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How older male kinship carers describe their care responsibilities and implications for ageing male identities

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Outline

- Overview of research about grandfathers, older men and alternative masculinities
- Brief history of my research
- Current sample of men who are kinship carers
- Their reflections on being a kinship care
- The importance of health and social care intervention and involvement for families over time

Starting point

- Recent but limited evidence base about grandfathers (Tarrant, 2011; 2015; 2016; Mann et al. 2016; Buchanan and Rotkirch, 2017)
- Change in gender roles playing a part in grandfather involvement
- Men over 75 are more likely to provide care than women but are also more absent and invisible, particularly in the development and organization of welfare services (Ruxton 2006),
- Caring masculinities – as a gender equality intervention (Hanlon, 2012; Elliott, 2014)
- Limited research on men from low-income families including kinship families

Ageing masculinities

- Ageing masculinities (Hearn, 1998; Tarrant, 2014; Jackson, 2016)
- Interrelations of sexism and ageism, (power relations that both disadvantage and privilege older men),
- Discourses of masculinities and ageing work in contradictory ways to the extent that older men are marginalised by their age identities but may still benefit from being man.
- Hegemonic masculinity - is largely unable to deal with ageing men's shifting and contradictory realities (Jackson, 2013)

Men, Poverty and Lifetimes of Care

- Leverhulme Trust funded (Oct 2014 to June 2018)
- Explores patterns of men's care over time and across the life course in low-income families
- Qualitative longitudinal (QL) methodology:
 - Qualitative secondary analysis (Oct 2014 – Sept 2015)
 - New empirical phase of data collection (Sept 2015 – July 2016)
- Secondary analysis of Intergenerational Exchange
 - Investigated how grandparents' lives unfold over time, and what mitigates against their efforts to change the lives of their grandchildren

The value of QL and QSA

Qualitative Longitudinal research

- Moves beyond ‘snap shot’ approach of much research
- Exploration of turning points, tipping points and things never changing (Hughes and Emmel, 2011)

Qualitative Secondary analysis and follow on study

- Enabled extended longitudinal analysis of men providing care in low-income families including later in the life course

Participants and study context

- Fathers
- Kinship carers (aged 37 – 73)

- All participants accessed reside in a city in the North of England
- 2000 males are single parents
- 6000 are working age and provide 20 hours or more of unpaid care
- Men more likely to die young than women and live unhealthy lifestyles (White et al. 2016).

Emerging findings

Men become carers for a variety of reasons; death of family members (daughters, sisters); incapability of female relatives; desire to provide support where needed;

THEMES

- Reversals of gendered roles in the family
- Stress, anxiety and breakdown
- Self-reflections on care and ageing

Pearce (age 51)

*[wife] were on a lot more money than me, and I were having a stressful job. So I just said right, I will jack it in. I'll look after the kids but it were a **massive learning curve** because I've never done it before. I mean, when my kids were growing up, I were working on nights for nine years and I went full time on days but I never had to deal with small ones. At the time, my kids were nine and ten when I came off nights. So it were a massive learning curve for me and really, really hard. **I can see what women sort of complain about when they've got kids round their feet all day and it's nice when my wife comes home. We get these to bed and we can talk and I've got adult conversation. It's really, really strange***

Grandfather, kinship carer, married

Geoff (age 47), IGE

I were so annoyed at the time I could have put 'em [granddaughters] in care but I thought you can't do that. I've been in care, I didn't want them to go through what probably I went through. I mean don't get me wrong I had a good...what I remember being in care, er, a good childhood but when I got like say abused and that...

I know for a fact I won't work again, I won't work again now....I've worked all me life and like I say, I had to give up a good job financially. I couldn't take it. There was so much pressure on me. The, the pressure I mean, I admire any woman who will look after their grandkids or anything but er, it's bloody hard work. Financially wise and everything else it's, it's tiring sometimes. I mean especially obviously at our age it's not easy because financial wise

Sam (age 51), MPLC

*But I think with him [grandchild], yeah it's hard work, but – it sounds funny, this – **it stops you ageing**. It definitely has...definitely stopped me ageing. And it's not interfered. It has not interfered with my work. In fact, I've gone on now from thinking I'm going to be skint for the rest of my life and I'm not going to do nowt, that's it, everything's over, to I've now kind of achieved more since I've had him than I ever had*

Anna: So what's different about him from your children, would you say?

*Well no, I genuinely have achieved more. I think what it is with him is I've got more of a soft spot for him because of what he's been through. **Very, very protective with him.***

Conclusions

- Men become kinship carers too and this has implications for the reconfiguring and reworking of their identities later in life,
- Care responsibilities can disrupt their identity in relation to work but can also be an opportunity for redressing gendered inequalities between partners,
- For some, it ameliorates the negative connotations of ageing,
- However, the hardship it causes is a key barrier and can result in marginalisation, frustration and breakdown