

'When I got the news': Aboriginal fathers in the Kimberley region yarning about their experience of the antenatal period

Why was this study done?

This study looked at Kimberley Aboriginal men's experiences during their partner's pregnancy. We were interested in understanding how men were feeling during their partner's pregnancy; if and how things changed for them during this time; and if they ever went to appointments with their partner to see how baby was growing.

How was this study done?

We yarned with ten (10) Aboriginal fathers, aged between 20-40 years. Men were interviewed if their partner was more than six months pregnant or if they had a child less than 18 months old and had most of their antenatal care in the Broome shire.

What did we find out?

Nine out of 10 men were in a relationship with their partner during the pregnancy. Eight men had babies aged under 18 months, two men had partners near her birthing due date. Four men were first time fathers or fathers to be, and four men already had other children.

The men shared that becoming a father starts when their partner becomes pregnant, they talked about their feelings and thoughts of responsibility becoming more. The men talked about wanting to help their partner with her feelings, thoughts and also to help her physically and financially. The men also talked about changing their own behaviours to get ready to help with the baby, like less alcohol and less going out. Some men shared their own story of not having a father around in their childhood and said that they wanted to be part of their children's lives.

All the men we interviewed attended at least one clinic appointment to check up on the baby, they said they attended to support their partner, get information on pregnancy and birth and to feel involved. Working full time or away from Broome was a reason that many men said stopped them from going to more appointments. Men had different experiences when they attended antenatal care appointments. Three men felt they were not supported by clinic staff, two men felt they were treated 'ok' in a good way. Four men talked about really good positive experiences; they felt they were part of the appointment yarn and were given good information on pregnancy and the growing baby.

All the men spoke about having many worries during their partner's pregnancy like the loss of close family member/s, no accommodation, money troubles and having to working away. One man was not with his partner and he found it very hard. Most men talked about getting support from their partner and family members, they said clinics did not have a role in looking after their thoughts and feelings wellbeing during this time. Men also talked about being active, eating well, having less alcohol, being on country and connecting with family members as important ways to care for their Liyan (inner being/spirit).

What does this mean?

Aboriginal men support having a healthy pregnancy and being part of their partner's pregnancy is important to them. The men talked about the importance for health services to include Aboriginal fathers, the need for programs and resources that will help Aboriginal men with knowledge and tools to better understand and support their partners to have a safe and healthy pregnancy.

Thank you to the participants who took the time to tell us their story involved in this study, as well as KAMS for their support.

If you have any questions or would like to read the full manuscript please contact: Emma Carlin by email emma.carlin@rcswa.edu.au or phone (08) 9194 3234. Alternatively you can view the manuscript via this web link: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/hpja.375>.