

‘When I got the news’: Aboriginal fathers in the Kimberley region yarning about their experience of the antenatal period

Why was this study done?

Research suggests fathers involved in parenting positively contributes to a child’s health and development, however little is known about Aboriginal paternal involvement in the antenatal care (ANC) period. We wanted to explore the experiences of Kimberley Aboriginal Australian men during ANC, including their perceptions of being an expecting father, their social and emotional wellbeing, and their experience with health providers.

How was this study done?

We conducted a qualitative yarning methodology, an established cultural approach, to explore our research questions with ten (10) Aboriginal fathers, aged between 20-40 years, during May-October 2019. Men were eligible to participate if their partner was more than six months pregnant or if they had a child less than 18 months old and had most of their ANC in the Broome shire.

What did we find out?

Nine out of 10 men were in a relationship with their partner during the pregnancy. Eight men had babies aged under 18 months, two men had partners near her birthing due date. Four men were first time fathers or fathers to be, and four men already had other children. All men stated they completed year 10, seven completed year 12 and some were employed and/or went on to higher education.

Men shared that fatherhood starts when their partner becomes pregnant and that their sense of responsibility increased as they sought to help their partner emotionally, practically and financially. The men talked about modifying their own behaviours in preparation for fatherhood, through a reduction in alcohol and less socialising. Several men self-reflected on their own absent fathers in their childhood and shared that this inspired them to be a more involved present father in their children’s lives.

All the men we interviewed attended at least one ANC appointment as a way to support their partner, receive education advice on pregnancy and birth and feel involved in the pregnancy. Working full time or away from Broome was a reason that many men said stopped them from attending more ANC appointments.

Men had different experiences when they attended ANC appointments. Three men felt they were not engaged by the health care professionals. Two men felt it was ‘ok’ and they were treated appropriately. Four men talked about really positive experiences; they identified being communicated with well and provided with meaningful information on pregnancy.

All men identified experiencing multiple stresses during their partner’s pregnancy which included: the loss of close family member/s; issues with accommodation; financial hardship; and working away. One man experienced the breakdown of a relationship and identified this as stressful. Most men talked about receiving support from their partner and family members and adopting self-care behaviours during the ANC period. The men identified ways for clinics to better support and engage Aboriginal men during the ANC period.

What does this mean?

Aboriginal men value being involved with their partner’s pregnancy. Health services have the opportunity to better engage with Aboriginal fathers through co-designing programs and resources that allows men to understand and support their partners to have a safe and healthy pregnancy.

Thank you to the participants who took the time to tell us their story involved in this study, as well as KAMS for their support.

The full publication can be found at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.375>

If you have any questions please contact: Emma Carlin by email emma.carlin@rcswa.edu.au or phone (08) 9194 3234.