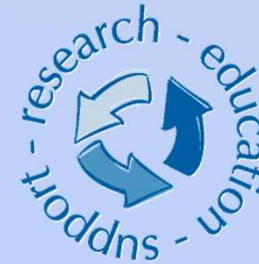


15th Annual Conference of the
National HIV Nurses Association (NHIVNA)



National HIV Nurses Association

Sean Highton

University of East London

27-28 June 2013- The International Convention Centre, Birmingham

Masculinity, fatherhood and HIV: men's accounts of displacement and settlement

Sean Highton

MSc Psychology



Background:

- Fathers largely ignored by studies of the family and HIV.
- Lack of fathers affected by HIV in health and support services.
- Seem to be a stereotype of the absent father, particularly in families affected by HIV.
- However, up to 50% of HIV positive heterosexual men in the UK show a desire for fatherhood¹ and 1 in 7 fathers in the UK are the primary carers for their children².

Methodology

- 6 qualitative interviews with HIV positive fathers.
- Recruitment via Body & Soul charity.
- Data analysed using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis.

Participant demographics:

- Age: 39 – 51 years old (Median 45)
- No. of children: 1 – 4 (Median 2.5)
- Ethnicities: 4 Black African, 1 White European, 1 White British
- Date of HIV diagnosis ranged from 1989 to 2008

Masculinity, fatherhood and HIV

- Discourses – how they interact and collide for these men
- How men made sense of their experiences in relation to these different discourses
- How they negotiate and position themselves in relation to them.

3 main themes:

- 1. The displacement of an HIV diagnosis**
- 2. The (Ir)responsibility of men: HIV and challenges to masculinity**
- 3. Settlement through fatherhood**

1 The displacement of an HIV diagnosis

1.1 The 'quagmire'

- The state of emotional turmoil and upheaval after diagnosis.

1.2 Increased awareness of mortality

1.3 Altered sense of time

1.4 Changing priorities in life due to the 'quagmire'

2: The (Ir)responsibility of men: HIV and challenges to masculinity

2.1 Challenges to the emotionally distant man

- HIV made some men more emotional, nurturing and caring
- Feminising / emasculating

2.2 Masculinity and 'responsibility' for HIV

- Men and masculinity perceived as responsible for the transmission of HIV.
- Male sexuality / promiscuity as responsible for transmission
- Both challenges and reaffirms masculinity

Extract 1: Andrew

Sean: Do you think being a man has influenced your experiences of living with HIV?

Andrew: HIV positive women are always a victim.

And HIV positive men in the context of women are always the reason. Men are seen as the ones who play away and bring it back to the woman ... (as) a straight man, it's an instantly isolating experience. Very isolating experience.

Extract 2: Isaac

Sean: Do you think being a man was important in how you experienced health care for HIV?

Isaac: I think so yes, because I took it on the chin. I accepted it. It's my fault ... You need to take responsibility. Be man enough to accept it. Just try to be good, you know. Do the best. Do the best, because it's not their (my wife and children's) fault.

3 Settlement through fatherhood

3.1 Settlement, adjustment, re-emergence

- A return to 'positive living' and HIV
- After the displacement of 'the quagmire'
- HIV as a positive force in some way in all of these men's lives

3.2 Settlement through fatherhood

- Reworking responsibility – Responsibility for HIV has made many of these men more responsible fathers
- Increased importance of family due to HIV
- The importance of ‘being there’

However, there were also continued tensions within HIV and fatherhood

- HIV, work and challenges to the traditional role of ‘father as provider’
- Inability to work = biggest cause of stigma for men affected by HIV
- Being the ‘provider’ both challenged and reaffirmed masculinity

Extract 5: Isaac

Sean: 'So you feel you have a responsibility (for HIV transmission)?'

Isaac: 'Yeah, I know that every day. And having that responsibility probably has pushed me and my children to do better as well. It has made me look for the positives, and you know it helps me to know that besides this there's life ... I just think being HIV positive made me take a big step in my life.'

- **3.2 Settlement through fatherhood cont.**
- Family and fatherhood provides a vehicle for 'normalisation' for these men - Reaffirms masculinity.

Conclusions

- Dominant discourses of masculinity, fatherhood and HIV may enable and constrain certain behaviours within the family.
- Links between masculinity and responsibility for HIV, and ideas about responsible fatherhood.
- Mainstream discourses on masculinity, fatherhood and HIV are taken up and reworked by fathers as a means of coping with the effects of illness.
- In some ways HIV is seen as a positive force in all the fathers' lives, encouraging them to take up new subject positions, namely that of the responsible father.

Implications

Within support services:

- **Importance of working with fathers in gender specific or gender sensitive ways.**
 - **For example, offering peer support for groups for fathers living with HIV.**
- **Further opportunities for fathers to build on positive identities and enable coping with the psychological challenges of HIV.**

References

- 1. Sherr, L. & Barry, N. (2004) Fatherhood and HIV-positive heterosexual men. *HIV Medicine*, 5, 258–263.
- 2. AVIVA (2010) *UK: Ten times more stay-at-homedads than 10 years ago.*
<http://bit.ly/yEyRyt>