

Data suggest Indigenous fathers help build stronger communities: How they can be better supported

February 17 2024, by Jacob Prehn, Huw Thomas Peacock, Kootsy Canuto, Leonard Collard, Michael A. Guerzoni and Mick Adams



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

When approaching how to support the needs of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander families, there is a tendency in favor of strengthening and [empowering mothers](#), rather than fathers.

While this emphasis on maternal support is undoubtedly justified (in fact, there probably needs to be more supports that are culturally appropriate), it raises the question of why specialist assistance is not similarly prioritized for fathers.

For instance, within what is arguably the core Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy in Australia, [Closing the Gap](#), there is no mention of initiatives specifically for Indigenous fathers or men more broadly.

We analyzed data from around 150 First Nations fathers about the support they needed. Here's what they had to say.

Doing away with negative stereotypes

Western society can portray some groups of fathers in a less favorable light and offer limited support.

In Australia, there has been a particularly cruel characterization of Indigenous fathers as deviant, distant, and/or drunkards.

These harmful characterisations were reflected in a [2016 cartoon](#) by Bill Leak of an Aboriginal man unable to recall the name of his son.

These representations are not true of many Indigenous fathers. They are often disciplined, devoted and sober, and want to be positive role models for their children. A great example of this is in the [social media movement](#) that sprung up in the wake of the cartoon, called #IndigenousDads.

In light of this social climate, we wanted to know what Indigenous

fathers need in order to enhance their experience of fatherhood. We drew the responses from data of 149 Indigenous fathers from the [Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children \(LSIC\)](#), a large Australian dataset administered by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services. That study asked them "if you could have something to make it easier to raise your child, what would it be?". We analyzed the results.

More support needed

[Our research](#) found more than 60% of Indigenous dads surveyed indicated needing further support.

There were several areas that came up most frequently. These were finances, social services, housing, and the ability to spend more time with their children.

Of the 10 themes we observed across the comments from Indigenous fathers in response to this question, nearly all were related to socioeconomic and cultural factors. One of the fathers expressed frustration at the lack of available [social services](#), wanting more support in general. Another father shared how finances affected his role, saying, "I would like to have a decent paying job; I had to stop working to help and care for my children and partner."

Other fathers mentioned wanting housing that was appropriately sized to accommodate a family, and not wanting to rent. Additionally, fathers wished they had the ability to invest more time in engaging in activities with their children.

Collectively, these desires are reflective of men striving to be involved and nurturing fathers, not deviant or distant, as illustrated in harsh stereotypes. This is highlighted in their courage in openly asking for help.

What needs to be done?

Our research shows policies about and for Indigenous men and fathers need to directly address the areas in which they've expressed the most need. This includes looking at their [social determinants of health](#). This means examining the social and economic circumstances that can affect a person's life, from their housing situation through to feeling included in society.

As we mentioned earlier, the [Closing the Gap](#) strategy does not presently do this. It is important for this policy, and other relevant government strategies, to target these areas and concerns specifically.

Further, urgent attention is needed for greater research funding to support Indigenous dads and men more broadly. [One study](#) shows the minimal amount of Indigenous-specific research funding awarded by Australia's two central funding bodies. The Australian Research Council (ARC) has provided 1.46%, and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has given a concerning 0.29%. There is a pressing need for additional investigation into how best to support Indigenous fathers and Indigenous men.

Giving Indigenous fathers the support they need is crucial in reducing the [well-documented](#) challenges experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. There are also positive flow-on effects to others, [as found](#) by researchers Lyndon Reilly and Susan Rees: "If you have strong Indigenous fathers, you will have strong Indigenous families. By having strong Indigenous families, you will have strong Indigenous communities."

As of 2021, Indigenous children are more than [10 times](#) more likely to be on a care or protection order than non-Indigenous children. Strengthening the role of Indigenous fathers not only makes financial

sense for governments, but also contributes to Indigenous family and community well-being, reducing care and protection orders for Indigenous [children](#).

We need to listen to First Nations fathers. If we do, we can deliver services that play to their strengths, rather than seeking to address perceived deficiencies.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Data suggest Indigenous fathers help build stronger communities: How they can be better supported (2024, February 17) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-02-indigenous-fathers-stronger-communities.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.