“Nothing’s available”: Young fathers’ experiences with unmet information needs and barriers to resolving them

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Abstract

Young fathers, like all parents, have a range of information needs, such as learning how to introduce their babies to solid foods. Yet compared to young mothers and older parents, they have fewer resources available to them. To date, young fathers have not been identified as a priority population in need of parenting-related information and face unequal access to information resources. This inequality is in part related to gender stereotypes and social biases about young men who become parents at “too early” an age. Through interviews and field observation conducted during a longitudinal ethnographic study of young mothers, fathers, their parents, and service providers in two cities in British Columbia, Canada, we examined young fathers’ gendered experiences accessing parenting information and resources. Using an ecological model of information needs, we identified factors at different levels: micro (e.g., personal), meso (e.g., relational) and macro (e.g., access to city/provincial parenting programs and resources) that revealed information inequalities for young fathers. Our findings illustrate that young fathers often have unexpressed and unaddressed information needs due to barriers they encounter when accessing services, the stigma they experience as early age parents, and social pressures that result in avoiding asking for help in order to adhere to traditional masculine values.

Keywords: Information need; young parents; young fathers; parenting services; gender; qualitative methods

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1. Introduction

Becoming a parent gives rise to questions and new experiences as mothers, fathers, and the people who support them adjust their daily routines and practices to care for children. Information is frequently needed and sought to inform decisions and practices around feeding, sleeping, child safety, enrichment activities, and so on. Library and Information Studies (LIS) research has focused on parents’ use of varied information sources (e.g., the Web, other parents, and health professionals) (see, for example, [32][37][60]). Such research has shown that parenting is a complex information landscape where needed information is not always available and unwanted information is sometimes received [37]; difficult circumstances, such as child illness, complicate decision making [30]; and parents encounter conflicting information that may increase their uncertainty around childcare practices, such as baby feeding [45].

To date, most studies about the information needs of parents have focused on mothers and older, middle class parents (notable exclusions include [50][60]). Fathers – and specifically young fathers – have not been fully recognized as parents who may have unique information needs. Young mothers (aged 16 to 24) have been perceived as “information needy” and it is assumed that they lack the ability to make good decisions because of their early-age pregnant and parenting statuses [15][61]. As a result, young mothers have been regular targets of parenting information resources by health professionals, but also by family, friends and even complete strangers [22]. In contrast, young fathers are regularly excluded from formal supports, including parenting resources and services [9][29]. Some fathers refer to informal supports for parenting advice, such as their partners and their own parents; however, relying primarily on personal relationships for information in the absence of welcoming parenting services makes young fathers a population with unrecognized information needs who are marginalized from the parenthood experience [9][12][29].

Few studies have analyzed the services available for young fathers, and even fewer have studied the information contexts of young fathers [41]. The dearth of information resources and programs targeted toward young fathers starkly contrasts the volume of information resources and programs targeted towards young mothers [21][34]. These extremes of information abundance and scarcity are both problematic. On the one hand,
young mothers’ access to information services and programs may come with the risk of information overload and increased surveillance of their parenting practices and lifestyle [45][6][21][22]. Conversely, young fathers encounter persistent stigma as “absentee” [15], despite many being (or seeking to be) actively engaged fathers. This stigma contributes to their exclusion from parenting information and support services. Their exclusion may be due to explicit (e.g., “mothers-only” programs), or implicit (e.g., scheduling conflicts with employment), factors, but their lack of attendance may feed back into the stereotypes that they are not fully engaged parents.

This research, which was part of a longitudinal ethnographic study of young parents in two Canadian cities, explored the information needs, contexts, and barriers to acquiring information experienced by young fathers. The aim of this analysis is [14] to analyze the perspectives of young fathers, young mothers and service providers in relation to information needs and barriers to information acquisition. Due to the gendered nature of the information resources, supports and services designed for (expectant) parents, we observed that parenting information is largely inaccessible to young fathers and sought to explore the myriad factors that contributed to this inequality.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Information needs

LIS research has framed “information need” as something that motivates people to seek and use information [7][62]. Information needs have been defined as the identification of a “problem” that needs to be resolved, a response to uncertainty [4] or a drive for sense-making [11]. Derr [10] defined need as “a condition in which certain information contributes to the achievement of a genuine or legitimate information purpose” (p. 276). This goal orientation of information need is also evident in Nicholas’s [43] definition: “the information that individuals ought to have to do their job effectively, solve a problem satisfactorily or pursue a hobby or interest happily” (p.
For the purposes of this paper, we adopted this definition, as a pragmatic way of situating information needs in relation to broader life goals, namely parenting.

Research has highlighted that needs may be dormant, in which case an individual does not see that there are problems to resolve, or may be unexpressed, where the needs are recognized but an individual is unable to act upon them due to personal or situational constraints [43]. This has made it challenging to ascertain whether information systems and services are effectively meeting individual and community information needs. Some studies have focused on exploring information seeking processes and outputs as a means of understanding information needs [52][53], while others have taken more contextual or human-centred (affective, cognitive, and psychological) approaches [7][59]. Taylor’s [59] “cognitive stages of need” and Kuhlthau’s Information Search Process model [31] both emphasized the changing nature of needs – in the mind of the user and over time as information seekers learn more about a topic or information resource and adjust their goals.

The extent to which information needs must be results-focused, articulated, or recognized by the individual with the need has been a matter of debate and discussion, and there is growing recognition of the social aspects of information needs. Wilson, proposed that information needs should be viewed with respect to the “user’s life world,” “the totality of experiences centred upon the individual as an information user” [62]. The life world is comprised of different “sub-worlds” (e.g., home, school) that give rise to different needs based on the user’s role (e.g., parent, student) and contain different information sources, systems, and reference groups from which to draw information. However, it is unclear how these different life worlds may complement or be in conflict with one another, or the ways in which individual characteristics, such as age and gender, shape life worlds in different ways and affect information behaviour.

### 2.2 Information needs and parenting

The “life world” of parenting results in numerous information needs related to maternal and child health, baby feeding and weaning, sleeping, developmental milestones, researching products such as car seats and strollers, and so on [32][33].
Walker noted that parents inhabit a world of “being a parent” where they both consciously and unconsciously look for information that will underpin, support, and inform their parenting” [60]. McKenzie’s study of women pregnant with multiples demonstrated the range of ways in which expectant mothers “looked” for information. She identified connecting and interacting with information through active seeking (e.g. consulting a known source) or scanning (e.g., browsing parenting magazines), as well as through more passive means [37]. McKenzie’s participants described overhearing information and observing other parents (i.e., encountering) and being identified as someone “in need” of information (due to their pregnant bellies) by intermediaries, typically family and close friends [37][38].

McKenzie’s work gave nuance to understandings of parents’ information behaviours, exploring the ways in which information was both sought and thrust upon expectant mothers, and how information needs were internally motivated or imposed upon individuals by health professionals, service providers, family and friends, and even strangers [21][22]. Governments also participate in shaping information needs through policies and guidelines. For example, in Canada, national recommendations about infant feeding have been jointly developed by Health Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society, Dietitians of Canada, and the Breastfeeding Committee for Canada,¹ with additional recommendations from the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada and the Canadian Nurses Association and Canadian Association of Midwives². An individual parent may also be exposed to provincial, regional, and practice-level advice regarding infant feeding, all of which may or may not be in alignment. As a result, parenting takes place in a complex environment where mothers and fathers must negotiate (sometimes conflicting) information from many sources to arrive at a “best for me” decision [37]. These decisions are shaped not only by information, but also by a host of physical, structural, social, and affective factors. For

example, in the case of baby feeding, O’Brien et al. showed that mothers’ baby feeding decisions were mediated by physical challenges to breastfeeding, messages and support from health care and service providers, family and friends, the cost of baby formula, and childcare requirements that limited their agency in controlling their children’s diets [45].

As with all arenas of life, there is not always a direct relationship between parenting information needs, seeking and use; barriers and intervening factors influence who is positioned as needing information [37][22] and whether information will be sought or used. With respect to who is positioned as needing information, young mothers, are frequently targeted with information by health and social service agencies and providers [6][21][22][23][34][54]. These information interventions are part of ongoing surveillance of young mothers that is fed by stigma and the reinforcement of stereotypes about young women becoming mothers due to poor decision making or naiveté about sex and contraception [15][54][61]. Young fathers, on the other hand, are cast as absentee and uninvolved [15][24] and therefore not needing information. Conversely, parents’ sometimes encounter or receive information others perceive them as needing, although they themselves might not feel that they need it [22]. When it comes to whether young parents will actively seek and use information, fear of being judged by service providers, friends and family about parenting decisions (e.g. [32]) is a dominant factor. Parents of lower socioeconomic status [49][60] and young parents [22][23] may fear child apprehension, and be reluctant to ask for help, especially from “authority” figures.

Many communities are host to information-rich services for young mothers in the form of Young Parent Programs (YPPs). YPPs may be affiliated with a school or social service agency, and may combine high school education, daycare, and parenting information and support [20]. YPPs allow for active and passive information seeking [63]. For example, posters, books, classes, and guest speakers deliver formal information about a range of parenting topics (via educational programming), and information is sought, shared, and encountered informally through socializing with peers and service providers (via information grounds). Since people do not always have the ability to articulate information needs [4][61] or perceive that they need information [43], spaces such as YPPs are important for parenting information and social support
[16], and may increase young parents’ awareness of and access to formal (e.g., health professionals) and informal (e.g., peers) information sources [37]. While YPPs and other services provide a variety of information and resources on an array of topics to young mothers [22][23], young fathers do not typically have access to most of these programs³.

2.3 Information needs and young fathers

Young fathers are often portrayed as a “hard to reach” population [9][29]; yet, recent studies have argued that many services and supports are actually “hard to access” for young fathers [9]. As Harris and Dewdney noted in their study of women experiencing domestic violence, “accessibility” means different things to different individuals, and people encounter a host of geographical, physical, social, and psychological barriers to acquiring information [26]. In the past decade, several academic publications have analyzed experiences of young fathers (for examples, see [9][12]); however, most of these studies have focused on the benefits of establishing services and programs for young dads without asking them about their unique information needs or the barriers they face in acquiring information. Studies have been limited to interviews with service professionals [9] or small samples of young dads [3][13][27][55]. This limited evidence on the benefits of programs for young fathers feeds into a cycle in which the lack of programs results in challenges to recruiting young dads in order to discover more about their information needs and how to meet them.

Fathers often feel that they lack adequate information about childcare, especially compared with mothers [12]. Being on uneven footing with young mothers in this regard makes young dads uneasy about attending parenting groups where the majority of attendees are mothers [28]. Young fathers also report that having a close relationship with service providers is a vital precursor to attending services hosted by them and seeking their advice [29]. Young dads have expressed the desire to have parenting

³ Access to young parent programs, although beneficial for many young mothers, also has unintended consequences, such as increased surveillance and judgement of young mothers’ parenting values and decisions. For example, some young mothers feel judged by service providers at parenting programs for their feeding decisions (O’Brien et al., 2018).
services created with their specific circumstances and information needs in mind [28][29].

Yet, many young parent programs operate de facto as young mother programs [9], frequently excluding fathers. Where dads are able to access such programs, they report that they do not feel that their needs are adequately addressed [12][29]. This may be because the information needs and seeking styles of young fathers are different from those of young mothers. Young mothers are likely to routinize attending young mothering groups and services, while young fathers want a “one-stop shopping” service structure that provides assistance at the point of need and answers their “practical concerns” about employment, medical care, childcare, and so on [29][55]. Fathers also report feeling uncomfortable in the spaces that host young mothers’ services [12][22] and many would prefer to meet in traditionally masculine spaces such as sports centers [29].

It is inaccurate to assume that young fathers do not have information needs because they are “absentee,” and therefore do not need parenting information or support. It is also erroneous to suggest that they cannot articulate their own needs and proceed to design services for them without their input. Both of these approaches reinforce stereotypes about young fathers as being uninvolved or “hard to reach,” and the belief that they do not have information needs related to parenting. To date, young men’s perspectives of pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes and parenthood have been understudied, which perpetuates assumptions that young men are not concerned with such topics; a review of the literature of young men’s attitudes on these topics found that young men are interested in them, and that providing them with opportunities to explore these topics may build foundations for improved gender equity in young parenthood [32]. It is our conjecture that young fathers’ needs go unexpressed due to real and perceived barriers to acquiring information, and that gender plays a key role in this process.

One line of research that may indirectly shed light on the information needs and seeking of young fathers is help-seeking theory. Harris and Dewdney argued that “there is little distinction between help and information” if we understand “information as that which helps people progress through troublesome situations” [26]. Research on men’s help-seeking habits consistently shows that men as a group within western cultures,
regardless of age, ethnicity and social background, are frequently unwilling to seek help, advice or information when they experience problems [1]. As part of masculine gender role socialization, men tend to be hesitant to admit they need help and seek it out due to different societal expectations for men and women. Men and women learn socially and culturally acceptable gendered ways of being that become learned values and norms and affect every aspect of daily life – including parenting [1][2]. Some men experience “masculine gender-role conflict”, where ascribing to some socially and culturally gendered values and norms, such as self-reliance and resistance to help seeking, can have negative consequences on their health and well-being. By not seeking help and information when they need it, men put themselves—and potentially their families—at risk [1][8][17].

2.4 Current Study

Based on parenting, information behaviour, and help seeking literature, we explored the relationship between information needs, information acquisition, and barriers to information seeking encountered by young fathers. We explored how aspects of participants’ identities, including age (i.e., being young), gender (i.e., identifying as a man), and having children (i.e., being a father), interacted with and contributed to their unique information needs. In particular, gender contributed to the unique information needs of young fathers because we were able to compare the information needs – and the ability to resolve those needs – of young fathers and young mothers. Our study contributes to the conceptualization of information needs by demonstrating that being a young adult, identifying as a man, and being a parent creates information needs that are, in some ways similar to, but in many respects different from older parents or (young) mothers. Further, information needs must be resolved in the particular contexts that shape those identities and the values associated with them.

“Context” is a complex term that has garnered much attention in LIS. We argue that individual information needs, seeking and use cannot be studied independent of people’s environments (c.f., [37][51]). For the purposes of this analysis, we defined information context as the social, cultural, and institutional influences, technologies,
and power dynamics that shape people and their information behaviours [8]. Through our investigation of young fathers’ information contexts, we observed the ways in which they acquired or failed to acquire parenting information; in many cases, we found that they were largely excluded from information services and programs that could address explicit and latent information needs.

As an organizing framework, we used an ecological model to investigate information needs. Since information needs are influenced by social, individual and contextual factors [7][51][62], O’Brien and Greyson [46] drew on developmental psychology [5] to depict three nested layers of micro, meso, and macro level factors important to understanding information needs. Within the micro layers are individual characteristics, such as demographics, e.g., gender, geographical location, age, literacy level [43]. Relational factors (meso level) represent an individual’s personal and professional network. For instance, the notion of how social capital influences our availability of information is reflected at this level [51]. Lastly, macro level factors such as community norms and values, political and technological infrastructure, and so on, shape the user’s environment. These three layers are further influenced by both temporal and task (or situation) specific factors, which shape the goals and activities of individuals over time and in response to specific events or “problem situations” [4][59]. While this model allows us to identify and appreciate the myriad variables that can affect information needs, it does not explicate how these levels interact and “play out” in terms of influencing information seeking behaviours and the resolution of information needs. This study afforded the opportunity to investigate specific micro, meso, and macro level factors that impacted young fathers’ information needs, seeking, and acquisition.

In this way, we sought to disrupt typical models of information seeking, whereby we typically begin with a need that (once articulated) leads to information seeking and ends with a satisfactory resolution or compromise (e.g., Taylor, 1968). We did not wish to mitigate the utility and value of such models in information behaviour research. However, we felt it was necessary to embrace the complexity and messiness of information needs. We aimed to enhance traditional models by demonstrating the extent to which context impacts information needs, seeking, and acquisition. In addition, we
looked at our data through the lens of age, gender, and being a parent, and the ways in which these components of identity resulted in information exclusion.

This study was guided by the following research questions: How does gender, age and being a parent distinguish young fathers’ information needs from older parents and young mothers? What are young fathers’ personal (micro), relational (meso), and societal (macro) contexts, and how do these influence information seeking and acquisition?

3. Methods

This was a secondary analysis of data from the Young Parents Study, a longitudinal, ethnographic study of young parenting in British Columbia, Canada conducted from 2013 to 2018. The Young Parents Study was approved by the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) (Certificate #: H13-00415); approval to re-analyze the Young Parents Study data for the primary author’s thesis research was granted in 2017 (Certificate #: H17-02504).

3.1 Participants

Over the course of the broader study, 90 expecting or parenting young mothers (YM), 23 young fathers (YF), 2 socially significant others (e.g., parents of YM), and 26 service providers (youth care workers, daycare staff, teachers, health care professionals, and program coordinators) participated in one or more in-depth interviews. Our description of the demographic characteristics of the participants focuses primarily on the young fathers (Table 1). For a demographic description of the young mothers from this study, please see [41][42].

The young mothers recruited for the study were between the ages of 15-24. Young fathers were primarily referred to our study by their partners and ranged in age from 17 to 29 (with five of the twenty-six fathers recruited for the study age 25+). All the young fathers in the study identified as heterosexual men, with the exception of one young father who identified as a bisexual man.
Table 1: Self-Identified characteristics of the young father (YF) participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some High School (HS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Currently in HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduated HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some post-secondary (e.g., college)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants could choose more than one category when stating their ethnicity. Most of the young fathers participating in the study self-identified as Indigenous (n=14). Eight young fathers identified as white. Two young fathers identified as Black, and one identified as South Asian. Although most young mothers also self-identified as Indigenous or white, the ethnic identifications of young mothers were more varied and also included, for example, Filipina and Latina women.

Not all young parents responded to the question about educational attainment. The majority of young fathers (N=13, 56.5%) who did answer had not completed their high school education. Three fathers were in the process of completing their high school education and five fathers had graduated high school at the time of the initial interview. In contrast, many young mothers (N=39, 43.3%) were in high school at the time of intake. This disparity may be explained in part by the fact that many young fathers did not have access to the same flexible high school education programs as young mothers and/or by the emphasis on earning money as a sign of being “good” fathers, and by young fathers’ average age being 1-2 years older than young mothers, leading to them being further excluded from high school completion programs.

3.2 Recruitment Sites

Recruitment and data collection occurred in two British Columbian urban areas. The city of Prince George (PG) is located in the center of the province and has a population of around 86,622 people [57]. Approximately 13.2% (n=11,430) of PG’s citizens are 14-25 years old [57]. Greater Vancouver (GV) is a southern coastal metropolitan area...
with a population of around 2,463,431 people, making it home to more than half of British Columbia’s population [58]. In GV, 12.6% of citizens are ages 15-24 [58]. Research staff visited recruitment sites in GV fifty-five times and made nine two-week long visits to PG.

Participants were recruited at sites across these two regions, including alternative school programs providing high school education for young parents and childcare for their children, as well as programs for pregnancy outreach and youth support. Most young mothers and service providers were recruited via YPPs. Young fathers were more difficult to recruit and were often invited to the study by their partners (young mothers) through snowball sampling. Five young fathers, two of which were raising children as single fathers, were recruited via youth or father-focused programs operating in GV. In some cases, the children the young fathers were parenting were not their biological child; however, participants were actively engaged in fathering roles.

3.3 Data Collection

Over a period of five years, researchers interviewed young mothers and young fathers. Recruitment was rolling, and participants were invited back for subsequent interviews (up to nine interviews total) whenever possible. At each interview, data were collected using semi-structured open-ended questions, socio-demographic questionnaires, and naturalistic observation. The interviews lasted 30-120 minutes, were preceded by informed consent, and were audio recorded. Interviews covered a range of topics about young parents’ experiences, including access to services and information practices. Socio-demographic questionnaires were administered at the beginning or end of the interview, depending on the interviewer’s preference, and included questions about age, ethnicity, sexual identity, reproductive history, contraceptive practices, and access to services. Participants received a $30 cash honorarium per interview and were able review their interview transcripts.
3.4 Approach to Data Analysis

Interviews and interview fieldnotes were transcribed and checked for accuracy by two researchers, one of them being the first author. These two researchers coded transcripts and fieldnotes using NVivo 12 Pro qualitative analysis software [48]. Microsoft Excel was used to record quantitative data, such as demographics, obtained from questionnaires administered during interviews.

Researchers used a deductive codebook and Grounded Theory methods [14] to code interviews and field notes. The deductive codebook was drafted as coding commenced, and codes and their definitions were discussed and revised regularly to reflect the data. All authors, plus two other researchers on the Youth Sexual Health Team, were involved in developing the codebook. Codes were divided among the two previously mentioned researchers, and the primary author was responsible for open coding the three codes accessed for this analysis, and defined in Table 2 below: “Parenting Support,” “Information Behaviours/Practices” and “Gender Roles, Norms, and Expectations.” In preparation for this analysis, the themes reflected in these codes were connected through theoretical coding [14]. This was done by utilizing cross-coding (e.g., applying several codes to a certain passage). For example, some passages coded under “Parenting Support” were also cross-coded with the “Information Behaviours/Practices” category. Both researchers responsible for coding also wrote annotations to explain their coding and cross-coding decisions for particularly complex passages. The aggregated results from the three codes were selectively coded [14] to organize data about young fathers’ experiences, including barriers to accessing services. This process gave rise to a specific examination of the experiences of young fathers that were both self-reported and informed by conversations with young mothers and service providers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Support</td>
<td>Descriptions of support and assistance for young (expecting) parents, received, or given. Includes both formal (e.g.,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Behaviours/ Practices</td>
<td>Discussions about information needs (met or unmet); seeking information (for self or others); encountering information (&quot;bumping into&quot; information - e.g., bus ads, Facebook feed); avoiding information (e.g., throwing away, tuning out, avoiding a source); assessing information (e.g., how good, reliable, useful, accurate); or sharing information with others (in person or online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Roles, Norms, and Expectations</td>
<td>Discussions related to gender roles, norms, and expectations for the self and others. Includes discussions about conforming and non-conforming gender roles and expectations for all genders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Findings

Young fathers in this study had both expressed and unexpressed information needs. Common needs expressed by fathers of babies included (but were not limited to) interpreting and following feeding guidelines and recommendations, as well as encouraging their growing infants to achieve developmental milestones, such as learning how to crawl and walk. Like other fathers, young fathers needed to know how to support their partners during labour and delivery, but were often ill prepared to do so. Young father Bear reported being unable to recognize his partner was in labour, and Thomas had inaccurate information about the duration of labour and delivery because his knowledge was drawn from television programs. When popular media are the primary way in which young fathers learn about pregnancy, birth and parenting, they may have misconceptions, since representations of these subjects are dramatized and not portrayed accurately [36].

While many young dads indicated that mass media were often their first and sometimes only exposure to such topics, others did have some opportunity to attend

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4 All the identities of study participants quoted in this paper are protected by pseudonyms that participants chose for themselves.
prenatal and parenting classes. Interviewees indicated that they did not have specific questions going into the classes, but they learned a lot about parenting by attending them. Jim described the prenatal class he attended with his partner as a rich learning environment, which provided him with information he had not realized he needed:

Like, it literally covered all the bases, like, health, what’s afterwards, different baby cries and stuff like that. Like, uhm, how to breastfeed, how to do this uhm, during a pregnancy, like, all those things, like, so it was really, really helpful, thankfully. [...] And I didn’t even want to go to it at first ‘cause I was, like, “Oh, I know, I’ll figure it out.” But, yeah, no, it was really helpful.

A common theme highlighted in our interviews with Jim and other young fathers was the issue of not knowing what one doesn’t know, a central feature of information needs research.

Inherent in the interviews with young fathers was the sentiment expressed by Jim that one needed to “figure it out” or “suck it up” when it came to acquiring or doing without information, which we do not disambiguate from “help” or “support” in this study. During the process of data analysis our attention turned quickly from debating whether or not young fathers had information needs and what those were, to probing why and how young fathers’ information needs were deferred, unmet or remained unexpressed. We observed that young fathers shared in the stigma experienced by young mothers as early aged parents, but also contended with gender role socialization, the socially and culturally acceptable ways people learn to exhibit their gender [1], that affected every aspect of their daily lives.

In the following sections we presented more detailed findings on how micro level factors (age and gender) formed young fathers’ limited information worlds, and how this affected their relationships with their partners and co-parenting young mothers (meso level). Finally, we examined young fathers’ access to young parent programs and services (macro level) to demonstrate the ways in which they explicitly and implicitly excluded young fathers. The micro, meso, and macro level “layers of exclusion” form the context in which young fathers’ seek or fail to seek information or help, reinforce stigma, and contribute to the rhetoric of hard to reach, uninvolved fatherhood.
4.1 *Micro level – Personal characteristics*

Personal characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, social class, and parenting and relationship statuses affected young fathers’ information needs and seeking behaviours. During interviews, young fathers expressed that pervasive “absentee” stereotypes often resulted in inequitable access to parenting support and information. Young fathers demonstrated the ways in which their identities as young fathers – and in some cases as non-White, lower income individuals – affected their access to information and services.

Saul was a young father who described himself as being of mixed Indigenous and European immigrant decent and was co-parenting with his girlfriend. Saul moved to Greater Vancouver (GV) with his family from a small town in British Columbia, where “we had a social worker that was like, at our house everyday just to see if [my daughter] was like, still breathing kind of thing. Like, she thought we were gonna, you know, like, do something to [my daughter] or not know how to feed her.” Saul described feeling over-surveilled and stigmatized by this social worker, and he described that this overbearing and prejudicial treatment reflected a combination of stigmas associated with his young age (and his partners’ young age), their Indigenous identities, and their low socio-economic status.

Among the young fathers in our sample, gender was a major factor influencing how comfortable young fathers felt accessing parenting information and support services. Markus, a young single father, felt excluded from resources available for young mothers. His former partner received the universal childcare benefit, even though he was the full-time caregiver of their children. Markus perceived that many services and programs assumed that the primary caregiver was the mother, and gave preferential treatment to mothers. Markus said that he “would never dream” of using his single-parent status to look for additional assistance or advice, and “even if I tried to, I would most likely get the response of ‘Well, you’re a dad. Deal with it.’ Instead of getting

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5 The universal childcare benefit was a taxable monthly payment given to “eligible families to help them with the cost of raising children under 18 years of age” (Government of Canada, 2018). On July 1, 2016, the universal childcare benefit was replaced by the Canada child benefit, which is “tax free” (Government of Canada, 2018).
sympathy, they’ll be like, ‘Why are you different from me?’” Markus articulated that “single dads don’t tell anyone they’re a single dad” [because] there’s nothing to be gained by telling people about it [because] [n]othing’s available.” Markus felt that this was a cycle: many young dads did not discuss their needs as parents with others, and therefore there were fewer information resources and supports available to them because their needs were not obvious.

If information seeking is one means of understanding information needs [42][43], then young fathers’ (lack of) information seeking and acquisition communicated a great deal about met and unmet information needs. As young dad Jim phrased it, for dads “there’s no really, like, book- or, you know, something to, like, look at and be, like, ‘Okay, there’s this, and this is that.’” Although there are many resources for prospective parents, our previous analysis has shown that the gendered nature of parenting books and online forums commonly excludes fathers, and particularly young fathers [41].

Because of pervasive stereotypes about young fathers being irresponsible and absent from the lives of their children [15], many young fathers felt that expressing their need for information may incur more judgment than assistance. Perceived prejudice against young dads, combined with pressures to adhere to traditional masculine gender norms of self-reliance [25], often dissuaded young fathers from expressing their information needs. As a result, many young fathers lived and parented with unexpressed – and unaddressed – information needs. Darren, a young father, said he knew of a few resources he could direct young mothers to, such as a social worker. However, when asked where he would direct a young dad, Darren said he would tell him to “suck it up” because there is nothing available for young fathers.

4.2 Meso level – Relationships with Young Mothers

Young fathers’ relationships with others, particularly with young mothers, framed their parenting experiences. Young fathers either avoided or missed out on information, or relied heavily on their personal networks (i.e., family members, friends with children, internet-based forums) to learn parenting techniques and answer parenting questions. Particularly salient was that young mothers often acted as information “intermediaries”
for young fathers by sharing information they acquired [1][38], and this created challenges both in terms of the relationships between co-parents and for young fathers’ agency as parents and engagement in the help seeking process.

Parenting couple Clinton and Payton were interviewed together. According to the interviewer’s field notes:

Clinton occasionally looked to Payton for clarification on certain parenting details (e.g., how long their baby was sick). […] For example, when he asked Payton for clarification about certain issues, she told [the interviewer], “He’s just the father. What do you expect?” and Clinton joked, “I don’t know nothing.”

Clinton’s admission that he had limited information about parenting reinforced his partner as a reliable and convenient source of that information when he needed it. Information flow in such relationships was not bi-directional though; young mothers in our study rarely conveyed that they similarly relied on their partners as important sources of parenting information.

By relying on their (sometimes former) partners for parenting information, young fathers received much parenting information “by proxy,” a passive form of information seeking [38]. However, in their descriptions of information seeking situations, young fathers sometimes presented themselves as “actively seeking,” which involved retrieving information through an identified source [38], but later in the narrative, it became apparent that they received the information through their partners. For example, Victor, a young father from GV, told interviewers that he sometimes called the 8-1-1 helpline when he had questions. When asked how he found out about this service, Victor said, “Uh, [my girlfriend] calls them all the time when she panics.” The interviewer asked Victor if he also called the line himself, and Victor responded, “Uh no, like, she sometimes just passes me on the phone and then I ask the questions and stuff, yeah.” Victor framed his partner’s information seeking through the phone line as his own, but most of the information he received from the 8-1-1 helpline was mediated, or at least initiated, by his partner. Young mothers had frequent information exchanges

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6 8-1-1 is a free phone line run by HealthLink BC (part of the Ministry of Health) that provides health information and advice (Government of B.C., 2017).
with health professionals, other young parents, and so on, and tended to be the default seekers and holders of information about pregnancy and parenting. As such, young dads often adopted the information seeking behaviours of their partners as their own.

Because young mothers were set up to be the “parenting expert” within the dyads, young mothers also felt the consequences of their partners’ unaddressed information needs. Jade, one young mother from Prince George (PG) whose partner wanted to be more involved in the care of their baby, said that the imbalance between the information resources young mothers and young fathers receive was unfair.

Jade felt she had to be the primary caregiver for their child since her partner did not have enough information to take on some of the responsibilities. Because Jade was eligible to attend the local YPP (her partner was not), she was supported as a mother through its on-site daycare, parenting groups, and regular classroom visits by public health nurses. While this provided her with more opportunities to develop her parenting skills, she also took on more of the childcare responsibilities in their relationship. By contrast, Jade’s partner had few such opportunities to develop parenting skills. Jade felt that if there were more programs and services for young fathers, perhaps her partner would have been able to take their child to school or to parenting groups with him.

Jade’s experiences showed that not supporting young fathers translated into decreased support for them as a parenting couple.

Another gender-based distinction we observed in the data was how young parents identified and utilized relational information sources. While young mothers and fathers in our study both drew upon family and friends as information sources, young mothers were more likely to ask direct questions of these individuals; young fathers preferred more passive information acquisition through informal conversations or observation, rather than directly asking for help. For example, Victor often acquired information from his father, who was a parent of nine children, through casual conversations over
Skype. Victor recalled an instance when his father advised him to “put extra clothes on
the baby [because] it’s too cold over there.” Ryan, a single young father from GV,
identified his mother as someone who shaped his parenting style and someone he would
go to for advice, but he also told the interview: “I just think I do kind of whatever feels
right, yeah. [Pause] And if it goes over well, then I’ll do it again or it doesn’t go over
well, then I’ll try something else,” which indicated that he relied on himself and his
learning as a primary information source. Further, while peers were important to both
groups, young mothers had more interactions with other young mothers, while young
fathers had limited opportunities to exchange information with other dads, and this
extended into online information seeking and support, such as through Facebook groups
formed as a result of young mothers’ in-person interactions.

Some young fathers, such as Mike, admitted to feeling uncomfortable about reaching
out for parenting advice or support, and told interviewers, “I’m pretty shy, right. I don’t
like talking to new people. […] I usually just keep to myself unless I’m spoken to.” For
some young fathers, their reluctance to seek information and admit that they need
assistance would run counter to masculine gender values of self-reliance. Young fathers
who found it difficult to disclose that they needed help or information relied on what
they are able to glean from discussions with their partners or – especially if they were
single parents – family members; many young fathers who could not rely on (former)
partners or family members to act as information intermediaries were subject to a
vacuum.

4.3 Macro level – Young Parent Programs and Services

Young mothers in our study had regular access to young parent programs and
services, but young fathers had limited or no access to these kinds of resources. This
meant that mothers were able to resolve many parenting information needs by attending
programs while fathers were frequently left with unmet information needs. This
difference may have been particularly salient in filling unrecognized or unarticulated
information needs, as regular parenting skills content was woven into informal and
educational programming, which enabled both passive and active information seeking
and exchange. In this section, we address access to parenting information and services from the perspective of young fathers and discuss young father’s self-described comfort levels for engaging with formal programming and service providers.

Access to parenting information services varied across recruitment sites. Service providers articulated the challenge of needing to serve their current population of mothers, yet acknowledged that by doing so, they risked alienating fathers. In PG, there were no services designed for young fathers and none of the YPPs explicitly welcomed or made programming accessible for dads. Ruby, a PG service provider, said:

[T]here really isn’t anything put in place. You know, if they’re committed, I’m sure they could access [a parenting support group] and all those other things right, too. But for the most part, there isn’t, like, support groups. […] Boys just don’t have the same support. […] It’s almost non-existent, right? […] The dads just had no opportunity unless they were with that partner. If they weren’t with that partner, they really had no opportunity to parent and to be part of that kid’s life.

Ruby recognized that many young fathers had unmet information needs, in part due to the fact that in her city young fathers were not eligible to attend the YPP. In addition to not being welcome at parenting services, young fathers also faced stigma and their ability to parent was often questioned by professionals and other authority figures. One young father, Bishop Dennis, said that he preferred to “just [stay] home and read books, [look] it up on the Internet” in order to avoid prejudice against him or his parenting capabilities from others. It is probable that because Bishop Dennis had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and was interested in the subject from a parenting perspective, he feared encountering stigma and judgement if he expressed his information need on this sensitive topic publicly. Ruby said that in her community, she encountered stereotypes about young men’s ability to parent, that “there’s really kind of that assumption that the boys can’t do it”.

In GV, many YPPs and young parent services welcomed young fathers to attend, but the majority of attendees were mothers. Outside metropolitan Vancouver, one parenting service catered primarily to young fathers and provided regularly scheduled programming, which was well attended. A few young dads in our sample attended one-time group sessions on parenting for fathers and found them to be rich learning
opportunities. However, many of these groups were one-time-only with no long-term funding to sustain or expand them. Vince, a service provider working at a youth center in PG, recalled helping one young father:

*We had a family – young man here with his son that was coming here for... almost a year and we were teaching them – helping them – teaching him how to parent and getting him through the welfare system and trying to get him the supports to surround him so that he could support his son. Eventually he’s gotten a job and he’s working now and off of the [welfare] system but there were no supports for him anywhere other than us helping him.*

Because one-time-only supports were customized and created only when an information need was explicitly stated, young fathers who could not articulate parenting information needs to service providers or self-advocate for increased support did not have those needs addressed. Since few supports existed for young fathers, Vince said he and other workers at his organization “try and do our best to help that youth get what they need,” but these supports were not sustainable because the youth center did not have a mandate to assist YFs specifically. Many organizations had a mandate to help parenting women (who were regarded as having a greater service need than parenting men), and thus sustain services and programs with an “intensive focus on young mothers” [22].

Many of the professions working with young parents (i.e., midwives, public health nurses, teachers) were female-dominated. Of the 26 service providers interviewed over the course of the study, only three identified as men⁷. Many of the service providers who identified as men were acutely aware that the clientele of young parent programs and services were predominately women. Grant, one of the two men who led a successful program for young fathers in GV, told the interviewer that when they encountered young mothers in the shared service space, they took the role of modelling fatherhood to them seriously.

*I make a point every week or twice a week of going in there and laying on the floor and playing with the kids in front of the moms so they can see, “Hey, the

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⁷ Two other men service providers were observed in their roles as teachers at a YPP where interviewers recruited young parents to the study, but these two service providers were not interviewed for the study.
dads, they actually enjoy this." [...] I’m role modelling to mom that, ‘Hey, it’s important for dads to have – and males to have good healthy relationships with these kids and here’s some of the things you can expect from your partner.’"

By modelling involved parenting behaviours, Grant was trying to reduce the stereotype that men were disinterested in parenting while simultaneously empowering the young mothers to involve the fathers of their children in parenting. Based on his experience with both young mother and young father programs, Grant felt that service providers’ efforts to better include young fathers in young parent programs and services would dramatically increase their access to parenting information.

*I actually just want all the different service providers out there to do a better job of making dads feel comfortable, making dads feel like they’re supposed to be there and that they’re safe when they’re there. [...] And it’s really not massive changes that need to happen. Like, it’s actually just, like, simple tweaks really about how to make dads feel like they’re wanted and expected and it’s not like these massive renovations that have to happen at programs.*

In addition to the unavailability of services and programs specifically designed for or inclusive of young fathers, or service providers who are acutely aware of the challenges young fathers face to meeting their information needs, some young dads experienced systemic barriers. Many parenting programs were hosted during daytime working hours, placing program attendance in opposition with daytime work hours. As previously discussed, some young dads were forced to decide between attending a parenting program and going to work. This was the case for Bear, a young father from PG. Instead of supporting him as a father to continue in the program, his social worker told him that only one parent – the mother – needed to attend. Not only did Bear miss out on valuable parenting information and support by not attending the program, but he did not get time with his children, who were in foster care at the time of the interview. He said that because his partner went to the parenting program, she “gets to go with her boys and she gets extra two days with them a week.” By scheduling programs at times during weekday working hours and having limited or no alternative scheduling on evenings or weekends, many working young fathers could not attend information-rich parenting programs.
Many young fathers felt that parenting groups composed primarily of mothers embodied a “mother-focused” culture. Some young fathers, like Thomas, “...[felt] weird sometimes, like, ‘cause a lot of these groups I [would] go to, it’s just, like, mothers and I [was], like, the only dad there.” However, Thomas overcame those awkward feelings because he wanted to learn parenting skills. Other fathers, like Markus, admitted that he tried attending “a group that was mostly young moms,” once but did not continue attending; he felt that many of the topics discussed among the group came from a mother’s perspective and that his experiences were not represented adequately. He said that many of the young mothers in the group gave each other advice on how to receive more supports, such as the universal childcare benefit, by appealing to gender-specific experiences as mothering women. Markus did not feel he had access to many of the supports the young mothers at the group were describing, which made him feel further isolated as a parent.

Some service providers, such as Mavis – who helped host young mothers’ programming – described young fathers’ information needs as neglected by parenting services because in addition to a dedicated YPP for young mothers, she knew that PG had “a mother’s recovery group and they have a grandparents raising grandkids group. I’m not sure if they have anything specific to dads. […] [A]nything for young dads, just about, is missing.” Ruby, another service provider working in that community, acknowledged that many services created exceptions for young mothers with extenuating circumstances, and even tailored effective solutions and resources for them; however, she said she’s “never seen that offered to a boy,” no matter his situation.

In summary, the majority of young fathers interviewed did not have access to consistent parenting services and resources. Of the young fathers who found and attended parenting programs, issues of discomfort due to systemic barriers and representation were expressed. In this sense, many young parent services were actually young mother services [9], because of their gendered policies, service hours, location, and culture, which created barriers to information access for young fathers. Young dads found that parenting programs targeting young mothers did not address their information needs or provide opportunities for incidental information acquisition to point to information they did not know they needed.
5. Discussion

Gender influenced young fathers’ information life world and played out in personal, relational and community contexts. We found that at the macro level, young parent services, although possibly best equipped to meet young parents’ information needs, were frequently unavailable to young dads due to policies restricting their attendance, inconvenient hours of operation, and exclusionary cultures at the programs. The majority of young fathers in our sample were unable to attend young parent services but were knowledgeable about them through their co-parents and partners. As a result, young fathers frequently relied on the mothers of their children for parenting information, who in turn acted as information intermediaries, a role that conveyed both privilege and burden. This dependency contributed to unequal parenting dynamics between mothers and fathers. Figure 1 summarizes the macro and meso level factors of young fathers’ information contexts in this study that formed the basis of exclusion from parenting information and experiences.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1. The excluded information contexts of young fathers

As a result of stereotypes and stigma, social assistance and other programs that overlooked the needs of young fathers, study participants often felt that there was “nothing available” for them. Markus’ reflection that dads have to “deal with it” and
Darren’s advice to other young fathers to “suck it up” were examples of “masculine gender-role conflict,” where adherence to traditional gender norms and values may lead to negative outcomes, including many young dads avoiding the admission that they needed assistance or information [1]. Markus’ and Darren’s responses bolstered their appearance as being self-reliant – which Harris [25] described as one of twenty-four “gender-role messages” that are “standards for appropriate male behaviour.” However, presenting themselves as self-reliant also prevented them from seeking and obtaining the parenting information and support they needed. Hearing messages about masculine self-reliance, like Markus did, or perpetuating these messages, like Darren did, reinforced masculine norms about avoiding help-seeking. Such messages may have made young fathers uncomfortable asking services to begin providing the help and information they needed in modes that better suited their needs and schedules, so these young dads could confidently engage as more actively involved and informed parents with their children.

The culpability of perpetuating counter-productive ideals of traditional masculinity does not lie with young fathers, however. Markus, Darren and other young fathers were trying to make sense of a system that barred them from accessing needed resources and services. Parenting programs and services were a macro level influence on young fathers’ information needs, which often excluded them due to gender-biased policies and attitudes. Many young parent programs and services alienated young fathers through gendered policies, hours of operation, and programming. Previous research has also found that some parenting services and organizations perpetuate exclusionary messages in the information documents they display and distribute, such as posters, books and pamphlets [41], which increases the stigma young fathers already experience from authority figures and society in general.

Due to their exclusion from parenting services and programs, young fathers often relied on information available via meso level actors, such as intermediaries like their (former) partners, in part because young mothers were better connected to parenting resources. In an effort to maintain their agency and reframe their information seeking to adhere to masculine norms of control and empowerment, many young fathers framed their passive reception of information through their partners as active seeking (e.g., Victor describing his partner’s calls to the 8-1-1 helpline as his own). Conflating their
information behaviours with those of their partners also indicated that some young parent dyads addressed their information needs and sought information collaboratively. Nevertheless, young mothers had greater access to information resources, which meant young fathers often relied on them for information, and preserved a relationship in which information exchanges were not bi-directional. The unmet information needs of young fathers created inequities of parenting knowledge between partners and intensified the gendered practice of the mother being the primary caregiver for a child.

Many of the pregnancy and parenting services and programs available to young parents – mostly young mothers – were led by women service providers. Other scholars have referenced the support mothers received from women service providers, such as midwives, over the course of their pregnancy, during birth and during the early stages of parenthood [39][64]. They found that the support pregnant and parenting women received from women service providers was invaluable, yet there was also an underlying assumption that the service providers were present primarily for the mothers and their information needs, rather than those of both parents. The relationships forged between young mothers and women service providers, which were based on common understandings of gendered experiences, fostered fluid information exchanges [40]. In such cases in our study, young fathers were often excluded, and this further encouraged young fathers to satisfy their information needs by proxy through young mothers.

Young fathers’ reliance on young mothers to be information intermediaries was especially unproductive when young parents did not have a relationship that fostered information exchanges; for example, some young parents who had broken up were no longer on comfortable speaking terms. In those cases, the information intermediary relationship between young parents deteriorated and left many young fathers further isolated as parents.

Unlike the information seeking practices of pregnant women described by McKenzie [38], who had access to both social and professional information intermediaries, young fathers were often not well-connected with services and could only rely on social intermediaries such as their partners, family members and other young fathers, when such supports were present in their lives. They usually connected with the parenting information provided by professionals, such as public health nurses and daycare providers by proxy via their (former) partners.
Because norms and values of masculinity are often at odds with seeking help and information, men – particularly younger men who may encounter additional pressures to adhere to and perform their masculinity while they are maturing and navigating through puberty – may find it challenging to admit that they need help or information to address their information needs [1][44]. In addition to grappling with masculine norms of self-reliance which may dissuade men from seeking help and information, young fathers also contended with additional stigma as early age parents. As one of the service providers, Ruby, said in her interview, a young father was often not trusted “to be an effective parent.” Because young fathers were stereotyped as emotionally volatile, irresponsible and absent from their children’s lives [15], the young dads in our study may have been apprehensive to ask parenting questions, especially in contexts where they and their parenting competency may have been judged by others.

6. Conclusion

This article was one of the first attempts to understand the information contexts of young fathers and their gendered experiences of needing information. This analysis has a number of limitations, which should be addressed in further research on young fathers and their information contexts. First, the study sample of young fathers was small and geographically constrained to two Canadian cities in the same province, limiting the generalizability of findings. Although young fathers were underrepresented in the study sample (in part due to their exclusion from several of the services where participants were recruited), those who were interviewed expressed deferred and unresolved information needs. Second, young mothers participating in the study recruited a majority of the young fathers. Since the young mothers recruited for the study were connected with the services through which recruitment occurred, the young fathers in the study were aware of the programming available to young mothers. This insight may have influenced young fathers’ perspectives about parenting resources and services and heightened their sense of exclusion.

This work makes several important contributions to the study of information needs. First, we explored how young fathers’ identities influenced information needs, and how
actors (i.e., young fathers) in specific social contexts are (un)able to resolve those needs. This paper analyzed the unique information needs of young, parenting men with special attention paid to the way gender influenced their needs and the barriers they encountered to obtaining information and support. Next, by applying the ecological model of information needs [46], we were able to show that young fathers’ information contexts were complex and influenced by micro, meso, and macro level factors. This ecological model could be used to enhance more linear, traditional models of information needs, seeking and use by enabling researchers and practitioners to better understand the context in which target populations are acquiring information. By exploring a level (e.g., micro) or variables within several of the levels, as we have done in this study, a more holistic picture of how context affects information behaviour emerged, specifically with respect to how information needs were deferred or unresolved.

Our use of the ecological model points to several pragmatic outcomes for addressing the parenting information needs of your fathers. At the micro level, negative consequences of masculine gender norms complicated young fathers’ motivations and modes to seek help or information. Efforts by information and service providers could be made to counter the vulnerability young men feel about accessing resources. This could be accomplished through the design of information objects, services and programs that are more aligned with the ways in which they prefer to engage with parenting information. At the meso level, we found that young fathers often relied on young mothers to serve as information intermediaries because mothers had better access to parenting services and resources and passed along information to their partners. However, single young fathers have scarce access to parenting services and must navigate parenting without a partner acting as an information intermediary. The unbalanced information needs of young mothers and young fathers added strain to parenting dynamics, especially when young mothers performed the bulk of childcare responsibilities because they were more informed about parenting. Services and programs that focus on and are accessible to young parenting couples could empower young men and create greater balance within the co-parenting dynamic. At the macro level, it is important for organizations to consider whether there are any marginalized groups within their target populations who do not have their information needs met
through interventions or have difficulties accessing services. In this study, many service
providers were aware of this and sought to mitigate this as best they could in their front
line roles, but the challenges were more systemic. Developing formal supports for
young fathers would boost parenting confidence and knowledge and alleviate dads’
reliance on young mothers as primary childcare providers and information
intermediaries. By creating spaces that are father-friendly, available at times and
locations that correspond with dads’ other commitments and welcoming of fathers’
needs and perspectives, parenting services could build a network of engaged young
fathers. For young families to prosper, all members need to be engaged; supporting
young fathers equates to supporting young families.

In this study, we articulated that young fathers have many information needs in
common with older parents and young mothers. However, by applying the ecological
framework to analyze the ways in which young fathers (fail to) acquire information, we
demonstrated that articulating and seeking information to satisfy information needs is
not the same for this population. In this way, it is inadequate to focus solely on
information needs without considering the ways in which personal, relational and socio-
structural factors contribute to people deferring information seeking or failing to ask
for help. Thus, it is not only about creating services to meet the needs of young fathers;
in this case, it is important to take into consideration the mode of delivery. In this study,
young fathers seem to prefer more social, yet passive ways of exchanging and receiving
information, which means that programs that focus on incidental information
acquisition may be more successful than initiatives that demand active seeking (e.g.,
websites or specific programming targeted explicitly at young fathers). However, it is
also essential to address the systemic biases that portray young fathers as self-sufficient,
absentee, or unlikely to benefit from such resources. This cannot be done by targeting
young men alone, as the life world of young fathers are heavily influenced by young
mothers as well as health and social service professionals.
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