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“No Man’s Land”: Unmarried Fatherhood and Caring

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Abstract

This research focuses on how the caring role of unmarried fathers in Ireland has been constructed by society and social policies. Unmarried fathers are excluded twofold, firstly they are deemed unsuitable carers by society and secondly they face powerful exclusion from the social system. The aim is that the research will explore the concept of masculinity and how this has impacted on how fathers are viewed in society and also the effect that policy has had on constructing fathering in Irish society. There are two main conclusions drawn. Firstly, that in order for policy to change culture must change to enable fathers to have a more active caring role in their children’s lives. Secondly, unmarried fathers are excluded by policy and this needs to be remedied with better supports put in place.

Keywords: Fatherhood; masculinity; gender roles; family policy

Background to the Research Topic

According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2007) the structure of the Irish family has been transformed in the past forty years moving away from the nuclear family based on marriage as the dominant model. Statistics show the number of households composed of the typical traditional family structure of a married mother and father with children has declined since 2002 now standing at 31,714 (CSO, 2007)¹. These changes have implications for men. Historically in Ireland men dominated in the sphere of employment as the main breadwinners and women were charged with the rearing and

¹ Statistic for 2002 was 44,263 (CSO, 2002)

educating of children, as outlined by Articles 41.2.2 and 42 of the Irish Constitution. Today however, men and women are expected to share equal roles in both work and childcare.

The most important statistic to look at in relation to unmarried families is that 33.8 per cent of all births for 2007 were outside of marriage (CSO, 2007). This is a relatively high number affecting most places in Ireland, for instance in Limerick city over half (57.9 per cent) of births were outside of marriage and in Galway about 1 in 5 births were to unmarried people (Sheehan, 2007, p. 12). A further point to add to this identified by Dr. K. McKeown and his colleagues is that “a quarter of all children [in Ireland] (24 *per cent*) do not live in a household containing both their biological parents” (McKeown et al, 2003, p. 7). Family structures are changing yet policy and cultural thinking is not, and as such unmarried fathers are left in a disadvantaged position. They are expected to share the caring role yet they are “either opposed or not supported by many of the structures, processes and practices that have a direct impact on fathers” (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998, p. 8).

Rationale

This subject was chosen because regarding research “little has been produced on the nature of fatherhood in Irish Society” (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998, p. xv). There seems to be a dearth of information, especially from the father’s perspective, in the Irish context. The sociological question of masculinity and fatherhood has been neglected somewhat in terms of qualitative research that actually gives the fathers themselves a voice, “even when men have been (and are) actively involved fathers, this experience has not been articulated by them in public discourse” (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998, p. 5). As a result of this the experiences of unmarried fathers are relatively excluded from the literature and fathering as a whole outside of marriage has become a taboo subject in Irish society. Therefore, this research acts to put unmarried fathering in a more positive light and advocate for the position of unmarried fathers.

Methodology

This research utilises two main research techniques:

1) Literature Review

The literature review is the foundation of the research as looking at others work has helped in the design of a framework for this research and also to see areas of current interest and areas of relative neglect. The review aided this research in identifying the main theories, ideas, concepts, political standpoints and questions revolving around the area of unmarried fathers, how they have been applied and also criticisms of these theories.

2) Interview

The second research method used was the semi-structured or ethnographic type interview. This method was best suited to this research as it is the optimum way of accessing people's perceptions of their situations and the world around them in a way that is easily understood. Jones (1985 in Walker, 1985, p.46) gives a very adept description of this stating:

“in order to understand other persons' constructions of reality, we would do well to ask them and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms (rather than those imposed rigidly and a priori by ourselves) and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings”.

Non-standardised, open ended interviewing methods were used as this allowed for the understanding of experiences, attitudes, interests and descriptions of unmarried fathers in an informal way. Six unmarried fathers were interviewed in total. The first two interviews were carried out with Ray Kelly and Donnacha Murphy the President and Chairman of the Unmarried Fathers of Ireland respectively. The last four interviews I carried out were with Jack*, Thomas*, Harry* and Alan*² who are all unmarried fathers from around Ireland.

Social Constructions of Masculinity & Fatherhood

This research piece highlights the traditional social construction of fatherhood in the Irish context as being built around the idea of marriage where “fatherhood is a social practice

² The asterix is used to indicate that pseudonyms have been used to protect anonymity

shaped by its social context” (McKeown, 2001 in McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998, p.18). This automatically leaves unmarried fathers in a much excluded position. Fathers today are expected to be as caring and as nurturing as their female counterparts in the private sphere, what authors such as Fein (1978); Popenoe (1993); Lupton & Barclay (1997, p. 42) refer to as “androgynous fatherhood”. However, this feminised way of caring may not be something that they have been socialised by culture to do or indeed that they feel comfortable with. I argue that the concept of a more nurturing father is really just rhetoric. This rhetoric is based in commercialism and post-modernism, resulting in a change in expectations as opposed to any real move away from the traditional behaviour. As Zoja (2001) claims “the primary care of children on the part of their fathers remains, a noble ideal or a hypocritical fantasy” (Zoja, 2001, p. 249). In reality the traditional construct of men and fathers in Ireland still holds sway.

Socialisation of Males

The caring role that men currently occupy in fact begins in Ireland at an early stage in the way boys are socialised to be the antithesis of the nurturer from a very young age. As Hartley (1974, p. 7) states, “demands that boys conform to social notions of what is manly come much earlier and are enforced with much more vigour than similar attitudes with respect to girls”. As a result boys restrict their activities and interests according to what society deems to be their role as male before they can even fully understand what this role means. This can be seen as normative constructions of gender and parenting. Consequently, they therefore find it difficult to occupy a caring role later on in life with their own children. There is a genuine fear and barrier created by the traditional constructs of masculinity to unmarried fathers acknowledging any personal problems they may have and getting involved with the care of their children.

Mythology

Following on from this, in Irish culture, mythology and history also play a role in creating the father figure not as a nurturer and carer but as a strong heroic figure. Traditional Irish male figures are the embodiment of masculinity presented as strong, self-reliant, able-bodied heroes with no vulnerabilities. This has led to a construction of what

(Connell, 1995, p. 77) calls “hegemonic masculinity” in Ireland which sees men as in control, rational, emotionally unavailable, and not needing supports, which makes it very difficult for unmarried fathers to be carers of their children. Ray gives a good example of this in his interview when he talks about crying being seen as a sign of weakness or vulnerability:

“If there is a man in the world that hasn’t cried well then I’ll bow down, but the majority of men do cry and you’d want to be a right hard guy not to cry, especially when they take away your parents, especially when they take away your children, especially when they take away your little cat and your dog, we’ve all cried somewhere along the way”

(Interview No. 1, Ray, 27/02/08).

Harry* also talks about this point saying:

“men don’t express their feelings, they don’t want to say there’s something wrong with them but there really is inside and society should realise that everyone has a feeling whether they’re a man or a woman and they should know by now it’s the 21st century”

(Interview No. 5, Harry*, 18/03/08).

Coupled with this is the idea of the father as being aggressive or punishing, which has led to the creation of a negative image of fathers as authoritarian and not nurturing. This reinforces a cultural practice where mothers have a more dominant role in the parenting process and fathers are expected to do more of the disciplining. “Aggressiveness has always been entrusted to males, making it a nearly inalterable image of the collective unconscious” (Zoja, 2001, p. 255). Masculinity is presented as being one dimensional, what Ferguson & Hogan (2004) call ‘toxic masculinity’, when in reality it is multi-faceted; although there may be negative parts there are also nurturing parts. However, these negative views have been internalised by Irish men, influencing how they feel about themselves and their capability for intimacy. As such, men are expected not to show emotion or express pain which can be very damaging to an unmarried father seeking supports. This is what Horrocks (1994 in Lupton & Barclay, 1997) calls ‘emotional autism’.

Breadwinner

However, the main point this research piece outlines in relation to culture is that ‘father’ and ‘breadwinner’ have become synonymous in Irish society to the point where a father becomes defined solely by what he does in society today as opposed to who he is outside of this. The Irish Constitution clearly outlines the role of a ‘good father’ as being “financial investment rather than emotional involvement” (McKeown, 2001, p. 8). As a result of this a father’s identity was as a worker only, resulting in their thoughts being imprisoned in their jobs “their work, their day, their very feelings took place at a distance from their children and had nothing to do with their children’s lives” (Zoja, 2001, p. 179). This perception goes back to the nuclear family where the father worked as a breadwinner but was often absent from the family. Fathers occupied an investment role and mothers had an involvement role, associated with caring and emotion. Consequently, men were distanced from the supportive and emotional role in family life simply because they were the main providers for a family and this became part of their identities. The father-child relationship came to be seen as a secondary position to the mother-child relationship in the private sphere and the fieldwork for this research demonstrates that this is still the case today. For instance, Harry* articulates that he does not feel like he is recognised as part of his child’s life in the same way the mother is stating:

“the mother is one hundred *per cent* part and you’re not a part at all, you’re just someone they had a child with and that’s not fair to any man”

(Interview No. 5, Harry*, 18/03/08).

This myopic focus on breadwinning in the past means that men were not seen as nurturers throughout Irish history and it could be said that although there is a claim that men are moving more towards nurturing and caring roles, this is still just rhetoric even today. In contemporary post-modern Ireland there is more of an onus on fathers to occupy a role in the public sphere as provider in an increasingly capitalist country than ever before. This is mainly because of the fact that men are still paid more than women and so are expected to occupy the breadwinning position. For instance, in a paper by Harry Ferguson entitled Ireland National Report on Research on Men’s Practices, (2008, p. 9) he states “a third of fathers (33 *per cent*) work 50 hours per week or more compared to only a quarter of non-fathers (27 *per cent*)”. However, as aforementioned fathers are

expected to occupy more of a role in the private sphere and it seems these two expectations end up being incongruous. Irish masculinity emphasises the hard working family man more than ever before and as such the nurturing father ideal is given less importance. These social constructions have an impact on unmarried fathers' abilities to develop a nurturing relationship with their children.

Policy

From an Irish policy point of view, unmarried fathers face discrimination in affirming their rights as equal parents and being involved with their children as a result of being excluded. Family policy in Ireland is still extremely gendered and focuses mainly on activation and promoting equal opportunities for access to the labour market. A lot of the focus is aimed at encouraging more women into the labour force through measures that aid women in steadying the work-life balance, yet there are no policies to aid fathers in this endeavour. This is illustrated in the fact that women are granted maternity leave under the Maternity Protection of Employees Act 1981 but there is no statutory provision for paternity leave in Ireland. In 1996 the Irish government in union with its social partners did make a move to offer Parental Leave as directed by the EU Directive on parental leave by June of 1998, as amended by the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2006. However, although parental Leave is now offered few fathers make use of it as it is unpaid leave. This shows that there has not been an equal reconfiguration in policy directed towards men and fathers to allow them to be more active carers. The reason for this is that men cannot avail of policies like parental leave mentioned above because they are still the main earner in a family and as such changing their work pattern could result in financial loss to the family. Policy supports given to mothers are superior to those granted to fathers and there is a lack of policies aimed at aiding fathers in reconciling the work and family role even though "the male role and masculinity no longer match the reality of the circumstances in which many men live and work" (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998, p. xiii).

The Constitution

A father's legal position in Ireland according to the 1937 Constitution is defined by marriage. Mothers are explicitly mentioned in the constitution but unmarried fathers are not recognised as a member of a family unit or having any legal right to their child and as such they are unprotected and excluded. "The failure of the Irish Constitution to recognise the existence of unmarried fathers undermines the fathering role by failing to state the universal symbolic importance of the father to each child" (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998, p. 160). An unmarried father's paternity depends on the mother agreeing for him to have his name on the birth certificate. Mothers therefore hold a position of power in relation to unmarried fathers as they can block the father's name from being put on the birth certificate. In Ray Kelly's words:

"unmarried fathers don't hold any position whatsoever. There 'IS'³ no position for an unmarried father and it doesn't seem to be changing in that particular area"

(Interview No. 1, Ray, 27/02/08)

This is hugely unfair as "a woman's motherhood is never in doubt once she has given birth, whereas a man's fatherhood is always a matter of presumption" (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998, p. 33). Donnacha picks up on this in his interview asserting with regard to solicitors and judges:

"there is nobody in the country who actually understands, mainly because they are not educated enough. For instance, we have district court judges dealing in family court law and they are not educated in family law. As such they only use the Constitution and the domestic laws which are discriminatory towards unmarried fathers"

He goes on to say that:

"the Irish Constitution has expressed rights for the protection of mothers in the Constitution, the government is pushing for expressed rights for children now, why can't they push for the expressed rights of a whole family unit in one go, including the father"

(Interview No. 2, Donnacha, 27/02/08).

³ Capitalisation used to indicate emphasis

The view expressed by all unmarried fathers interviewed was that the only real solution in order to change legislation and their position in Ireland is a referendum and a Constitutional change.

Custody

In terms of the legal avenues of redress for unmarried fathers who wish to have access to their child a number of options were set out. The mother of a child born outside of marriage has sole custody of her child. “Custody is the right of a parent to exercise physical care and control in respect of the upbringing of his or her child on a day-to-day basis” (Shannon, 2008, p. 254). Fathers on the other hand may apply to the court under section 11 (4) of the 1964 Guardianship of Infants Act for sole or joint custody of their children where it is up to the court to decide whether to grant custody to the father (www.citizensinformation.ie, 22/03/08). However, studies show that the courts often demonstrate sentencing bias against unmarried fathers in favour of mothers. For instance, Ray states during the time he was applying for custody rights:

“I hadn’t seen my children for three months because of a delay in the courts. That’s the long period of time it took me to actually get into a court and look for the crucial access, custody, joint custody and Guardianship. It was very frustrating, it was very difficult, the fact that it had taken me so long to get to that point and the discrimination that I was subjected to and that my children were subjected to was unbearable”

(Interview No. 1, Ray, 27/02/08).

He goes on to describe this discrimination saying that his side of the story in the court was not taken into account:

“the fact that I have been involved with these children, I had brought them up, I had been there, I brought them to school, I nurtured them I done all the other stuff involved with being a father and this was not taken into account by the courts”

(Interview No. 1, Ray, 27/02/08).

Organisations such as TREOIR: The National Federation for Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children (2007) and The Unmarried Fathers of Ireland (UFI) (2007)

state most calls made to them are by fathers facing issues with access mostly because of mothers refusing to grant access and unmarried fathers having no legal challenge to this. Fathers can be involved with their children but as they have no legal right to their children if the relationship with the mother changes it can often be her decision if he gets to see the children or not. This view is reflected in the courts as Thomas stresses in his own personal experience:

“it’s natural, the mother is automatically seen as the primary carer by the judges, it’s just automatic. The judges are there and they just follow the laws which are clearly outdated to deal with the problems of today and don’t give fathers any rights as they favour mothers”

(Interview No. 4, Thomas, 27/02/08).

As such there is much inequality experienced by unmarried fathers as access can be very restrictive in some cases and in turn “the courts have been so restrictive in the access given to [these men to] their children, that the men do not feel allowed to be active fathers” (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004, p. 15).

Harry* states that:

“if you don’t see the child you’re just a bad dad”

(Interview No. 5, Harry*, 18/03/08).

This is unfair as one of the main reasons an unmarried father does not see his child is restrictive custody arrangements despite the fact that many unmarried fathers desperately want to be active in their children’s lives.

Guardianship

In Ireland both parents in a married couple are automatically deemed guardians of their children. However, unmarried fathers are not automatic guardians of their children. Guardianship can be defined as:

“the duty to maintain and properly care for the child and refers to the decisions that must be made during the child’s lifetime which relate to the general development of the child. Being a guardian requires a person to partake in the important decisions in a child’s life, for example, education, religion and general rearing” (Shannon, 2008, p. 252).

A joint statutory declaration must be made by the mother and father of a non-marital child if they wish the father to become a guardian of the child. However, if there is a dispute the father can apply to the court for guardianship and it is up to a judge to decide but in this case the onus is on the father to prove that he deserves guardianship. In essence this could be seen as merely the right to an application process and most unmarried fathers are not even aware that they would fall in to this position. Alan* states that he would fit this category as he assumed his Guardianship was automatic, he thought:

“once your name was on the birth cert nothing could be done about it, it couldn’t be questioned, but that means nothing”

(Interview No. 5, Alan*, 18/03/08).

According to TREOIR (2007), even when fathers are granted guardianship the mother’s guardianship still seems to hold more weight despite the fact that it is supposed to be equal. “Fathers are put through hoops to prove that they want Guardianship and this should not be seen as a reward for good behaviour” (www.usfi.ie, 16/02/08). For instance, Harry* tells the story of how his court orders were broken and there was nothing he could do about it despite his Guardianship:

“I was supposed to take my son on the Monday night and it was the night before his first Holy Communion. I had a court paper that I would have my son on that night. When I went up to collect him I was told I just wasn’t having him and that was it. I didn’t get to see him at all that night. I got the Gardaí to call to her because she was breaching the court papers but she is the mother in the eyes of the law and they don’t care about court papers. I told the Garda I had three legal documents stating I am the child’s natural father and guardian and I do have visitation rights. I told him she has failed to comply on these court papers, if it was me I’d be arrested like, but he said if she doesn’t listen to the judge, she doesn’t listen to the court papers she’s hardly going to listen to me”

(Interview No. 5, Harry*, 18/03/08).

Keegan & Mr. G Cases

The Keegan and Mr. G cases are the first real highly publicised cases in Ireland where the inadequacies of Irish Law were shown up but they did not go far enough. The Keegan case was taken to the European Commission of Human Rights by Joseph Keegan on the grounds that as an unmarried father his child had been placed up for adoption without his knowledge or consent and as such his right to respect for family life had been violated. The European Court of Human Rights upheld that this was a breach of human rights and has vindicated the rights of all unmarried fathers to be consulted in the case of adoption of their child because a family was not just about marriage based relationships. The Keegan case was an incredibly significant case as it actually acknowledged the fact that fatherhood is about the social relations between the parents and not just the physical or biological relationship and it also challenged the antiquated notion that marriage is paramount to a family structure.

Likewise, the Mr. G case is a landmark case in the Irish context. This case is in essence a child abduction case that revolves around twin three year old boys taken from Ireland by their mother in 2007 after a three and half year relationship between her and her unmarried partner, the children's father Mr. G, broke down. They were taken without his knowledge or consent and therefore he activated international child abduction procedures under Article 15 of the Hague Convention⁴. Eventually, in the Irish High Court Mr. Justice Liam McKechnie ruled that the removal of the children was wrongful, as was their retention in the UK, as the father's rights were being breached and he ordered that the children be returned to Ireland to their father (www.ireland.ie, 17/02/08). In this situation the unmarried father's right to his children was acknowledged, under the European Convention on Human Rights definition which basically states that the substance of the relationship should be taken over the form of the relationship, despite the fact that unmarried fathers hold no legal status in the Constitution.

⁴ 'The judicial or administrative authorities of a Contracting State may, prior to the making of an order for the return of the child, request that the applicant obtain from the authorities of the State of the habitual residence of the child a decision or other determination that the removal or retention was wrongful' (www.dfa.ie)

However, the Mr. G case is a specific case and did not go on to challenge the 1937 Constitution and unmarried fathers in Ireland in usual circumstances cannot avail of the Hague Convention as long as they have no legal rights to the child before they are taken from the country. Further, unmarried fathers should not have to go as far as the European courts to obtain rights and there is a need for domestic law to recognise their legal rights in line with how much responsibility the unmarried father assumes. Ray Kelly states:

“we have to take it into a Supreme Court before we get the rights to have a passport, the right to have a birth cert, the rights to implement Guardianship, so it’s a long, long hard struggle for most fathers when it simply comes down to the fact that decent fathers’ need decent rights” (www.usfi.ie, 16/02/08).

Welfare Policy & Practice

The social welfare system supports are structured so that they can only be paid to one parent and this parent is usually the mother. Either parent may apply to the court for a maintenance order against the other parent. Following this the court may then instruct that parent to pay a regular amount based on income. The government gives unmarried fathers responsibilities regarding the maintenance of their children but not the rights to go with these:

“The government has made me responsible for my children in relation to maintenance but with responsibilities come rights and what we’re saying to the government is give us our rights to be responsible and that’s what they’re not doing” (Interview No. 1, Ray, 27/02/08).

A key issue that keeps coming up around maintenance is the ‘deadbeat dad’ but this is unfair and discriminatory. As Jack states in his interview:

“I do realise that there are fathers in the country that are doing nothing to help us really, they are ruining it for the rest of us, the lads that don’t pay maintenance or recognise their children but I do believe the majority of men do love their children and they do want to just help raise them, provide support and be there for them” (Interview No. 3, Jack, 27/02/08).

It is unfair to treat all unmarried fathers as a homogenous group with this ‘deadbeat dad’ image when this is not necessarily true. There are some fathers that do not pay

maintenance, there are some fathers that do, and there are some fathers that cannot and they should not be treated as a homogenous group.

The One Parent Family Payment and the Children's Allowance are discriminatory towards unmarried fathers as the One Parent Family Payment is usually given to mothers and the Children's Allowance indicates that only the mother can apply for it. As (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004, p. 11) identify "in Ireland, most one parent family payments (97 *per cent*) are paid to mothers, and is done so on the condition that the woman may not cohabit". This co-habitation ban means that how much payment a mother receives is conditional on a father's absence. This acts to encourage mothers on social welfare benefits to keep fathers from their children. Unmarried fathers are excluded as a result because it puts them in the position of posing a liability to their partners receiving lone parent payments if they see their children. "The lone parent family payment therefore is a structural impediment which can and does function to exclude fathers and undermine their role both practically and symbolically within families" (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004, p. 128).

Overall it seems, "there is a palpable gender bias in how expertise and intervention actually shape the situation that encourages mothers, but not fathers, to be the primary carers" (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998, p. 208). The government needs to put resources into helping and supporting unmarried fathers to enable them to play an active part in their children's lives. Alan* says that for unmarried fathers like him and from talking to men in the same situation he feels:

"there's nobody there for them, they go through it on their own and it's a long and lonely process" (Interview No. 5, Alan*, 18/03/08).

Harry* suggests that even something as simple as a local support group can be hugely beneficial:

"when you go through it you are on your own and you think that it's only happening to you but the more people you talk to the more stories are more similar and this makes it easier" (Interview No. 5, Harry*, 18/03/08).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main conclusion drawn from the first part of this project is that unmarried fatherhood cannot be viewed in a vacuum and in order for policy to change culture on the whole must change to enable fathers to have a more active caring role in their children's lives. Fathers are not encouraged to have a nurturing role in their children's lives as males are not being socialised to show a nurturing side. Mythology and culture are influencing men not to show vulnerabilities and their need for support. Finally, 'father' and 'breadwinner' have become synonymous to the point where a father becomes defined solely by what he does in society today as opposed to who he is outside of this.

The second conclusion of this study is that policy also plays a negative role in encouraging fathers to be active carers in their children's lives illustrated by the case of the unmarried father. Unmarried fathers are discriminated against and excluded by policy from the very beginning as they hold no legal position in the Constitution, they are expected to prove themselves in terms of guardianship, custody, and also access to their children. The fact that Irish society is changing with the number of nuclear families decreasing and an increase in the number of de facto families and children born outside of marriage has not been taken into account by policymakers and legislators. It all comes back to the point that in the case of unmarried fatherhood, motherhood is automatic yet paternity is presumed and not proven and this needs to be addressed before unmarried fathers can be a part of their children's lives.

The fieldwork carried out for the research further illustrates the fact that the position of unmarried fathers is not heard. Interviewees state that in the court system judges were not listening to their side of the story or were being biased towards the mother's side of the story and this is a very important point. There is a huge lack of research, statistics, and experiential accounts from unmarried fathers and as such their situation goes unacknowledged.

Ray Kelly describes it aptly in when he says:

“we have the statistics out there, the writings on the wall, the problem is they can’t see the wall. Somebody, turned around and said before, men need to start talking, and I said no, people need to start listening, because men are talking the problem is nobody is listening”(Interview No. 1, Ray, 27/02/08).

If more awareness is to be raised about the position of exclusion of unmarried fathers more research needs to be gathered.

Finally, this study concludes there are not enough practical supports in place in Ireland to help unmarried fathers to be active carers in their children’s lives with the UFI in Dublin being the only port of call identified in Ireland. A lot of unmarried fathers feel that they go through their experiences of exclusion on their own and this is incredibly challenging with many men attempting or considering suicide. The majority of unmarried fathers acknowledge that support groups can be helpful as it is a chance to talk to people in similar circumstances. The main reason for a lack of supports is again a paucity of research on the issues faced by unmarried fathers but there is a great need for a nationwide support system to be put in place.



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