



Research to better support: CDI studies on father engagement

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Why to research on fathers engagement?

- Fathers or a second caregiver have **substantial impact** on child development, wellbeing, and family functioning (Lamb, 2010).
- Having **both parents** engaged in parenting programs leads to enhanced parent and child outcomes, compared with mother-only programs (Lundahl et al., 2008).
- However, engagement with fathers, and other coparents beyond mothers, is often not address within **policy, practice and research** (Lechowicz et al., 2019; Panter-Brick et al., 2015).
- Policies relevant to fathers are often focused on specific social or health outcomes (e.g., parental leave; prevention of intimate partner violence), rather than on improving **family caregiving environments** (Panter-Brick et al., 2015).



Why to research on fathers engagement?

- In a worldwide review of over 700 parenting interventions (Panter-Brick et al., 2015):
 - Mothers made up most of the participants
 - Interventions rarely made **dedicated efforts to include fathers**
 - Few studies **disagregated findings** related to mother and to father.



Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)

- CDI aims to **improve outcomes for children, families and communities** in Tallaght West and beyond, by supporting, promoting and enhancing **high quality, evidence-informed services** for them.
- CDI prioritises **prevention and early intervention approaches**, and encourages collaboration and shared learning amongst **stakeholders**.
- CDI has the objective of replicating CDI proven models in communities which have identified needs, and working in partnership to develop local capacity to sustain them.



Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)

- Engaging Dads – A key strategic focus for CDI
- Fathers in more vulnerable contexts may not have their voices heard
 - The evaluation of programmes to support families rarely includes the views and experiences of families facing **poverty or social exclusion** (Cadima et al., 2017).
- Little research with Dads
 - Very little in an Irish context
 - Especially Dads from areas of disadvantage

Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)

Two research projects being developed by CDI:

- Parent Engagement Research Project
- Being Dad



Parent Engagement Research Project

- The project aims to contribute to the development of **effective parental support policies and practices**. It will include:

1. **Literature review** on promising practice for **promoting fathers' engagement**.

- We will look for programmes aimed at families with young children (up to 6 years old), in **Ireland and Europe**
 - Programmes will be selected based on potential to reach families in poverty, potential to engage fathers, and outcome-evidence.
 - Analysis will focus on intervention aim, delivery mechanisms, target groups and population scope.
- Results will be used to inform the CDI interventions.



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Parent Engagement Research Project

2. Evaluation of the **CDI parental support model** on father engagement.

- CDI developed a **parental support model** by placing a dedicated **parent/carer facilitator (PCF)** within Early Years services.
- PCFs work with parents by **identifying needs**, offering **support** through different modalities (e.g. one-to-one, group-based, parent education courses), and **coordinating** with relevant education, health and social services.
- Accessible to **all parents**, the model targets families experiencing **poverty or social exclusion**.
- The model aims to **improve outcomes** at three levels:
 - Service** - Parental support provision and quality of relationships between practitioners and parents
 - Parents** - Engagement in children's learning, and parents' psychological distress
 - Children** - Preparedness for the transition to school.

Parent Engagement Research Project

2.1: To evaluate the impact of the CDI model

- Sample: approximately 245 parents (based on current project engagement); 16 ELC practitioners.
- Participants from eight **ELC services with the CDI model** will be **compared** to participants in eight matched **services without the model**, regarding:
 - **Gender-equitable caregiving practices**
 - ELC practitioners' relationships with parents
 - Parents' engagement in children's education, and stress
 - Children's preparedness for the transition to school
 - Experiences related to COVID-19
- Results will be **disaggregated** by fathers and mothers.
- Data collection: beginning and end of the academic year 2020/21.

Parent Engagement Research Project

2.1: To study the implementation of the CDI model

- Sample: 50% of families from the impact study.
- **Collection of** parents and children's (aged 3-6) **views** on model **quality** and **utilisation** (using Photovoice); and PCFs' and ELC practitioners' views on model **fidelity** and **organisation**.
- Collection of **fathers'/coparents' views** and **experiences** related to the CDI model.
- **Data collection: mid-way through the academic year 2020/21.**



Being Dad

- Funded through the Tusla Participation Initiative.
- Aims to explore and capture the experiences of Dads based in Tallaght.
- In-depth, semi-structured, one to one interviews with 10-12 Dads.
- Exploration of the unique experience of being a Dad, influences, aspirations and hopes, supports and challenges.
- Experiences related to Covid 19.



Being Dad



- Thematic Analysis.
- Report with recommendations.
- Development of support materials informed by and inclusive of the voices of Dads.

Expected outputs



- Research-based and contextualised **recommendations** for policy and practice.
- Insights on **fathers' support needs**, including from families facing poverty or social exclusion
- Insights on **conditions** and **characteristics** of parent support provision that foster positive outcomes.
 - Critical to develop **effective** and **targeted** interventions.
- **Comparisons** with other CDI, national and international research.
- Integration of results into CDI parental support **training** for ELC professionals.



Thank you!

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