

What about the dads?

Building a system of care for fathers

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"For we are indigenous fathers and we care for our children. We have loved, nurtured and provided for them; we've protected them and taught them how to survive and be proud of their culture."

Thomas Mayo



What about the dads?

- The intergenerational story
- Dads matter for children
- Dads matter for partners
- Preconception care – The Triple Dividend
- Perinatal care – the barriers
- Perinatal care – what we can change
- Mapping supports for fathers

The intergenerational story

In my first 16 years, my mother/father:

- Made me feel I wasn't wanted (*parent care*)
- Seemed emotionally cold to me (*parent care*)
- Invaded my privacy (*parent control*)
- Tried to make me feel dependent on her/him (*parent control*)

"Please, if possible, exclude questions about my father. I don't mind doing the survey but my father is an extremely sore spot in my life."

Mapp survey participant



The intergenerational story

30% recalled neglectful parenting from fathers

15% recalled neglectful parenting from mothers

30% each recalled affectionless control from mothers and fathers



The intergenerational story

55% "I would like to be the sort of parent my **father** was"



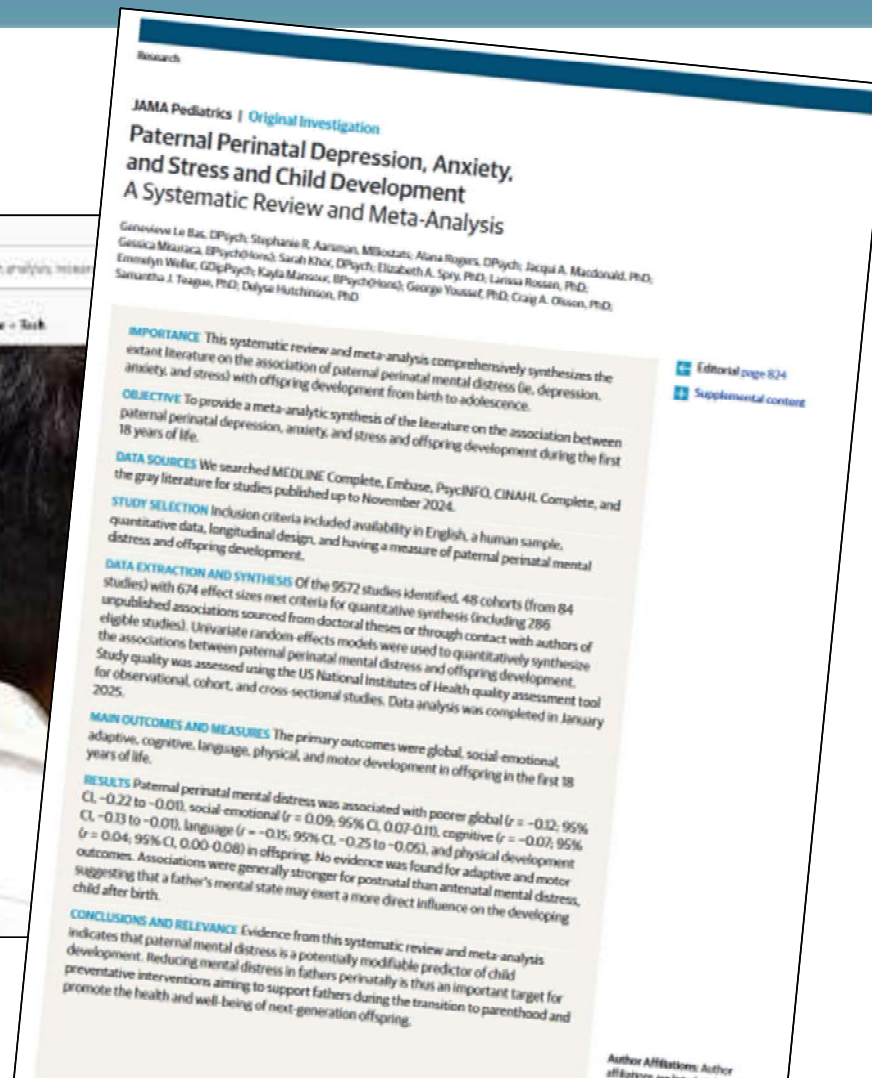
50% "As a father, I think I parent my child in a similar way to how my **father** parented me"

71% "I would like to be the sort of parent my **mother** was"



52% "As a father, I think I parent my child in a similar way to how my **mother** parented me"

Dads matter for children

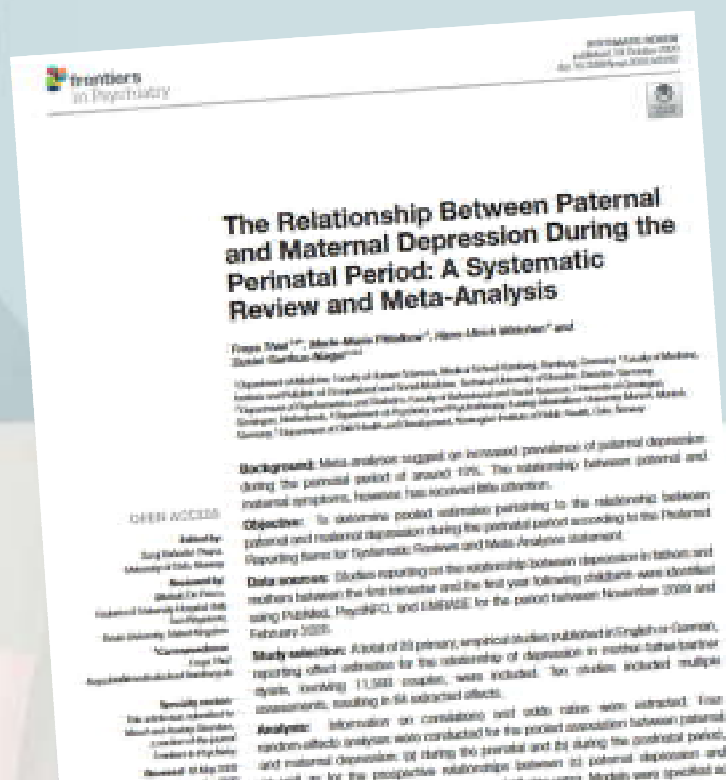


Dads matter for children

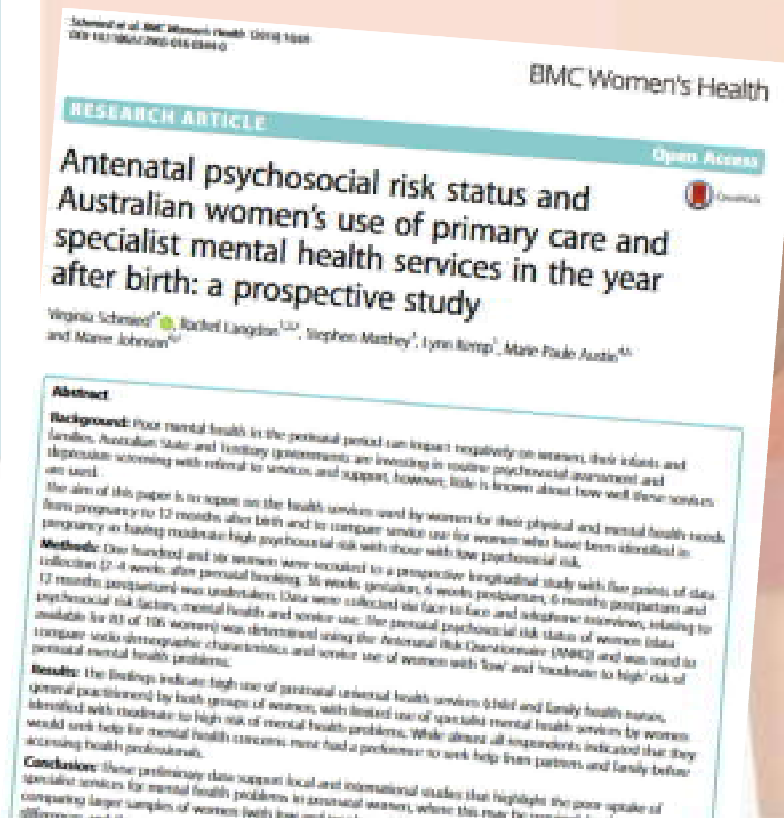


Dads matter for partners

When the predictors of mothers' depression are examined, fathers' mental health stands out among the most influential.

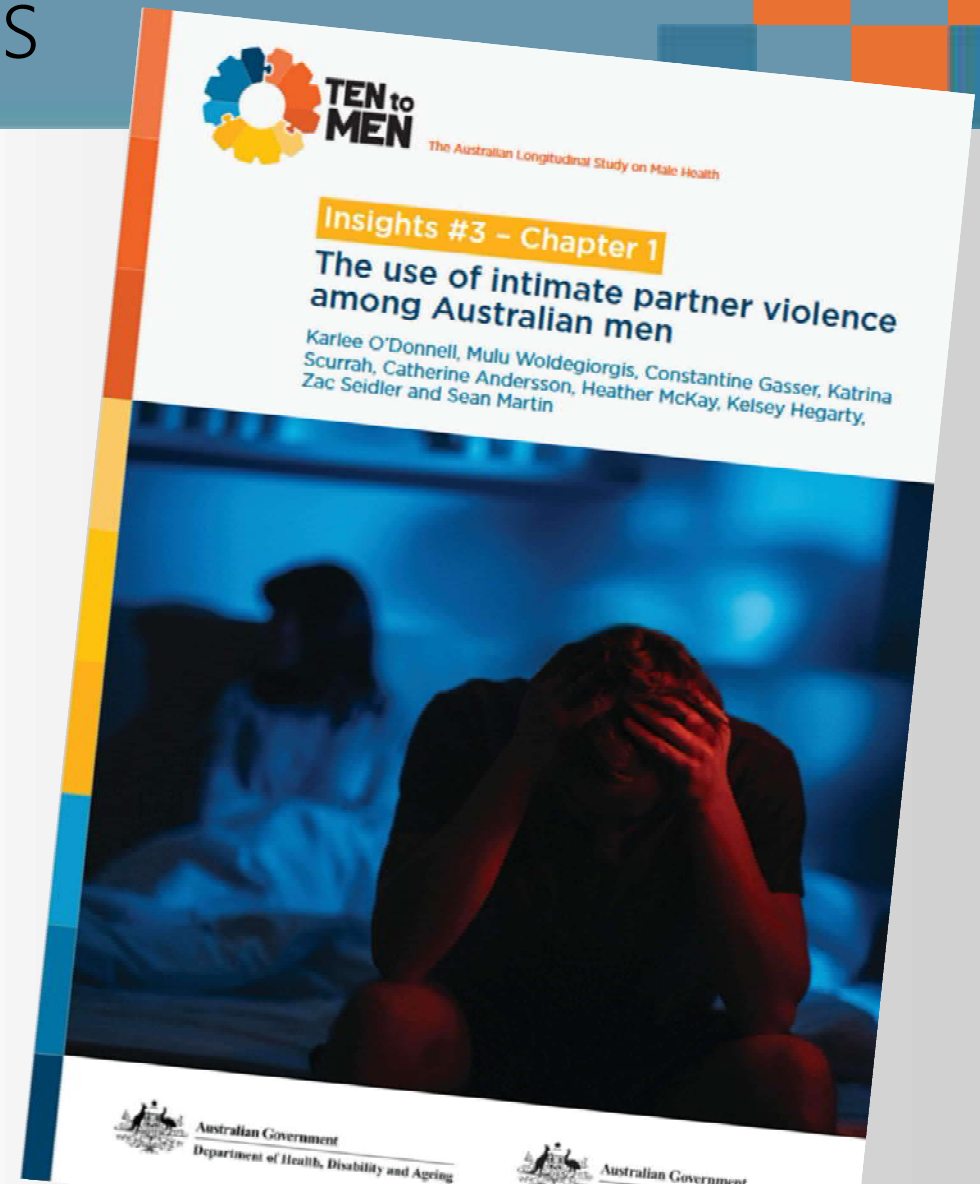


Mothers with mental health problems identify their partner as their main support.

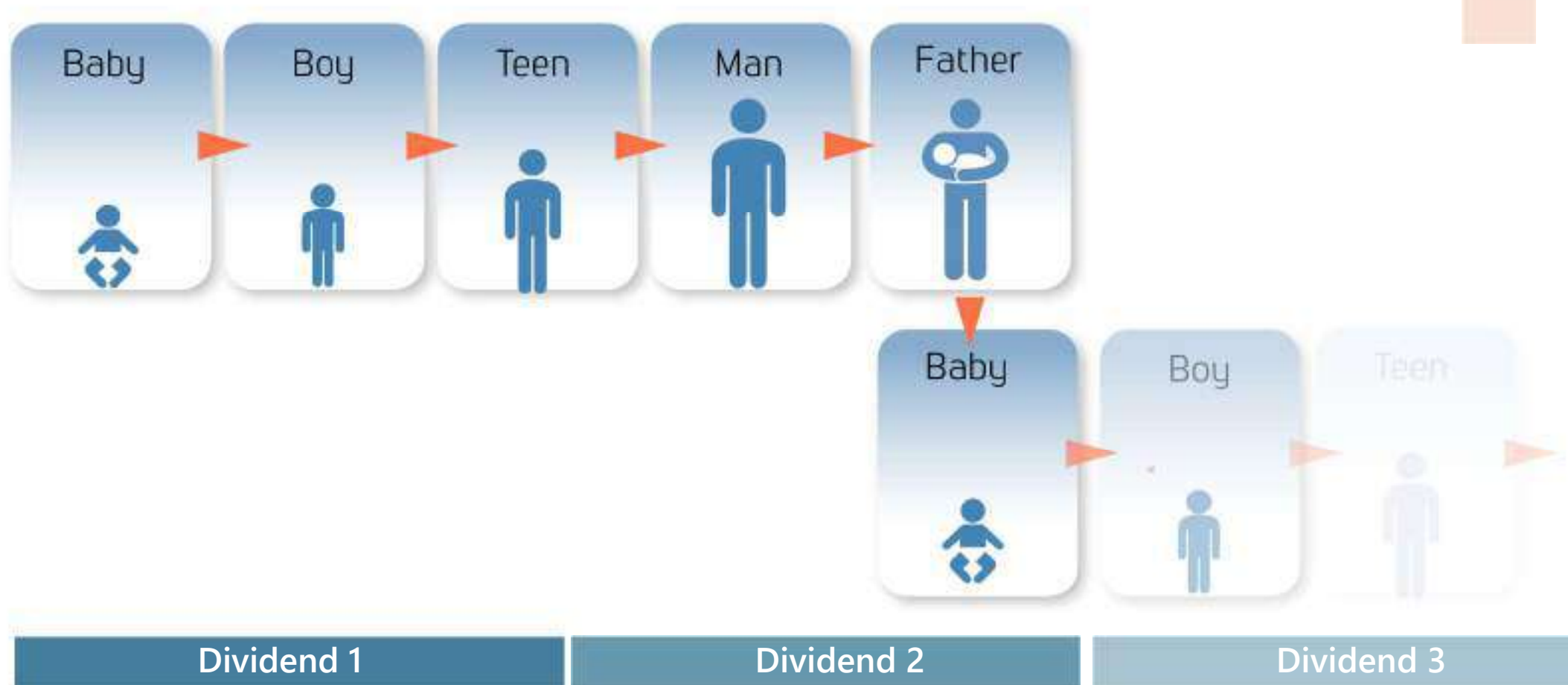


Dads matter for partners

- Men who felt strongly that they had a quality relationship with a father or father figure during childhood, marked with affection, were **48%** less likely to report ever having used intimate partner violence.
- Men with moderate or severe depressive symptoms were **62%** more likely to use intimate partner violence by 2022, compared to men without these symptoms.



Boys to men to fathers to ...



Preconception care for future fathers



Informing prevention of and treatment
for paternal mental health problems



Father's experiences of perinatal care



*"Wasn't even acknowledged.
Could have been invisible."*

*"My wife and I have had
three kids and no health care
professionals have spoken to
me directly about anything."*

*"I don't think a single person
ever asked me how I was doing
or if I needed anything."*

Mothers appreciate father inclusion



“It sets up an expectation really early on that, like the parenting belongs to both parents” - mother

“I think just the general feeling of involvement I’ve noticed when my partner’s been able to join for things; he understands more, he feels like he can be more active in this baby ... My partner does everything in the appointments, I don’t touch my baby when I’m in there because it’s his way of getting involved” - mother

Small, A., Kavanagh, S. A., Macdonald, J. A., Di Manno, L., & Wynter, K. (2025). Father Involvement in Pregnancy and Postnatal Care: Combined Perspectives of Fathers, Mothers, and Service Providers. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, 27(2), e70105.

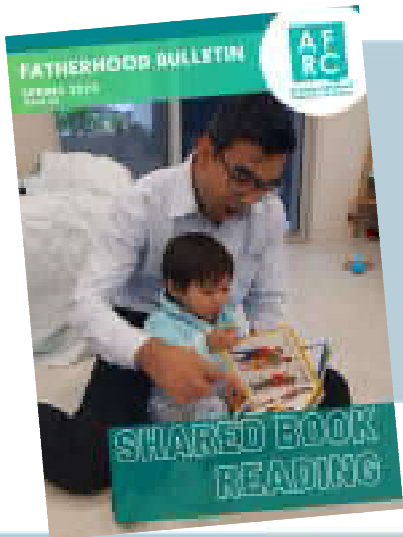
Barriers and opportunities

“A large number of studies reported **barriers and opportunities at the health service level**, mostly associated with a service-level focus on mothers... many of these factors **require attention at a policy or systems level**, and are beyond the efforts of individual health care professionals.”



Barriers and opportunities

What can you do?



Materials for dads specifically in waiting rooms



Refer dads to their GP for a health check



Work with existing groups to work out what will engage your community of dads

Bring dads into the conversation during appointments



Engage in workplace training for men's mental health



Invite dads to appointments if they can't make it, call them in



Inclusive language

Fathers and non-birthing parents



Identifying dads who are struggling

Male Depression Risk Scale (MDRS-7)

1. I **bottled up** my negative feelings
2. I needed **alcohol** to help me unwind
3. I had unexplained **aches and pains**
4. I overreacted to situations with aggressive behaviour
5. It was difficult for me to manage my **anger**
6. Using drugs provided temporary relief
7. I **stopped caring** about the consequences of my actions

Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS)

1. I have been able to laugh and see the funny side of things*
2. I have looked forward with enjoyment to things*
3. I have blamed myself unnecessarily when things went wrong
4. I have been anxious or worried for no good reason
5. I have felt **scared or panicky** for no very good reason
6. Things have been getting on top of me
7. I have been so unhappy that I have had difficulty sleeping
8. I have felt sad or miserable
9. I have been so unhappy that I have been **crying**
10. The thought of harming myself has occurred to me

**Reverse scored*

Cox, J. L., Holden, J. M., & Sagovsky, R. (1987). Detection of postnatal depression: development of the 10-item Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale. *The British journal of psychiatry*, 150(6), 782-786. Herreen, D., Rice, S., & Zajac, I. (2022). Brief assessment of male depression in clinical care: Validation of the Male Depression Risk Scale short form in a cross-sectional study of Australian men. *BMJ open*, 12(3), e053650.

The service perspective

"If we want to support women to be able to have the choices ...around their health, around their well-being and their lives, we actually have to make sure that the men are identified and supported and helped too" – perinatal service provider

... you know it's in the title, 'family' centre even though most of our admitted clients are women, you know, those women are, mostly, part of a family unit so the emphasis is on that family unit"



Men need to be told how to prepare their health and their relationship prior to the birth.

Despite their workload being huge, I still feel like we were treated with patience and respect.

Our obstetrician talked to my partner and I as a team, which we both really appreciated.

Mapping supports for fathers



First-time fathers in Australia



Risk factors for onset of depression in new fathers

Being younger

Living in a disadvantaged area

Living in a major city



84%

of first-time fathers saw a GP in their first year of fatherhood BUT

35%



reported at least 1 barrier to accessing health services

Australian Preconception Paternal Mental Healthcare Living Guidelines



Scan to the code be
notified when the public
consultation opens

Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium



Keep up to date
through LinkedIn



Save the date for the annual Australian
Fatherhood Research Symposium

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- To all the organisations and practitioners working with future and current fathers and to those who are lobbying their organisations to make father inclusion standard practice.
- To the Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium
- To SEED Lifespan Strategic Research Centre

