

Fathers' Experiences in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit: A Research Proposal

Lisa Cummings, MSN, MHA, PhD Student

PURPOSE

The purpose of this proposed study is to better understand the experiences and needs of fathers of premature infants while in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

BACKGROUND

- 15 million babies worldwide are born preterm each year (March of Dimes, 2015)
- There is little information on fathers' experiences in the NICU
- Fathers are taught to value masculinity over fatherhood (Edley & Petroski, 2006)
- Fathers perceive that nurses see them as unimportant (Freely & Waitzer, 2012)
- Mothers themselves may serve as "gatekeepers" to father involvement (Gaunt, 2008)
- With the number of infants born prematurely, and the number of fathers this may impact, it is imperative to understand how fathers can become more involved in their interactions with their infants

SIGNIFICANCE

- Involved fathers positively influence children's emotional and cognitive development (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda & Shannon, 2007)
- Father love is strongly linked to offspring's psychological well-being and health (Rohner & Vieziano, 2001)
- This study is important because the NICU is the initial environment in which a father encounters their premature infant
- Fathers play an important role in comfort and care

LONG TERM EFFECTS OF ATTACHMENT

Father involvement according to attachment theory has these positive effects:

- Father involvement is a good predictor of a child's future behavior (Bowlby, 1991)
- Greater father involvement in infant care is linked to lower parenting stress and depression (Fisher et al, 2006)
- Children whose fathers are actively involved with them are more likely to be emotionally secure, have better social connections with peers, and are less likely to use drugs or alcohol (Stone, 2008)

METHODOLOGY

Based on the assumption that understanding is deeply informed by experience, hermeneutic phenomenology will be the guiding methodological approach used for this study.

Using this approach, I am seeking to interpret the practical acts of living (Smythe, 2011) through the analysis of narratives of fathers of premature infants in the NICU



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Grateful thanks to Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center for the opportunity to share this proposal and SSM Health for tuition reimbursement enabling me to further my pursuit of my PhD. To Dr. Vandermause, I would like to express my appreciation for her guidance and valuable assistance. I would also like to thank Sigma Theta Tau and the Office of Research of the University of Missouri, St. Louis College of Nursing for funding this presentation

METHODS

Aims: to generate an interpretation of the experiences of fathers' interactions with their premature infants in the NICU

Sample:

- N = 15 (# anticipated to answer research question)
- Fathers whose infants have been hospitalized in a level 4 NICU for at least one week
- Varying gestational ages and length of stays

Setting: University affiliated Level 4 NICU located in the Midwest

Data Collection: One on one hermeneutic interviews in a private setting (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011), audio-recorded, de-identified, and transcribed

Data Analysis:

Interpretation/analysis methods in hermeneutic phenomenology (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Diekelmann & Ironside, 2011; Smythe & Giddings, 2007)

Steps in the interpretation process:

- Development of interpretive team for analytical process
- Narratives examined for story content and structure
- Central themes or meaningful life episodes explored
- Interpretive summaries analyzed for common meanings within and across stories
- Patterns and themes constructed with exemplars

IMPLICATIONS for INTERVENTION

- Educational interventions for fathers' involvement and care providers' support of fathers' involvement
- Identification of needs for further research on effects of early parenting experiences and family development

LONG TERM GOALS

- Foster the father-infant relationship at this critical stage in the infant's development
- Develop and foster ways NICU practitioners can facilitate healthy involvement of fathers with their premature infants through touching, holding, and daily care

REFERENCES

List of references are available upon request