

## Indigenous Fatherhood

### TEAM

#### Principal Investigator:

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#### Aboriginal Advisor:

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#### University-based Research Assistant:

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#### Community-based Research Assistant:

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#### Community Program Partners:

Lil'wat Nation, Mount Currie, B.C. - Pqusnalhew Child Care Centre  
Terrace Park Centre Dad's Group  
Esketemc Aboriginal Head Start Program  
Prince George Native Friendship Centre, B.C. - Aboriginal Head Start

### Announcements

1. Special issue of **American Journal of Community Psychology** including article by Ball

Ball, J. (2010). Indigenous fathers reconstituting circles of care. *American Journal of Community Psychology: Special Issue on Men, Masculinity, Wellness, Health and Social Justice – Community-based Approaches*.

2. DVD

#### **Fatherhood: Indigenous Men's Journeys**

To order, download and complete this order form. (36 KB) [PDF]  
You may also visit the Order page by clicking here.

3. Title including chapter by Ball & George on Aboriginal fathers

Policies and practices affecting Aboriginal fathers' involvement with their children are highlighted in a chapter by Jessica Ball and Ron George in an edited collection, **Aboriginal Policy Research: Moving Forward, Making A Difference, Volume 3**. Edited by Jerry P. White, Susan K. Wingert, Paul Maxim, and Dan Beavon. Click here to view the chapter [PDF] (294 KB).

This volume is available for order from:  
University of Toronto Press  
Distribution Division, 520-1 Dufferin Street  
Toronto, Ontario M3H 5T8  
By email: [utpbooks@utpress.utoronto.ca](mailto:utpbooks@utpress.utoronto.ca)  
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348 pages, \$34.95 CDN plus \$5.00 shipping and handling.  
(Examination copies available for course reading)

### **Project Background**

Aboriginal children and families have been under-represented in demographic, social, educational and health surveys. Aboriginal fathers especially have been over-looked as both a stakeholder group and a resource for Aboriginal children and youth. Low participation of Aboriginal fathers in infant and early childhood care has been found in research by Aboriginal communities collaborating with Jessica Ball, and is frequently reported at meetings of Aboriginal child care practitioners. Carrier Sekani Grand Chief Ed John has called attention to the need to support and involve Aboriginal fathers: "Aboriginal fathers are probably the greatest untapped resource for improving the quality of life for Aboriginal children." This exploratory project has been initiated and sustained by continuously incoming requests from staff in Aboriginal community-agencies, especially in early childhood programs, such as Aboriginal Head Start. Since the project began, in 2003, a flow of calls have been received from Aboriginal fathers themselves, asking to be part of the research – in the words of one father: "Just to be able to tell our stories. To shine some light on the struggle that some of us Aboriginal men have to learn what it means to be fathers and how to stay connected with our children."

### **Project Goal**

The main purpose of this ongoing project is to open up Aboriginal fatherhood as a new area of inquiry, community action, and policy reform.

### **A Networked Approach**

In 2004, this project became part of a nationally networked study of seven different populations of fathers that is being conducted by a group called the Father's Involvement Research Alliance (FIRA). Dr. Kerry Daly at the Centre for Families, Work, and Well-being at the University of Guelph, Ontario, is the Principal Investigator of the networked

study. Overall, this national study involves community agencies and fathers in exploring fatherhood in 7 populations in Canada: Indigenous Fathers, New Fathers, Young Fathers, Immigrant and Refugee Fathers, Gay Fathers, Divorced Fathers, Fathers of Children with Special Needs.

## **Project Activities**

### **I. Stories of learning to be a father.**

The project asks Aboriginal fathers to tell their stories about fathering. As of August 2005, 80 fathers have offered their stories through conversational interviews with an Aboriginal research team member and through survey questionnaires. Thematic analysis has been used to explore questions such as those below.

- Who are Aboriginal fathers? What is the range of diversity among Aboriginal fathers with respect to family composition, numbers of children, relationships to children, partner relationships, co-parenting arrangements, extended family involvements, mobility, education, employment, and housing?
- What are the frequency, circumstances and needs of Aboriginal fathers raising children as the lone parent?
- How do Aboriginal fathers see their roles in relation to their children? What do they want to be doing in terms of playing a father role? What are the challenges they face?
- How can programs of child care, parent education, and social development reach out to Aboriginal fathers? How can they provide useful, realistic ways of helping Aboriginal fathers be as involved with their children as they wish to be, and feel supported in their fathering roles and as adults with needs of their own?

### **II. Literature review and synthesis.**

The project maintains an ongoing search and synthesis of research and program literature around the world focused on Indigenous fathers. To date, only 5 articles in Canada and the USA have been found focused on Indigenous parents, including only one with a singular focus on fathers.

### **III. Children's book study.**

Children's stories written, narrated and/or illustrated by Aboriginal men or women in Canada are being studied as one source of representations of the roles of men (fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers and others) in the lives of Aboriginal children.

### **IV. Demographic profile.**

Data from Statistics Canada 2001 census of the population and the Aboriginal People's Survey are being analysed to construct profiles of Aboriginal fathers' characteristics and living conditions.

## V. Policy analysis and recommendations.

The project is undertaking analyses of federal, provincial and First Nations policies that affect the identification of Aboriginal children and fathers, definitions of fatherhood, and fathers' involvement.

### **Project Outcomes**

Findings of the interviews and surveys to date have pointed to challenges for most Aboriginal fathers to maintain connections to their children and feel confident in a fathering role. Many Aboriginal fathers have reported a desire for more involvement with their children, but identified several barriers, including: work-scheduling conflicts; perceived role ambiguity; perceived "bias" toward mothers' involvement in infant, child care, and parenting programs and services; interruptions in contact with children due to fathers' participation in work on trap lines or fishing boats far from home; residential treatment programs or incarceration; and their own doubts about being suitable role models for their children. Residential school attendance, and secondary residential school effects, have figured prominently in the explanatory accounts of many Aboriginal men who have participated in the study. The demographic analyses to date show that Aboriginal men are possibly the most challenged population in Canada with regards to key variables that are known to affect fathers' involvement, including being unmarried, low education, high employment, poverty, and high mobility.

This study is increasing the visibility of Aboriginal fathers in the partnering communities and in the fields of early childhood education and child and youth care. Visibility is being achieved through the community-university partnerships developed for this project, through presentations, workshops, and reports, and through the inclusion of this study in the first national study of fatherhood in Canada. As it continues, this project will:

- Create a research-based profile of the numbers and characteristics of Indigenous fathers in Canada.
- Provide guidelines for outreach, support, and education for Indigenous fathers.
- Identify steps that practitioners can take to create spaces and opportunities in community-based programs for fathers to be involved in meaningful and rewarding ways with their children.
- Produce training resources, advocacy materials, and recommendations for service providers.
- Inform community policies as well as recommend reform of regional and national policies.

By increasing understanding of Aboriginal fathers' involvement in child care and development of their children, this research reflects the program mission of the Early Childhood Development Intercultural Partnerships to contribute to the understanding of, and approaches to, Indigenous early childhood development, education and intervention,

as well as to effect change and reduce gaps in existing patterns of children's health, development, and educational outcomes.

## **Project Reports**

Ball, J. (2010). Indigenous fathers reconstituting circles of care. *American Journal of Community Psychology: Special Issue on Men, Masculinity, Wellness, Health and Social Justice – Community-based Approaches*.

Ball, J., & Moselle, K. (2007). Fathers' contributions to children's well-being. Commissioned brief overview of research for the Public Health Agency of Canada. [PDF] (686 KB)

Ball, J., Moselle, K., & Pedersen, S. (2007). Father's involvement as a determinant of child health. Commissioned review of research for the Public Health Agency of Canada. [PDF] (768 KB)

Ball, J., Roberge, C., Joe, L., & George, R. (2007). Fatherhood: Indigenous Men's Journeys. Short report of research findings. [PDF] (160 KB)

Ball, J., & George, R. (2006). Policies and Practices Affecting Aboriginal Fathers' Involvement with their Children. Report presented at Second Tri-Annual Aboriginal Policy Research Conference Relationships: Policy, Research, and Results. [PDF] (194 KB)

Ball, J. (2005). Aboriginal Men Learning Fatherhood. Presentation at the Third Annual Third Annual Research Meeting of the Human Early Learning Partnerships program, Vancouver, BC, May 20.

Ball, J. (2005). Indigenous fathers in Canada learning fatherhood. Paper presented at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Society for Cross Cultural Research, Santa Fe, NM, February 23-27.

Ball, J. & Daly, K. (2005). Fathers' involvement with their children: Presentation on the first Canadian national study of fatherhood. Presentation at the University of Victoria, REACH seminar series, April 14.

Father's Involvement Research Alliance of Canada: Overview [PowerPoint slides in PDF] (134 KB)

Aboriginal Fathers Learning Fathering: Overview of project in progress [PowerPoint slides in PDF] (322 KB)

The Effects of Father Involvement: A Summary of the Research Evidence [PDF] (98 KB) (feel free to distribute widely)

## **Funding**

- British Columbia Ministry for Children and Family Development through the Human Early Learning Partnership
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada: Community-University Research Alliance Program

## **Contact Us**

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## **Media**

Ball, J. (2008). Policies and practice reforms to promote positive transitions to fatherhood among Aboriginal young men. *Horizons*, 10(1), 52-56. (2.2 MB) [PDF]

NAHO Bulletin article on Aboriginal Fathers Research Project, Winter 2008 [HTML]

Documenting the Journey: First nations fathers share their experiences in a new DVD (Monday Magazine article, March 8-14, 2007) (2.8 MB) [PDF]

Study aims to salvage image of fatherhood (National Post article on Fatherhood Study, December 4, 2003) [HTML]

## **Related Websites**

Fathers Involvement Research Alliance: [www.fira.uoguelph.ca](http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca)  
Centre for Families Work and Well-being: [www.worklifecanada.ca](http://www.worklifecanada.ca)  
Human Early Learning Partnership: [www.earlylearning.ubc.ca](http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca)  
Fathers Involvement Network of British Columbia: email: [bccf@bccf.bc.ca](mailto:bccf@bccf.bc.ca)  
Fathers Involvement Ontario: [www.cfii.ca/fiion](http://www.cfii.ca/fiion)