/assets/files/publications/free/da_evaluation_fullreport-1.pdf [Accessed 03 July 2018].
- Barnardos. (2007) *Involving Fathers in Family Support – practice tool*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.barnardos.ie/assets/files/publications/free//involving_fathers_practice_tool.pdf [Accessed 03 July 2018].
- Bayer, A. R. (1992). *Maternal mediation of father–infant interaction*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Michigan.
- Bayliss, L. (2017) Maintenance Defaulters We have no Legal Remedies for Parents Who Refuse to Pay. *The Journal.ie*. Available at: <http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/maintenance-defaulters-we-have-no-legal-remedies-for-parents-who-refuse-to-pay-3479857-Jul2017/> [Accessed 28/06/2018].

Bennet, P. (2011) Forward. In: Sweeney, D. and M. Lloyd. eds. *Mediation in Focus: A Celebration of the Family Mediation Service in Ireland*. Dublin: Family Mediation Service, pp. 5-7.

Berger, L. M. and McLanahan, S. S. (2015) Income, Relationship Quality and Parenting: Associations with Child Development in Two Parent Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(4), pp. 996-1015.

Bergström, M., Fransson, E., Modin, B., Berlin, M., Gustafsson, P.A. and Hjern, A. (2015) Fifty Moves a Year: Is There an Association Between Joint Physical Custody and Psychomatic Problems in Children? *Epidemiology and Community Health*, 69(8), pp. 769-774.

Bergström, M., Fransson, E., Fabian, H., Hjern, A., Sarkadi, A. and Salari, R. (2018) Preschool Children Living in Joint Physical Custody Arrangements Show Less Psychological Symptoms Than Those Living Mostly or Only With One Parent. *Acta Paediatrica*, 107(2), pp. 294-300.

Bogges, J. L. (2017) Low-Income and Never-Married Families: Service and Support at the Intersection of Family Court and Child Support Agency Systems. *Family Court Review*, 55(1), pp. 107-119.

Bracken, L. (2017) Challenging Normative Constructions of Parentage in Ireland. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 39(3), pp. 316-331.

Brady, J. (2018) *A Child Maintenance Service for Ireland, A Proposal Paper on the Establishment of a Child Maintenance Service based on the service currently in place in the North of Ireland for the 26 Counties to Assist Lone Parents in Seeking Maintenance*. Sinn Féin. Available at: http://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2018/A_Child_Maintenance_Service_for_Ireland.pdf [Accessed 27 June 2018].

Bronte-Tinkew, J. and Horowitz, A. (2010) Factors Associated with Unmarried, Non-Resident Fathers' Perceptions of Their Coparenting. *Journal of Family Issues*, 31(1), pp. 31-65.

Bryman, A. (2012) *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buckley, C. K. and Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J. (2010) Father involvement and coparenting behaviour: Parents' non-traditional beliefs and family earner status as moderators. *Personal Relationships*. 17(3), pp. 413-431.

Byrne D. and Murray, C. (2017) *An Independent Review to Identify the Supports and Barriers for Lone Parents in Accessing Higher Education and to Examine Measures to Increase Participation*. Report for the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs, Education and Skills, Social Protection. Kildare: Maynooth University.

Camisasca, E., Miragoli, S., Caravita, S. and Di Blasio, P. (2015) The Parenting Alliance Measure: The First Contribution to the Validation of the Measure in Italian Mothers and Fathers. *Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology*, 22(1), pp. 71-95.

Carlson, M. J., McLanahan, S. S. and Brooks-Gunn, J. (2008) Coparenting and Nonresident Fathers' Involvement with Young Children After a Nonmarital Birth, *Demography*. 45(2), pp. 461-488.

Carr, A., Hartnett, D., Brosnan, E. and Sharry, J. (2017) Parents Plus Systemic, Solution-Focused Parent Training Programs: Description, Review of the Evidence Base, and Meta-Analysis. *Family Process*, 56(3), pp. 652-668.

Central Statistics Office. (2018) *Vital Statistics*. [online] Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-vs/vitalstatisticsfirstquarter2018/> [Accessed 10 October 2018].

Collier, R. and Sheldon, S. (2008) *Fragmenting Fatherhood: A Socio-Legal Study*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.

Commission on the Family. (1998) *Strengthening Families for Life*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Connelly, S. (2002) *Family Mediation in Ireland*. New York: Routledge.

Connolly, N., Deane, C. and Crosse, R. (2017) *Parenting Support and Parental Participation: Mapping Parenting Support in the Irish Context*. The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Connolly, N. and Devaney, C. (2017) 'Parenting Support: Policy and Practice in the Irish Context' *Child Care in Practice*, DOI: 10.1080/13575279.2016.1264365.

Corcoran, M. (2005) Portrait of the 'Absent' Father: The Impact of Non-residency on Developing and Maintaining a Fathering Role. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 14(2), pp. 134-154.

Corrigan, O. (2014) *Watch them grow: Unmarried co-habitant and solo parenthood in Ireland, an analysis of the Growing up in Ireland infant cohort data waves one and two*. Research Report for Treoir. Dublin: Treoir. Available at: <http://www.treoir.ie/cms-assets/documents/182540-37437.watch-them-grow-final-report-2014.pdf> [Accessed 12 April 2018].

Coughlan, B., Doherty, E., O' Neill, C. and McGuire, B.E. (2014) Minority Status, Social Welfare Status and their Association with Child Participation in Sporting, Cultural and Community Activities. *The Economic and Social Review*, 45(1), pp. 65-85.

Coulter, C. (2007) *Family Law Reporting Project, Report to the Board of the Courts Service*. Ireland: Courts Service.

Coulter C. with Colfer, L., Healy, K. and MacMahon, M. (2015) *Child Care Law Reporting Project. Final Report*. Dublin: Child Care Law Reporting Project. https://www.childlawproject.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/CCLRP-Full-final-report_FINAL2.pdf [Accessed 25 July 2018].

Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P. and Knox, G. (2010) Marriage and Fatherhood Programs. *The Future of Children*, 20(2), pp. 205-230.

Cowan, C. P. and Cowan, P. A. (1996) *Schoolchildren and their families project: Description of co-parenting style ratings*. Unpublished coding scales, University of California, Berkeley.

Cox, R. B. and Shirer, K. A. (2009) Caring For My Family: A Pilot Study of a Relationship and Marriage Education Program for Low-Income Unmarried Parents. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*, 8(4), pp. 343-364.

Cronin, B. (2016) Children and Family Relationship Act 2015: Review of Certain Commenced Provisions. *The Irish Social Worker*, Spring(3-10). Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10147/617863>

Daly, M. (2013) Parenting Support Policies in Europe. *Families Relationships and Societies*. 2(2), pp. 159-174.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) *Department of Children and Youth Affairs Statement of Strategy 2011-2014*. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs. (2014) *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children & young people 2014-2010*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs. (2015) *High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families*. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/20150413HighLevPolicyStatonFamilySupportParentsandFamENGLISH.pdf> [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Department of Justice and Equality (2018) *Mediation Act 2017*. [online] Available at: http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Mediation_Act_2017 [Accessed 23 July 2018].

Department of Social and Family Affairs (2006) *Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents*. Dublin: Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Dermott, E. (2008) *Intimate Fatherhood: A Sociological Analysis*. London: Routledge.

Deutsch, F. M. (2001) Equally Shared Parenting. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10(1), pp. 25-28.

Doucet, A. (2006) 'Estrogen-Filled Worlds': Fathers as Primary Caregivers and Embodiment, *The Sociological Review*, 54(4), pp. 696-716.

Dyer, J., Fagan, J., Kaufman, R., Pearson, J. and Cabrera, N. (2015) *Fatherhood Research And Practice Network Coparenting Relationship Scale*. [pdf] Available at: <http://www.frpn.org/sites/default/files/The%20FRPN%20Coparenting%20Relationship%20Scale%20.pdf>

Fagan, J. Cherson, M., Brown, C. and Vecere, E. (2015) Pilot Study of a Program to Increase Mothers' Understanding of Dads, *Family Process*, 54(4), pp. 581-589.

Fagan and Cherson, M. (2017) Maternal Gatekeeping: The Associations Among Facilitation, Encouragement, and Low-Income Fathers' Engagement With Young Children. *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(5), pp. 633-653.

Fahey, T., Keilthy, P. and Polek, E. (2012) *Family Relationships and Family Well-Being: A Study of the Families of Nine Year Olds in Ireland*. Funded by the Family Support Agency. Dublin: UCD. Available at: https://onefamily.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Family_Relationships_and_Family_Well-Being_Dec_2012.pdf

Fahey, T. and Curran, M. (2016) Children and Families Then and Now. In: Williams, J., Nixon, E., Smyth, E and Watson, D. eds. (2016) *Cherishing All the Children Equally? Ireland 100 Years on from the Easter Rising*. Ireland: Oak Tree Press, pp. 37-57.

Families Need Fathers (2018) *What is Shared Parenting?* [online] Available at: <https://fnf.org.uk/law-information-2/what-is-shared-parenting> [Accessed 20 June 2018].

Favez, N., Tissot, H., Frascarolo, F., Stiefel, F. and Despland, J. N. (2016) Sense of Competence and Beliefs About Parental Roles in Mothers and Fathers as Predictors of Cooparenting and Child Engagement in Mother-Father-Infant Triadic Interactions. *Infant and Child Development*, 25(4), pp.283-301.

Feinberg, M. E. (2003) The Internal Structure and Ecological Context of Coparenting: A Framework for Research and Intervention. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 3(2), pp. 95-131.

Feinberg, M. E., Brown, L. D. and Kan, M. L. (2012) A multi-domain self-report measure of coparenting. *Parenting*, 12(1), pp. 1-21.

Ferguson, H. and Hogan, F. (2004) *Strengthening families through fathers*. Dublin: Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Ferguson (2016) Patterns of Engagement and Non-Engagement of Young Fathers in Early Intervention and Safeguarding Work. *Social Policy and Society*, 15(1), pp. 99-111.

Ferguson, H. and Hogan, F. (2007) *Men, Sex and Crisis Pregnancy*. Dublin: Crisis Pregnancy Agency, Department of Health and Children. Available at: http://www.crisispregnancy/pub/men_sexuality_crisispregnancy.pdf [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Ferguson, H. and Gates, P. (2015) Early intervention and holistic, relationship-based practice with fathers: evidence from the work of the Family Nurse Partnership. *Child & Family Social Work*, 20(1), pp. 96-105.

Fine-Davis, M. (2011) *Attitudes to Family Formation in Ireland, Findings from the Nationwide Study*. Dublin: Trinity College and the Family Support Agency. Available at: <http://www.tara.tcd.ie/bitstream/handle/2262/63702/Attitudes%20to%20Family%20Formation%20-%20>

[%20Findings%20from%20the%20Nationwide%20Study.pdf;jsessionid=FBC98D6A5F13325D0659556ECEC9D25E?sequence=1](#) [Accessed 23 July 2011].

Florsheim, P. (2014) *The Young Parenthood Program: A Guide to Helping Young Mothers and Fathers Become Effective Co-Parents*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Floyd, F. J. and Zmich, D. E. (1991) Marriage and the parenting partnership: perceptions and interactions of parents with mentally retarded and typically developing children. *Child Development*, 62(6), pp. 1434-1448.

Frank, S. J., Jacobson, S. and Avery, C. (1988) *The Family Experiences Questionnaire*. Unpublished manuscript. Department of Psychology, Michigan State University.

Fransson, E., Turunen, J., Hjern, A., Ostberg, V. and Bergstrom, M. (2016) Psychological complaints among children in joint physical custody and other family types: Considering parental factors. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 44(2), pp. 177-183.

Futris, T. G. and Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J. (2007) Mothers' Perceptions of Barriers, Parenting Alliance and Adolescent Fathers' Engagement With their Children. *Family Relations*, 56(3), pp. 258-269.

Gaskin-Butler, V. T., Engert, T., Markievitz, M., Swenson, C. and McHale, J. (2012) Prenatal Representations of Coparenting Among Unmarried First-Time African American Mothers. *Family Process*, 51(3), pp. 360-375.

Gillen, A., Tuohy, O., Morrissey, M., Gaynor, J., Canavan, J., Devaney, C., Landy, F. and Coen, L. (2013) *Investing in Families: Supporting Parents to Improve Outcomes for Children: Child and Family Agency Parenting Support Strategy, National Guidance and Local Implementation*.

Gingerbread. (2011) *Firm Foundations – Shared care in separated families: building on what works*. [pdf] Available at: <http://www.oneplusone.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/firm-foundations-report.pdf> [Accessed 12 October 2018].

Goldberg, J. S. and Carlson, M. J. (2015) Patterns and Predictors of Coparenting After Unmarried Parents Part. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 29(2), pp. 416-426.

Hannan, C. (2018) The Selective Nature of Lone Parenthood: The Case of Ireland. In: L. Bernardi and D. Mortelmans. eds. *Lone Parenthood in the Life Course*. Life Course Research and Social Policies Book Series Vol. 8. Switzerland: Springer, pp. 303-322.

Harding, M. (2015) Teetering on the Brink of Meaningful Change? *International Survey of Family Law* 2015, pp. 161 -180. Available at: https://heinonline.org/HOL/AuthorProfile?action=edit&search_name=%20Harding,%20Mae%20bh&collection=journals [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Hogan, D. M., Halpenny, A. M., and Greene, S. (2002) *Children's experiences of separation*. Dublin: The Children's Research Centre.

Hogan, D. M., Halpenny, A. M., and Greene, S. (2003) Change and Continuity after Parental Separation, Children's Experiences of Family Transitions in Ireland. *Childhood*, 10(2), pp. 163-180.

Hohmann-Marriott, B. (2011) Coparenting and Father Involvement in Married and Unmarried Coresident Couples. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 73(1), pp. 296-309.

Houses of the Oireachtas (2017 June) *Report of the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland*. Available at: <https://webarchive.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/socialprotection/reports/joint-committee-on-social-protection-report-on-the-position-of-lone-parents-in-ireland-june-2017.pdf> [Accessed 10 October 2018].

Huntington, C. (2015) Family Law and Non-marital families. *Family Court Review*, 53(2), pp. 233-245.

Jamison, T. B., Ganong, L. and Proulx, C. M. (2017) Unmarried Coparenting in the Context of Poverty: Understanding the Relationship Between Stress, Family Resource Management and Resilience. *Journal of Family Economic Issues*, 38(3), pp. 439-452.

Jenkinson, H., Casey, D., Lynda, M. and Magee, D. (2016) *Just for Dads: a groupwork programme for fathers*. Cork: School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork and Springboard Knocknaheeny/Farranree Family Support Project.

Justice UK (2011) *Family Justice Review, Final Report*. Independent Report for the Department for Education and Ministry of Justice, UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-justice-review> [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Kaspiew, R., Gray, M., Weston, R., Moloney, L., Hand, K. and Qu, L. (2009) Evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms. [pdf] Available at:

<https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/evaluationreport.pdf> [Accessed 13 October 2018].

Kearns, N. and Coen, L. (2008) *Time4Us: evaluation report*. Galway: Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

Keating, A., Sharry, J., Murphy, M., Rooney, B. and Carr, A. (2016) An evaluation of the Parents Plus – Parenting When Separated programme. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 21(2), pp. 240-254.

Keilthy, P. and Morris, M. (2013) *An analysis of the users of the Teen Parents Support Programme 2005 – 2008*.

Kiely, E., O’ Sullivan, N. and Tobin, M. (2017) ‘*Father Friendly*’: *Promoting Father-Inclusive Social Care Practice in the Irish Context, A Report on fathers using the Supervised Access Programme at the Bessborough Centre*. Cork: The Bessborough Centre and UCC.

Kiernan, K. (2006) Non-residential Fatherhood and Child Involvement: Evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study. *Journal of Social Policy*, 35(4), pp. 651-669.

Kline Pruett, M. and Herbie DiFonzo, J. (2014) Closing the Gap: Research, Policy, Practice, and Shared Parenting. *Family Court Review*, 52(2), pp. 152-174.

Kruk, E. (1993) *Divorce and Disengagement*. Halifax: Fernwood.

Lamb, M. E. ed. (2010) *The Role of the Father in Child Development*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley.

Lamb, M. E., and Lewis, C. (2010). The development and significance of father-child relationships in two-parent families. In Lamb, M. E. ed. *The role of the father in child development*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc, pp. 94-153.

Law Reform Commission (1996) *Report on Family Courts* (LRC 52-1996). Dublin.

Law Reform Commission (2010) *Legal Aspects of family Relationships*. Dublin: Law Reform Commission. Available at: [http://www.lawreform.ie/fileupload/Reports/r101Family\(1\).pdf](http://www.lawreform.ie/fileupload/Reports/r101Family(1).pdf) [Accessed 12 April 2018].

Law Society of Ireland (2014) *Submission to the Department of Justice Equality and Defence, Family Law, the Future*. [pdf.] Available at:

<https://www.lawsociety.ie/globalassets/documents/committees/family/familylawsubmission2014.pdf> [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Leane, M. and Kiely, E. (1997) Single Lone Motherhood: Rhetoric Versus Reality. In: Byrne, A. and Leonard, M. eds. *Women and Irish Society, A Sociological Reader*. Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, pp. 296-310.

Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C. and MacVarish, J. (2014) *Parenting Culture Studies*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Letablier, M.T. and Wall, K. (2018) Changing Lone Parenthood Patterns: New Challenges for Policy and Research. In: Bernardi, L. and Mortelmas, D. eds. *Lone Parenthood in the Life Course*. Life Course Research and Social Policies Book Series Vol. 8. Switzerland: Springer, pp. 29-53.

Lopez, S. T., Calvo, J. V. P., Caro, M. I., Garcia, F. C. M. and Menendez, C. R. (2015) Evaluation of the Building Everyday Life positive parenting programme. *Journal of Children's Services*, 10(2), pp. 173-184.

Madden, E. (2014) *Opinion: Austerity cuts that directly affect women and children have been piled on by this government*. [online] Available: <http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/lone-parents-feminisation-of-poverty-1835949-Dec2014/> [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Mahon, E. and Moore, E. (2011) *Post-separation Parenting: A Study of Separation and Divorce Arrangements made in the Family Law Courts of Ireland and their Implications for Parent Child Contact and Family Lives*. Dublin: Government Publications.

Maldonado, S. (2014) Shared Parenting and Never-Married Families. *Family Court Review*, 52(4), pp. 632-638.

Marczak, M. S., Becher, E. H., Hardman, A. M., Galos, D. L. and Ruhland, E. (2015a) Strengthening the Role of Unmarried Fathers: Findings from the Co-Parent Court Project. *Family Process*, 54(4), pp. 630-638.

Marczak, M. S., Galos, D. L., Hardman, A. M., Bechmer, E. H., Ruhland, E. and Olson, K. A. (2015b) Co-Parent Court: A Problem-Solving Court Model For Supporting Unmarried Parents. *Family Court Review*, 53(2), pp. 267-278.

Margolin, G., Gordis, E. B., and John, R. S. (2001) Coparenting: A link between marital conflict and parenting in two-parent families. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15(1), pp. 3-21.

Maxwell, N., Scourfield, J., Featherstone, B., Holland, S., and Tolman, T. (2012) Engaging fathers in child welfare services: a narrative review of recent research evidence. *Child and Family Social Work*, 17(2), pp. 160-169.

McAllister, F., Burgess, A., Kato, J. and Barker, G., (2012) *Fatherhood: Parenting Programmes and Policy - a Critical Review of Best Practice*. London/Washington D.C.: Fatherhood Institute/ Promundo/MenCare.

McDaniel, B. T., Teti, D. M. and Feinberg, M. E. (2017) Assessing coparenting relationships in daily life: The Daily Coparenting Scale (D-Cop). *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 26(9), pp. 2396-2411.

McGowan, D. (2018) Reframing the Mediation Debate in Irish All-issues Divorce Disputes: From Mediation vs. Litigation to Mediation and Litigation. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 40(2), pp. 181-194.

McHale, J. P. (1997) Overt and covert co-parenting processes in the family. *Family Process*, 36, pp. 183-210.

McHale, J. Kuersten-Hogan, R. and Lauretti, A. (2000) Evaluating coparenting and family-level dynamics during infancy and early childhood: The Coparenting and Family Rating System. In: Kerig, P. and K. Lindahl, K. (eds) *Family observational coding systems: Resources for systemic research*. Mahmah, New Jersey: Psychology Press, pp. 151-170.

McHale, J. and Rotman, T. (2006) Is seeing believing? Expectant parents' outlooks on coparenting and later coparenting solidarity. *Infant Behaviour Development*, 31(1), pp. 63-81.

McHale, J. and Kuersten-Hogan, R. (2007) What is Coparenting, and Why is it Important? In McHale, J. ed. *Charting the bumpty of coparenthood: Understanding the challenges of family life*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three.

McHale, J., Waller, M. R. and Pearson, J. (2012) Coparenting Interventions for Fragile Families: What Do We Know and Where Do We Need To Go Next? *Family Process*, 51(3), pp. 284-306.

McHale, J. P. and Coates, E. E. (2014) Observed Coparenting and Triadic Dynamics in African American Fragile Families at 3 Months Postpartum. *Infant Mental Health*, 35(5), pp. 435-451.

McHale, J., Salman-Engin, S. and Coover, M. D. (2015) Improvements in Unmarried African American Parents' Rapport, Communication, and Problem-Solving Following a Prenatal Coparenting Intervention. *Family Process*, 54(4), pp. 619-629.

McIntosh, J., Burke, S., Dour, N. and Gridley, H. (2009) *Parenting After Separation: A Position Statement Prepared for The Australian Psychological Society*. Melbourne, Australia: The Australian Psychological Society.

McKeown, K., (2001) Families and Single Fathers in Ireland. *Administration*, 49(1), pp.3-24.

McLanahan, S. (2009) Fragile Families and the Reproduction of Poverty. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 621(1), pp. 111-131.

McLanahan, S. and Beck, A. N. (2010) Parental Relationships in Fragile Families. *Future Child*, 20(2), pp. 17-37.

Men's Networking Resource Centre. (no date) *About us*. Men's Networking Resource Centre: Dublin

Michigan State University Extension. (2009) *Together We Can Create A Healthy Future for Our Family*. Available from: <http://msue.anr.msu.edu/uploads/236/64484/INTRODUCTION-TWC.pdf> [Accessed 06/06/2018].

Millar, M. and Crosse, R. (2016) *Lone Parents and Activation, What Works and Why? A Review of the International Evidence in the Irish Context*. National University of Ireland Galway: The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre. Available from: https://aran.library.nuigalway.ie/bitstream/handle/10379/6044/Millar_and_Crosse_Activation_Report.pdf?sequence=1 [Accessed 29 June 2018].

Murphy, C. Keilthy, P. and Caffrey, L. (2008) *Lone Parents and Employment: What are the Real Issues? Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations*. A Research Report by One Family. Dublin.

Murphy, C. and Holt, S. (2013) *Final Evaluation of the Barnardos/One Family Pilot Child Contact Centre*. Dublin: One Family and Barnardos.

Murphy, S. (2017) *An exploration into the role of a social workers in supervised access between children in care and their parents*. Undergraduate BSW Dissertation, University College Cork.

National Youth Council of Ireland. (2012) *Access All Areas: A Diversity Toolkit for the Youth Work Sector*. [pdf] Available at: http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/Chapter%209%20-%20working%20with%20young%20parents%20-%20all%20Ireland_1.pdf [Accessed 10 July 2018].

Nepomnyaschy, L. and Garfinkel, I. (2011) Fathers' involvement with their nonresident children and material hardship. *Social Service Review*, 85(1), pp. 3-38.

Nepomnyaschy, L. and Teitler, J. (2013) Cyclical Cohabitation Among Unmarried Parents in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75(5), pp. 1248-1265.

Nixon, E., Greene, S. and Hogan, D. (2012) Like an Uncle but Less than a Father: Irish Children's Relationships with Non-resident Fathers. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(3), pp. 381-390.

Nixon, E., Greene, S. and Hogan, D. (2012) Like an uncle but more, but less than a father: Irish children's relationships with non - resident fathers. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(3), pp. 381-390.

Nixon, E. and Swords, L. (2016) Is Family Structure a Source of Inequality in Children's Lives? In: Williams, J., Nixon, E. Smyth, E. and D. Watson. eds. *Cherishing All the Children Equally? Ireland 100 Years on from the Easter Rising*. Ireland: Oak Tree Press, pp. 58 -77.

O'Connor, R. (2009) "No man's land": Unmarried Fatherhood and Caring. *Critical Social Thinking: Policy and Practice*, 1, pp. 184-201.

One Family. (undated a) *Submission to Law Reform Commission on the Preparation of the Fifth Programme of Law Reform – September 2017*. Dublin: One Family. Available from: https://onefamily.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/OneFamily_Submission-to-Law-Reform-Commission-on-the-Preparation-of-the-Fifth-Programme-of-Law-Reform_Sept17_final.pdf [Accessed 27 June 2018].

One Family. (undated b) *Submission to the Courts Service Strategic Plan 2017-2020*. Dublin: One Family. Available at: <https://onefamily.ie/policy-campaigns/policy-submissions/> [Accessed 26 June 2018].

One Family. (2009) *Supporting Child Contact: the Need for Child Contact Centres in Ireland: A research report by One Family 2009*. [pdf] Available at: <https://onefamily.ie/wp-content/uploads/Contact-Centre-Full-Report-31-M-20101.pdf> [Accessed 8 July 2018].

One Family. (2017a) *Facts & Figures*. [online] Available at: <https://onefamily.ie/media-publications/facts-figures/> [Accessed 30 June 2018].

One Family. (2017b) *Ireland's First National Shared Parenting Survey*. [pdf] Available at: https://onefamily.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/One-Family_Shared-Parenting_Results-and-Recommendations_FINAL-REPORT_Online.pdf [Accessed 20 /06/2018].

One Family. (2017c) *New Initiatives for Lone Parent Access to Higher Level Education*. [online] Available at: <https://onefamily.ie/policy-new-initiatives-for-lone-parent-access-to-higher-level-education/> [Accessed 12 October 2018].

One Family. (2018a) *Presentation to Joint committee on Education and Skills Barriers to Education Facing Vulnerable Groups: Lone Parents*. Available at: <https://onefamily.ie/presentation-to-joint-committee-on-education-skills-barriers-to-education-facing-vulnerable-groups-lone-parents/> [Accessed 23 July 2018].

One Family. (2018b) *One Family Welcome Child Maintenance Proposal*. [online] Available at: <https://onefamily.ie/policy-one-family-welcome-child-maintenance-proposal/> [Accessed 12 October 2018].

Osborne, C. and Ankrum, N. (2015) Understanding Today's Changing Families. *Family Court Review*, 53(2), pp. 221-232.

Owen-Jones, E. Bekkers, M-J, Butler, C.C., Cannings-John, R., Channon, S., Hood, K., Gregory, J.W. Kemp, A., Kenkre, J., Corbacho Martin, B., Montgomery, A., Moody, G., Pickett, K.E., Richardson, G., Roberts, Z. Ronaldson, S., Sanders, J., Stamuli, E., Torgerson, D. and Robling, M. (2013) The Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness of the Family Nurse Partnership Home Visiting Programme for first Time Teenage Mothers in England: A Protocol for the Building Blocks Randomised Controlled Trial. *BMC Pediatrics*, 13(114). Available at:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3750355/pdf/1471-2431-13-114.pdf>

[Accessed 14 October 2018].

Panther – Brick, C., Burgess, A., Eggerman, M., McAllister, F., Pruett, K., and Leckman, J. F. (2014) Practitioner review: Engaging fathers – recommendations for a game change in parenting interventions based on a systematic review of the global evidence. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines*, 55(11), pp. 1187-212.

Parentline. (2018) *About Parentline*. [online] Available at: <http://www.parentline.ie/about/> [Accessed 11 July 2018].

Parents Plus. (2018) *Parents Plus Parenting when Separated Programme*. [online] Available at: <https://www.parentsplus.ie/programmes-about/parenting-when-separated> [Accessed 11 July 2018].

Pearson, J. (2015) Establishing Parenting Time In Child Support Cases. *Family Court Review*, 53(2), pp. 246-257.

Pinkerton, J., Dolan, P. and Canavan, J. (2004) *Family Support in Ireland, Definition and Strategic Intent, A Paper for the Department of Health and Children*. Available at: www.childrensdatabase.ie/documents/publications/Definition_Intent_AW.pdf [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Pruett, M. K. and DiFonzo, J. H. (2014) Closing the Gap: Research, Policy, Practice, and Shared Parenting, *Family Court Review*, 52(2), pp. 152-174.

Quirk, K. (2011) Chapter 6, Mediation and Litigation: the Parenting Outcome for the Male. In: Sweeney, D. and Lloyd, M. eds. *Mediation in Focus: A Celebration of the Family Mediation Service in Ireland*. Dublin: Family Mediation Service.

Rabindrakumar, S. and Allbeson, J. (2017) *How the Government's new child maintenance service leaves domestic abuse survivors out in the cold*. [online] Available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/new-child-maintenance-service-leaves-domestic-abuse-survivors-out-in-the-cold/> [Accessed 28 June 2018].

Rebmin, P. A., Mageen, C. C. and Harrison, P. A. (2018) In-Hospital Paternity Establishment: Experiences and Meaning Perceived by Unmarried Parents. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Undeserved*, 29(1), pp. 497-508.

Reddy, J. and Canavan, J. (2017) *The Evaluation of the Mol an Óige Common Sense Parenting Programme*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland.

Regan, M., Keane, C., and Walsh, J. R. (2018) 'Lone-Parent Incomes and Work Incentives' Budget Perspectives 2019 Paper 1. Dublin: ESRI. Available at: <https://www.esri.ie/pubs/BP201901.pdf> [Accessed 23 July 2018].

Rettig, K. and Leichtentritt, R. D. (2001) Understanding Non-Custodial Fathers' Relationships with Children from Resource Theory Perspectives. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 35(3/4), pp. 1-22.

Riordan, S. and Ryan, L. (2002) *Final Evaluation Report of the Teen Parents Support Initiative*. Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology.

Robling, M., Bekkers, M., Bell, K., Butler, C.C., Cannings-John, R., Channon, S., Corbacho Martin, B., Gregory, J.W., Hood, K., Kenkre, J., Montgomery, A.A., Moody, G., Owen-Jones, E., Pickett, K., Richardson, G., Roberts, Z., Ronaldson, S., Saunders, J., Stamuli, E. and Torgerson, D. (2016) Effectiveness of a Nurse-Led Intensive Home-Visitation Programme for First-Time Teenage Mothers (Building Blocks): A Pragmatic randomised Controlled Trial. *Lancet*, 387(10014), pp. 146-155.

Roy, K. M. (2004). You Can't Eat Love: Constructing Provider Role Expectations for Low-Income and Working -Class Fathers. *Fathering: A Journal Of Theory, Research, & Practice About Men As Fathers*, 2(3), pp. 253-276.

Roy, K. M., Buckmiller, N. and McDowell, A. (2008) Together but Not "Together": Trajectories of Relationship Suspension for Low-Income Unmarried Parents. *Family Relations*, 57, pp. 198-210.

Samman, E., Presler-Marshall, E. and Jones, N. (2016) *Women's Work, Mothers Children and the Global Childcare Crisis*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

Schoppe-Sullivan, S. (2017) *Coparenting Coding Manual: New Parents Project*. [pdf] Available at: <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/u.osu.edu/dist/6/3074/files/2017/04/NPP-Coding-Manual-23yhq0p.pdf> [Accessed 30 May 2018].

Sharry, J., Murphy, M. and Keating, A. (2015) Parents Plus Parenting when Separated Programme. [pdf] Available at: http://www.effectiveservices.org/downloads/Targeted_Services.pdf [Accessed 15 July 2018].

Sigal, A., Sandler, I., Wolchik, S. and Braver, S. (2011) Do Parent Education Programs Promote Healthy Post-Divorce Parenting? Critical Distinctions and a Review of the Evidence. *Family Court Review*, 49(1), pp. 120-139.

Singley, D. B. and Edwards, L. M. (2015) Men's perinatal mental health in the transition to fatherhood. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 46(5), pp. 309-316.

Smyth, B. (2009) A 5-year retrospective of post separation shared care research in Australia. *Journal of Family Studies*, 15(1), pp. 36-59.

Smyth, B. and Chisholm, R. (2017) Shared -Time Parenting After Separation in Australia: Precursors, Prevalence, and Postreform Patterns. *Family Court Review*, 55(4), pp. 585-603.

Sneddon H. and Owens S. (2012) *Prevention and Early Intervention in Children and Young People's Services – Parenting*. Dublin: The Centre for Effective Services.

Sobolewski, J. M. and King, V. (2005) The Importance of the Coparental Relationship for Nonresident Fathers' Ties to Children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(5), pp. 1196-1212.

Social Policy Research Centre. (2010) *A Policy Framework for Parenting: Final Report*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/A_Policy_Framework_for_Parenting_Final_Report.pdf [Accessed 17 July 2018].

Society of St. Vincent de Paul. (2013) *'It's the Hardest Job in the World': An Exploratory Research Study with One Parent Families Being Assisted by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Dublin*. Available at: <https://www.svp.ie/oneparentfamilies> [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Stright, A. D. and Bales, S. S. (2003) Coparenting Quality: Contributions of Child and Parent Characteristics. *Family Relations*, 52(3), pp. 232-240.

Sushchyk, Abigail R. (2016) Co-parenting children survey: an investigation between separated and intact families. *Theses, Dissertations, and Projects*, 1731. Available at: <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1731> [Accessed 15 October 2018].

Swirak, K. (2015) *Just for Dads – providing an opportunity for Dads to explore their relationships with their children: what have we learned?* Cork: School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork.

Tach, L., Mincy, R. and Edin, K. (2010) Parenting as a “Package Deal”: Relationships, Fertility, and Nonresident Father Involvement Among Unmarried Parents. *Demography*, 47(1), pp. 181-204.

Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Shannon, J. D., Cabrera, N. J. and Lamb, M. E. (2004) Father and Mothers at Play With Their 2- and 3-Year-Olds: Contributions to Language and Cognitive Development. *Child Development*, 75(6), pp. 1806-1820.

Teen Parents Support Programme. (2007) *Teen Dads: The Neglected Parents – Engaging with and Supporting Young Father*. First National Conference. Available at: file:///C:/Users/ekiely/Downloads/PROCEEDINGS-TPSP_NATIONAL_CONFERENCE.PDF [Accessed 05 June 2018].

Teen Parents Support Programme. (2009) *Teen Parents Support Programme Cork: Three-Year Annual Review*. [pdf] Available at: http://www.teenparents.ie/iopen24/pub/3_year_review_tpssp_cork_20062008.pdf [Accessed 9 July 2018].

Teen Parents Support Programme. (2016) *The Teen Parents Support Programme Summary of Work 2016*. [pdf] Available at: file:///C:/Users/ekiely/Downloads/TPSP_SUMMARY_OF_WORK_2016.PDF [Accessed 05 July 2018].

Teubert, D. and Pinquart, M. (2011). The Coparenting Inventory for Parents and Adolescents (CI-PA): Reliability and validity. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 27(3), pp. 206-215.

Time4Us. (2018a) *Home*. [online] Available at: <http://www.time4us.ie/> [Accessed 24 June 2018].

Time4Us. (2018b) *What We Do*. [online] Available at: <http://www.time4us.ie/what-we-do/> [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Treoir (2017) *Treoir Annual Report 2017*. [pdf] Available at: <http://www.treoir.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Final-Treoir-Annual-Report-2017-4th-May.pdf> [Accessed 03 July 2018].

Treoir (2018) *Information Pack for Unmarried Parents*. [pdf] Available at: <http://www.treoir.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Treoir-Information-Pack-2018.pdf> [Accessed 17 July 2018].

Triple P. (2018) *Triple P Takes the Guesswork out of Parenting*. [online] Available at: <https://www.triplep.net/glo-en/home/> [Accessed 17 July 2018].

Turney, K. and Halpern-Meekin, S. (2017) Parenting in On/Off Relationships: The Link Between Relationship Churning and Father Involvement. *Demography*, 54(3), pp. 861-886.

Turunen, J. (2017) Shared Physical Custody and Children's Experience of Stress. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 58(5), pp. 371-392.

Tusla/Barnardos. (2015) Parenting Positively: Coping with Separation for parents of children between 6 and 12. [pdf] Available at: https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Parents_Coping_with_Separation_d3.pdf [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Tusla. (2018) *Let us introduce ourselves*. [online] Available at: <https://www.tusla.ie/> [Accessed 14 October 2018].

United Nations/Children's Rights Alliance. (2010) *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/submissions_reports/files/UNCRCEnglish_0.pdf [Accessed 10 October 2018].

United Nations. (2017) *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. [pdf] Available at: docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhsgA84bcFRy75ulvS2cmS%2f%2bil2Olic4vOOol%2b%2fJdEApK4Y1bDvfs5hiCDBBEjK%2fEX3%2bio9SY4WyO2qG7JijYBEmLWqMSF1fNCIKeydI2zVqkP [Accessed 30 July 2018].

Van Egeren, L. A. (2000a) *The Parental Regulation Inventory*. Unpublished manuscript. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.

Van Egeren, L. A. (2000b) *The Caregiving Labor Inventory*. Unpublished manuscript. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.

Van Egeren, L. A. and Hawkins, D. P. (2004) Coming to Terms with Coparenting: Implications of Definition and Measurement. *Journal of Adult Development*, 11(2), pp. 165-178.

Varga, C. H., Gee, C. B., Rivera, L. and Reyes, C. X. (2017) Coparenting Mediates the Association Between Relationship Quality and Father Involvement. *Youth & Society*, 49(5), pp. 588-609.

Von Klitzing, K. and Bürgin, D. (2005) Parental capacities for triadic relationships during pregnancy: Early predictors of children's behavioural and representational functioning at preschool age. *Infant mental Health Journal*, 26(1), pp. 19-39.

Waller, M. (2012) Cooperation, Conflict, or Disengagement? Coparenting Styles and Father Involvement in Fragile Families. *Family Process*, 51(3), pp. 325-342.

Waller, M. R. and Swisher, R. (2006) Fathers' Risk Factors in Fragile Families: Implications for "Healthy" Relationships and Father Involvement. *Social Problems*, 53(3), pp. 392-420.

Warshak, R. A. (2014). Social science and parenting plans for young children: A consensus report. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 20(1), pp. 46-67.

Warshak, R. A. (2017) Stemming the Tide of Misinformation: International Consensus on Shared Parenting and Overnighting. *American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers*, 30, pp. 177-217.

Waterston L, Babigian R, McHale J. (2002) *Parents' stories about their families reflect individual and family functioning at infant age 12 months*. Paper presented at the meetings of the World Association for Infant Mental Health. Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Watson, D., Maître, B., Grotti, R. and Whelan, C. T. (2018) *Poverty Risk Dynamics of Social Risk Groups in the EU, An Analysis of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions 2005-2014*. Dublin: Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Economic and Social Research Institute.

Wayman, S. (2016) Why we need more men working in our creches. *The Irish Times*, 9 August. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/parenting/why-we-need-more-men-working-in-our-creches-1.2737234> [Accessed 10 July 2018].

Weiner, M. H. (2016) Thinking outside the Custody Box: Moving beyond Custody Law to Achieve Shared Parenting and Shared Custody. *University of Illinois Law Review*, 4, pp. 1535-1579.

Westerman, M. A. (2000) Measuring triadic coordination in mother-father-child interactions. In: Kerig, P. K. and K. M. Lindahl, K. M. eds. *Family observational coding systems: Resources for systemic research*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum, pp. 243-257.

Whyte, D. (2017) Non-resident Fathers: A Literature Review of Factors Influencing their World. *Journal of Social Care*, 1(1), pp. 1-9.

Wiggins, M., Rosato, M., Austerberry, H., Sawtell, M. and Oliver, S. (2005) *Sure Start Plus National Evaluation: Final Report*. London: Institute of Education Social Science Research Unit.

Wood, R. G., Moore, Q., Clarkwest, A. and Killewald, A. (2014) The Long-Term Effects of Building Strong Families: A Programme for Unmarried Parents. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(2), pp. 446-463.

Wong, O., Nguyen, T., Thomas, N., Thomson-Salo, F., Handrinos, D. and Judd, F. (2015) Perinatal mental health: Fathers – the (mostly) forgotten parent. *Asia Pacific Psychiatry*, (8(4), pp. 247-255.

Woulfe, J. (2011) *Calls to use DNA tests to track runaway fathers*. *Irish Examiner*, 27 January. Available at: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/calls-to-use-dna-tests-to-track-runaway-fathers-143401.html> [Accessed 09 July 2017].

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

- Meaning of Shared Parenting

How do you understand shared parenting in the context of your situation? What do you think it means? What does it involve? Is it a term you use to describe what you are doing as a parent?

- Shared Parenting & Outcomes for Children

Do you think it is in a child's best interests to experience shared parenting?

In what circumstances, if ever, do you think shared parenting may not be in children's best interests?

- Fathers & Sharing Parenting Over Time

Are there challenges for fathers generally in Irish society who wish to share parenting? What are these challenges? Have you experienced these challenges?

Are their specific challenges or not for fathers who are not married (as distinct from parents who separate / divorce) to share the parenting of their children? If yes, can you identify these?

What helps to sustain shared parenting in non-marital families over time? What hinders shared parenting being sustained over time?

Are there factors in your or unmarried men's lives that you think can influence positively their engagement in shared parenting? Are there factors in your or unmarried men's lives that you think can influence negatively their engagement in shared parenting?

Have you sought the assistance of any organisation(s) for advice / support in relation to parenting, sharing parenting your rights as a fathers etc. (e.g. Treoir, One Family, Barnardos, etc.)? (Also ask about peer information support from other fathers / fathers representative organisations / social movements)

- Experience of Parenting to Date

When did you become a father (age at child's birth – when was child's birth)? What age is your child now?

Did you ever live with the mother of your child?

Have you more children (with the mother of your child / someone else)?

Does the mother of your child have a partner? Is her partner there for your child / take an active part in your child's life?

How would you describe the relationship you have had and have now with the child's mother?
How has this relationship changed over time?

How involved with your child are you now? (Direct care equally divided / direct care but not equally divided / visitation at weekends)? Were you always this involved or is this level of involvement more or less than in the past? Are you as involved in your child's life as much as you would like or not? What needs to be different do you think to change in the level of your involvement?

- Shared Parenting Indicators

Do you think you work as a team (you and your child's mother) or do you parent your child quite separately from each other? (e.g. same rules / routines in both houses re. caregiving etc.).

Do you support the child's mother, talk about problems, concerns, communicate well about your child etc.

Do you think she trusts you to look after the child and encourage / facilitate you to directly care for the child?

Do you make joint decisions about the child's future / education etc.

Do you financially support your child? – Is the financial support you provide acceptable to the child's mother or is this a point of conflict / dissatisfaction between you? Are financial support and involvement with your child (e.g. access to your child) related in your situation?

Do you both agree strategies / ways of minimising conflict between you in the child's best interests?

If you do have conflict between you, what is likely to cause that conflict – one issue or every issue?

In your view, do you think your child's mother (family) act as gatekeepers where your involvement with your child is concerned? If yes, in what ways?

- Policy and Practice Ideas to Support Shared Parenting

As an unmarried father, can you identify any measures (legislative, policy or practice based) you are familiar with that support shared parenting in non-marital families?

As a father, can you identify what measures you think hinder shared parenting in non-marital families?

What would you like to see introduced in Ireland to better support shared parenting among fathers like you? - coparenting programmes, mother or father only programmes, court mandated orders or interventions... relationship based interventions... quality of life interventions for less financially secure families / dads...

You have had opportunity to become acquainted with different evidence based legislative / policy / practice/ interventions being utilised to good effect to promote / support shared parenting in non-marital families in different contexts, do you have any particular views on these?

With reference to our context, Ireland, do you think any of these interventions show particular promise? Can you explain why?

Finally, if you could project into the future, how would you like life to be like for you and your child?

Appendix 2: Information Sheets, Consent Forms and Posters

INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEW / PARTICIPANTS



Institute for Social Science
in the 21st Century
Institiúid na hEolaíochta Sóisialta
san 21ú haois



Purpose of the Study. The study funded by Treoir (Information Service for Unmarried Parents) and is being undertaken for Treoir by Researchers in UCC. It is concerned with exploring the role of fathers, specifically unmarried fathers in sharing parenting, identifying the challenges specific to unmarried fathers seeking to or engaged in shared parenting. It also seeks to document good policy and practice to support shared parenting.

What will the study involve? The study will involve interviews by telephone with fathers.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because we think you have valuable insight, knowledge and experience towards achieving the research aim.

Do you have to take part? We hope you agree to take part but your participation is

entirely your decision and whatever decision you make will not in any way affect the service you receive from Treoir. After you receive an information sheet about the study, you will be asked to sign a consent form if you wish to take part. You will be entitled to keep a copy of both of these documents. You will have the option of withdrawing from the research before the interview or during the interview if you wish. You will also be able to withdraw from the study for up to a two week period after the interview. If you withdraw, the information provided by you will not be used and will be destroyed.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? The research team can confirm that your identity will not be disclosed in the research reported and the research team will do its utmost to ensure no clues as to any persons' identities appear in the report and in other publications.

What will happen to the information which you give? The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study, available only to the research team. Physical data will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher (Elizabeth Kiely's) office in UCC and electronic data on research team members' password protected computers and laptops. On completion of the project, the data will be retained securely (on a password protected computer / UCC supported safe online storage facility) for minimum of a further ten years (as is required by UCC data retention policy) and then destroyed by the researcher.

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in a research report. They will be seen by the research team and the report will be read by others. The

study may be published in a research journal and the research findings will also be used in conference presentations and for the development of information guides on shared parenting.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? We do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

What if there is a problem? At the end of the telephone interview we will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel distress, you can contact either of us Elizabeth Kiely e.kiely@ucc.ie or Damien Peelo (Treoir) damien.peelo@treoir.ie and we will arrange for further support / assistance for you.

Who has reviewed this study? Approval has been given by the Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC for this study to take place.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact either Elizabeth Kiely at UCC, e.kiely@ucc.ie or Damien Peelo (Treoir) Damien.peelo@treoir.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

[Over...

CONSENT FORM



I.....agree to participate in Elizabeth Kiely & Treoir's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I understand that the interview in which I participate will be audio-recorded and I agree to participate on this basis.

I understand that I can withdraw from the interview without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data I provide within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured as much as is possible in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from the data I provide may be quoted in the report and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the information I provide in the interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the information I provide in the interview ☐

Signed:

Date:

PRINT NAME:

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS / GUARDIANS OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE FATHERS (UNDER 18 YEARS)



Purpose of the Study. The study funded by Treoir (Information Service for Unmarried Parents) and is being undertaken for Treoir by Researchers in UCC. It is concerned with exploring the role of fathers, specifically unmarried fathers in sharing parenting, identifying the challenges specific to unmarried fathers seeking to or engaged in shared parenting. It also seeks to document good policy and practice to support shared parenting.

What will the study involve? The study involves interviews with young fathers by telephone.

Why has your son been asked to take part? Your son has been asked because he is a father.

Does he have to take part? His participation is your decision and whatever decision you make will not in any way affect the service your son receives from Treoir. After you receive an information sheet about the study, you will be asked to sign a consent form giving your son permission to take part. You will be entitled to keep a copy of

both of these documents. Your son will have the option of withdrawing from the research before the interview commences or during the interview if he wishes. He will also be able to withdraw from the study for up to a two week period after the interview. If he withdraws, the information provided by him will not be used and will be destroyed. Your son will not be part of the research if he chooses not to participate himself.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? The research team can confirm that your son's identity will not be disclosed in the research reported and the research team will do its utmost to ensure no clues as to any persons' identities appear in the report and in other publications.

What will happen to the information which your son gives? The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study, available only to the research team. Physical data will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher (Elizabeth Kiely's) office in UCC and electronic data on research team members' password protected computers and laptops. On completion of the project, the data will be retained securely (on a password protected computer / UCC supported safe online storage facility) for minimum of a further ten years (as is required by UCC data retention policy) and then destroyed by the researcher.

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in a research report. They will be seen by the research team and the report will be read by others. The study may be published in a research journal and the research findings will also be used in conference presentations and for the development of information guides on shared parenting.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? We do not envisage any negative consequences for your son in taking part.

What if there is a problem? At the end of the interview, we will discuss with your son how he found the experience and how he is feeling. If he subsequently feels distress, he can contact either Elizabeth Kiely e.kiely@ucc.ie or Damien Peelo (Treoir) damien.peelo@treoir.ie and we will arrange for further support / assistance.

Who has reviewed this study? Approval has been given by the Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC for this study to take place.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact either Elizabeth Kiely at UCC, e.kiely@ucc.ie or Damien Peelo (Treoir) Damien.peelo@treoir.ie

If you agree to your son taking part in the study, please sign the consent form

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE FATHERS (UNDER 18 YEARS)



Purpose of the Study. The study funded by Treoir (Information Service for Unmarried Parents) and is being undertaken for Treoir by Researchers in UCC. It is exploring the role of fathers, specifically unmarried fathers like you in sharing parenting. It is concerned with identifying the positives as well as the problems or challenges you experience shared parenting. It will also look at how shared parenting for unmarried fathers can be better supported.

What will the study involve? The study will involve interviews by telephone with fathers.

Why have you been asked to take part? You are being asked because you are a father.

Do you have to take part? Your participation is your parent(s) /guardian(s) and your decision and whatever decision you make will not in any way affect the service you receive from Treoir. After you receive an information sheet about the study, your parent / guardian will be asked to sign a consent form and you will be asked to sign

an assent form giving your permission to take part. You will be entitled to keep a copy of these forms. You can stop taking part in the research before the interview commences. You will also be able to stop taking part in the study for up to a two week period after the interview. If you withdraw, the information provided by you will not be used and will be destroyed.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? The research team can confirm that your identity will not be disclosed in the research reported and the research team will do its utmost to ensure no clues as to any persons' identities appear in the report and in other publications.

What will happen to the information you give? The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study, available only to the research team. Physical data will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher (Elizabeth Kiely's) office in UCC and electronic data on research team members' password protected computers and laptops. On completion of the project, the data will be retained securely (on a password protected computer / UCC supported safe online storage facility) for minimum of a further ten years (as is required by UCC data retention policy) and then destroyed by the researcher.

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in a research report. They will be seen by the research team and the report will be read by others. The study may be published in a research journal and the research findings will also be used in conference presentations and for the development of information guides on shared parenting.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? We do not think that there will be any bad consequences for you in taking part.

What if there is a problem? At the end of the interview, we will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you feel distressed after the research, you can contact either Elizabeth Kiely e.kiely@ucc.ie or Damien Peelo (Treoir) damien.peelo@treoir.ie and we will arrange for further support / assistance.

Who has reviewed this study? Approval has been given by the Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC for this study to take place.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact either Elizabeth Kiely at UCC, e.kiely@ucc.ie or Damien Peelo (Treoir) Damien.peelo@treoir.ie

If you agree to taking part in the study, please sign the assent form.

ASSENT FORM

(Fathers under 18 years)



I.....agree to participate in Elizabeth Kiely & Treoir's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I understand that the interview in which I participate will be audio-recorded and I agree to participate on this basis.

I understand that I can withdraw from the interview without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data I provide within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured as much as is possible in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from the data I provide may be quoted in the report and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the information I provide in the interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the information I provide in the interview ☐

Signed:

Date:

.....

PRINT NAME:

Unmarried Fathers Shared Parenting Research Project

If you are an unmarried **father** sharing parenting presently or seeking to share parenting and you would like to share your views, University College Cork (in collaboration with Treoir – the service for unmarried parents) is undertaking a research project and would like to hear from you. Please contact Liz Kiely (project researcher) e.kiely@ucc.ie () or Robert Bolton robert.bolton@ucc.ie () to find out more about the research.

If you are an **under 18 year old father** and you wish to participate in the research, a signed consent form from your parent / guardian is required as well as a signed assent form from you. Please contact either of the persons identified in the paragraph above or Margaret Morris (Teen Parents Support Programme co-ordinator) tpsp@treoir.ie to find out more about the research and to get the relevant forms.

Appendix 3: Shared/Coparenting Measures

Type of Tool	Description
Parent Self-Reports	
<i>Parenting Alliance Measure</i> (Abidin and Konold, 1999), developed from the <i>Parenting Alliance Inventory</i> (Abidin and Brunner, 1995)	Assesses the strength of couples' parenting alliance. Appropriate for variety of parenting partners such as married and unmarried couples. The Measure contains 20 items measured on a 5-point rating scale. It takes 10 minutes to administer and 5 minutes to score.
<i>The Family Experiences Questionnaire</i> (Frank <i>et al</i> 1988)	117-item self-report scale of the interparental relationships and parenting goals and styles. Items are rated from 1 = <i>strongly disagree</i> to 4 = <i>strongly agree</i> . The scale has been shown to be a valid construct for assessing interparental interactions and parent-child interactions. The scale contains a number of subscales such as the 'problem-solving' and 'coparental warmth' subscales. It can be used to measure coparenting solidarity, coparenting support, undermining coparenting and shared parenting (Van Egeren and Hawkins, 2004)
<i>The Parental Regulation Inventory</i> (Van Egeren, 2000a)	Asks parents about the specific strategies they use to encourage the partner to be involved in parenting (e.g. positive reinforcement, indirect requests). Items are rated on a scale that ranges from 1 = never to 6 = several times a day.
<i>Caregiving Labor Inventory</i> (Van Egeren, 2000b)	Measure parents perception of the division of labor specific to caregiving activities and assesses their perception of the justice of the division of caregiving labor.
<i>Perceptions of Coparenting Partners Questionnaire</i> (Stright and Bales, 2003)	14 questions to measure supporting and undermining behaviour.
<i>The Co-Parenting Planning Worksheet</i> (Florsheim, 2014)	A measure of coparenting activities based on questions from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing-Survey and the Who Does

	What. The measure asks questions relating to the frequency of several coparenting activities such as playing and bathing.
<i>The Coparenting Relationship Scale</i> (Feinberg, Brown and Kan, 2012)	Based on Feinberg's (2003) conceptual framework of coparenting. The scale is a self-report measure of the quality of coparenting in a family and comprises 35 items and seven subscales such as 'coparenting agreement' and 'coparenting undermining'.
<i>Coparenting Questionnaire</i> (Margolin, Gordis and John, 2001)	Assesses parents' perceptions of one another on 3 dimensions—cooperation, triangulation, and conflict.
<i>The Coparenting Inventory for Parents and Adolescents</i> (Teubert and Pinquart, 2011)	Asks adolescents, mothers and fathers about the parental relationship, mothers' contributions fathers' contributions in relation to three subscales: cooperation, conflict and triangulation.
<i>The Coparenting Scale</i> (McHale, 1997)	16-item self-report scale designed to assess parents' perceptions of the frequency with which they engage in several activities related both to coparenting and in promoting a sense of family.
<i>Fatherhood Research and Practice Network Coparenting Relationship Scale</i> (Dyer, Fagan, Kaufman, Pearson and Cabrera, 2015)	A validated measure designed to assess fathers' coparenting relationship with the mother of their non-residential children.
<i>Co-Parenting Children Survey</i> (Sushchyk, 2016)	56-item measure that Aims to assess coparenting. Suchchyk's (2016) research aims to assess its suitability for measuring and evaluating coparenting dynamics amongst both intact and separated families.
Coders Reports/Observations	
<i>Triadic Coordination Frequency</i> (Westerman, 2000)	Used in the observation of tree way interactions and measures specific behavioural frequencies related to coparenting.
<i>The Coparenting and Family Rating System</i> (McHale et al 2000)	Dyad-level ratings conducted by trained coders during observations of videotapes of tree way interactions of play. Each couple is given a single score rated on a scale from 1 =

	<i>low to 5 = high</i> characterising the degree to which they exhibited particular coparenting interactions such as competition and coparental warmth.
<i>Coparenting Coding</i> (Cowan and Cowan, 1996)	
<i>New Parents Project Coparent Coding Scales</i> (Schoppe-Sullivan, 2017)	Used to measure coparenting in observed interactions. Adapted and modified from Cowan and Cowan (1996) and Bayer (1992)
Diary Measures	
The <i>Daily Coparenting Scale</i> (McDaniel, Teti and Feinberg, 2017)	A 10-item measure that can be administered on a daily basis (e.g., 7 consecutive days, etc.) to participants to assess within-person fluctuations and variability in perceptions of coparenting quality
Interview/Discussion Measures	
McHale and Rotman (2007) – Using the <i>Narrative Assessment Scale of Typical, Best, and Worst Times</i> (Waterston, Babigian and McHale, 2002) and coding of ‘negative outlook score’.	Parents were interviewed separated about their coparenting team and their families best and worst moments. The analysis was evaluated using the scale on several 1-4 scales, including an analysis of the overall positive and negative tone of the narrative.
(Von Klitzing and Burgin, 2005) – Using an ‘intensive psychodynamic interview’	The interview assess how they anticipated their future parenthood and their relationships as threesomes. Asked about the capacity of fathers and mothers to anticipate their family relationships without excluding either themselves or their partners from the relationship with the infant
Other Measures	.
<i>Fatherhood Research And Practice Network Father Engagement Scale</i> (Dyer, Kaufman, Cabrera, Fagan and Pearson, 2015)	Four different scales according to the child’s age. A validated measure that is designed to assess fathers' engagement with their children at different ages.

Resource List

Arizona Supreme Court. (undated) *Planning For Parenting Time: Arizona's Guide for Parents Living Apart*. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.azcourts.gov/portals/31/parentingTime/PPWguidelines.pdf>

Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. (2005) *Planning for Shared Parenting: A Guide for Parents Living Apart*. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.masslegalhelp.org/children-and-families/afcc-shared-parenting-planning.pdf>

Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. (2014) Closing the Gap: Research, Policy, Practice, and Shared Parenting. *Family Court Review*, 52(2), April, pp. 152-174

Barnardos Parenting Course Database – Barnardos. (2018) *Parenting Course Database*. [online] Available at: <https://www.barnardos.ie/resources-advice/parents/parenting-course-database.html>

Cuyohoga Job and Family Services. (undated) *Co-Parenting Guide: Working Together For Our Children*. [pdf] Available at: https://cjfs.cuyahogacounty.us/pdf_cjfs/en-US/PTOC-CoParentingGuideBook.pdf

Forrest, S. and Barnardos. (2008) *Engaging with Fathers in Family Support Services: A Summary of Learning Acquired Through Barnardos' Da Project*. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.barnardos.ie/assets/files/publications/free/engaging.pdf>

Jenkinson, H., Casey, D., Monahan, L. and Magee, D. (2016) *Just for Dads: a groupwork programme for fathers*. 'Off the shelf' father parenting course - Cork: School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork and Springboard Knocknaheeny/Farranree Family Support Project.

Kiely, E., O' Sullivan, N. and Tobin, M. (2018) *Working with Fathers in Child Welfare / Social Care Contexts, A Practice Guide*. Cork: UCC and the Bessborough Centre.

Ooms, T. (2003) *Raising Your Child Together: A Guide for Unmarried Parents*. [pdf] Available at: http://www.dss.state.la.us/assets/docs/searchable/OFS/GuideMarriageChild/Raising_Child_Together.pdf

The Mediators' Institute of Ireland. (undated) *Mediation for Separating Couples*. Dublin: The Mediators Institute of Ireland. Available at:
http://www.themii.ie/ckeditor/uploads/files/mii_separating_couples.pdf

Michigan State University Extension. (2009) *Together We Can Creating A Healthy Future for Our Family*. Available from:
<http://msue.anr.msu.edu/uploads/236/64484/INTRODUCTION-TWC.pdf>