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## DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**Opening up the gendered box on the right to choose: young men's experiences and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives**

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**Opening up the gendered box on the right to  
choose – Young men's experiences and  
decision-making in relation to an unintended  
pregnancy in their lives.**

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## ABSTRACT

National Government and transnational organisations strategies to reduce adolescent pregnancy have been largely gender neutral or targeted at young women (United Nations (UN), 2006; World Health Organisation (WHO) 2011; WHO, 2020). Within this global policy initiative to reduce unintended pregnancies, however, organisations such as the WHO and the UN recognise that adolescent men's involvement in decisions in relation to preventing and dealing with unintended pregnancies should be considered in clinical practice, health promotion and sexual health education. Today, there is a considerable breadth of research on men and boys – particularly on health, sexuality and masculinities - which establishes that their meaningful participation in gender equality produces positive changes in their attitudes, perceptions and behaviours (Kato-Wallace et al., 2016).

Within this global policy initiative to reduce unintended pregnancies, much of the research has tended to focus on how women perceive the role of men in adolescent pregnancy and pregnancy decision-making and how these views define and constrain women's decision-making. While this research identifies the influential role of men in women's decision-making, little is known about men's own experiences of pregnancy resolution decision-making.

This research sought to address this gap by exploring young men's experiences and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives, whatever the outcome was. A qualitative approach was applied, using semi-structured interviews

with ten young men aged 16-24 years. This thesis provides an insight into how young men experience an unintended pregnancy in their lives, and reflects on what discourses, ideologies and common-sense understandings of ‘maleness’ were informing or influencing these young men’s thinking. Using Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities (CSM) as a theoretical framework, the data suggests that young men’s understandings of unintended pregnancy and their role in decision-making is informed by dominant and emerging notions of masculinity and wider societal and cultural norms in the region. The notions of masculinity and responsibility that young men draw on are to a greater or lesser extent shaped by norms “values” that are reflective of their ethno-religious cultural and class backgrounds.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

NI: Northern Ireland

USA: United States of America

UK: United Kingdom

MP: Member of Parliament

ROI: Republic of Ireland

ESRC: Economic and Social Research Council

SDLP: Social Democratic Labour Party

CEDAW: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

ICESCR: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

ICCPR: Committee on Civil and Political Rights

ECHR: European Court of Human Rights

WHO: World Health Organisation

UN: United Nations

UNDESA: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

FPA: Family Planning Association

NISRA: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

DUP: Democratic Unionist Party

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

MMAT: Mixed Methods Assessment Tool

RSE: Relationship and Sex Education

BPAS: British Pregnancy Advice Service

SCCY: Street Connected Children and Youth

CSM: Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities

# **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **Chapter Overview**

The aim of this research is to explore the lived experiences of young men who have been involved in an unintended pregnancy. It also seeks to provide insights into the decision-making processes of young men in relation to an unintended pregnancy, whatever the outcome of that pregnancy was. Chapter one of this thesis introduces the background to and the starting point of this study, locating the study within the unique context of Northern Ireland (NI). Chapter one concludes by explaining the structure of this thesis. First, it is important to note that the ambiguity, cultural dependence, and interchangeability of terminology surrounding adolescence, youth, and teenage years has been documented (Sunitha and Gururaj, 2014; WHO, 2014; UNDESA, 2016). Consequently, the participants in this study are aged 18-24, and I focus on the 10-24 years age group within the literature review, I use the terms ‘teenage men’/‘teenage women’, ‘adolescent men’/‘adolescent women’ and ‘young men’/‘young women’ interchangeably throughout this thesis.

## **Defining an Unintended Pregnancy**

The aim of this research is to explore young men’s experiences and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives. Therefore, it is important to define and contextualise unintended pregnancy. The Guttmacher Institute has defined an unintended pregnancy as one that occurred when a woman wanted to become pregnant in the future but not at the time she became pregnant or one that occurred when she did not want to become pregnant then or at any time in the future (Guttmacher Institute,

2019). Pregnancy intention is a complex concept to measure, as intention changes over time, it is subject to bias and can be impacted by cultural norms and beliefs. For the purpose of this research, an unintended pregnancy is defined as a pregnancy that was either unwanted or mistimed at conception.

## **Background**

Teenage pregnancy rates in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) remain the highest in the developed world and the reduction of unintended pregnancy is resolutely on the international policy agenda (Lawlor and Shaw, 2004; Finer and Zolna, 2011; Rudoe, 2014). Universally, adolescent pregnancy is regarded as a major contributor to maternal and child mortality as well as feeding into a cycle of ill health and poverty (Beers and Hollo, 2009; Harden et al., 2009; Public Health England 2018). Some academics recognise that not every adolescent pregnancy results in negative outcomes; instead, it can be a positive experience for both mother and child (Phoenix, 1991; Schofield, 1994; Bell et al., 2004; Bonell, 2004; Seamark and Lings, 2004; Duncan, Edwards and Alexander, 2010; Kavanaugh et al., 2017). Even for teenage mothers who had been in care ‘the birth of a child signifies a remarkable turning point’ (Barn and Mantovani, 2007: p.239). However, the dominant theme within the research literature is that adolescent pregnancy results in negative health, (Moffitt, 2002; Chen et al., 2007) emotional, (Figueirido, Pacheco and Costa, 2007) social (Ermisch, 2003; Cook and Cameron, 2015) and economic outcomes (Berrington et al., 2005; Imamura et al., 2007; Ashcraft, Fernandez-Val and Lang, 2013). Evidence has highlighted how such adverse outcomes remain after adjusting for pre-existing social, economic, and health problems (Harden et al., 2009). In a speech to Parliament in April

2016, Sharon Hodgson Member of Parliament (MP), the Shadow Minister for Public Health highlighted the struggles and consequences for many teenage mothers. She said;

*“The fact that 21% of women between 16 and 18 who are not in education, employment or training are teenage mothers shows that teenage pregnancy is not only a cause but a consequence of the educational and health inequalities in our society”*

(Hansard, 2016).

Despite a fall in the overall rate of pregnancy in recent years the UK still has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe (Family Planning Association, 2014). In Northern Ireland, the birth rate to teenage mothers per 1000 of the female population aged 13-19 years in 2014 was 10.3 per 1000 young women (a total of 839 births) (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, NISRA, 2015). However, there is a marked difference in the birth rates to teenage mothers across the most and least deprived areas. In 2016, the under 20 teenage birth rate in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland was almost six times the rate in the least deprived (Department of Health, 2018). While the majority of Northern Irish women having abortions at UK clinics are between the ages of 20-24, in 2014, 12.8% of women from Northern Ireland having legal abortions in England were under the age of 20 (Family Planning Association, 2014).

More generally, lack of access to abortion care in Northern Ireland has resulted in 4,652

women and girls travelling to England in order to access these services between 2010 and 2014 (The Detail, 2015). However, this is not the true total as not all women give their home addresses to clinics, others may travel to other countries for treatments and some resort to ending their pregnancies by ordering abortion pills online (Aiken et al., 2019). In contrast to these figures, just 12 legal terminations of pregnancy were carried out in Northern Ireland's hospitals in 2018 (Department of Health, 2019).

As it is young women who undergo pregnancy, the focus on their experiences in this data is understandable. Lohan et al's (2010) systematic review highlighted a long-standing gender bias in academic and policy research on adolescent pregnancy, which has led to the silencing of young men's perspectives. Academics have highlighted how research on men's roles, as perceived by women, needs to be supplemented by research that focuses exclusively on men's perspectives, in an attempt to understand men as "being reproductive in their own right" (Inhorn et al., 2009: p.3). Research on unintended pregnancy has focused almost exclusively on women in relation to their decision-making as regards an unintended pregnancy, leaving important questions concerning the male partners' roles and experiences unanswered. This research with women confirms the importance of men's roles in defining and constraining women's responses to an unplanned pregnancy in general (Browner, 1979; Mahon, Conlon and Dillon, 1998; Cowley and Farley, 2001; Kero et al., 2001; Sihvo et al., 2003), and more specifically, the importance of adolescent men's roles in decision-making (Resnick, 1992; Stevenson, Maton and Teti, 1999; Broen et al., 2005).

One of the reasons for this lack of research into men's experiences is the methodological

challenges of conducting research into adolescent men's experiences of an unintended pregnancy (Marcell et al., 2011; Saewyc, 2012; Lohan et al., 2013). These challenges consist of two inter-related issues: relevance and access. Firstly, in relation to relevance, gender norms in society and reproductive physiology have meant that adolescent men are generally not afforded the same opportunities as adolescent women to imagine an unintended pregnancy in their lives and to work through the consequences (Marsiglio, 1993a; Marcell, Raine and Eyre, 2003). Due to the challenges, previous research has involved the use of written vignettes to evoke a scenario and to inquire into adolescent men's thoughts, feelings and hypothetical decision-making in relation to an unplanned pregnancy (Marsiglio, 1988, 1989; Marsiglio and Menaghan, 1990; Hooke, Capewell and Whyte, 2000; Lohan, 2013). Secondly, in relation to access, the sensitive nature of the issues in question and the lack of any clinical or social space in which young men who have been involved in an unintended pregnancy could be recruited, means that it is very difficult to collect data directly from adolescent men in relation to how they experience an unintended pregnancy (Buston, 2010). Only in a small number of studies have researchers attempted this direct approach inquiring into adolescent men's actual experiences of unintended pregnancy (Vaz, Smolen and Miller, 1983; Redmond, 1985; Holmberg and Wahlberg, 2000; Cater and Coleman, 2006; Buston 2010). Another approach to the study of adolescent men and unintended pregnancy has been to conduct surveys of college men's views on abortion. This research has been mainly conducted among small, convenience samples of college men in the United States, with a particular reference to men's right to be involved in abortion decision making (Ryan and Dunn, 1983; Esposito and Basow, 1995; Nelson, Coleman and Swager, 1997; Coleman and Nelson, 1999; Jones, 2006; see also Agostino and Wahlberg's, 1991 interview based study of school-aged men).

Overall, the literature suggests that there is a need for research that focuses directly on men's experiences, and their participation in, unintended pregnancy-decision making. To date, many of the studies that have inquired into men's actual experiences of unintended pregnancy, have recruited these men primarily through their female partners, though researchers have utilised other sites for recruitment (see for example Buston's 2010 study, with incarcerated males). Academics have highlighted the difficulties of accessing young men who have been involved in an unintended pregnancy unless they are accompanying the woman to pre-and post-natal health services (Marsiglio and Menaghan, 1990; Buston, 2010; Connor, Edvardsson and Spelten, 2018). As a result, research has tended to focus on the experiences of young women (Hoggart and Phillips, 2010; Montovari and Thomas, 2014; Ralph et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2017; Brauer et al., 2018; Cense and Ganzevoort, 2018; Frederico et al., 2018; Grindlay et al., 2018; Spierling and Shreffler, 2018). This study has accessed young men independent of their female partners, in order to explore their *actual* experiences of unintended pregnancy.

## **Northern Irish Context**

This current study took place in Northern Ireland which will become clear presented a globally unique context for research. As this study explored complex themes such as masculinity, the role and power of men and the ways in which wider societal narratives shape individual views, it is the case that many of the issues at the heart of this thesis have been controversial and contested within Northern Irish society from at least the formation of the state in 1921. At their most general, these include areas such as health and wellbeing, religion, gender, culture, sex and conceptions and constructions of

masculinity. Due to space constraints it is impossible to explore all the nuances of changing narratives and politics of reproductive rights in Northern Ireland particularly as there are distinctive dynamics within the two main ethno- religious blocs and differences within and between other salient social and political cleavages. However, it is important to note some central social, cultural and political processes in Northern Ireland's history and their relevance to understandings of reproductive rights and the role and place of men.

Northern Ireland is commonly referred to as a divided society. It remained a region of the UK after the Republic of Ireland (ROI) gained independence in 1921. Inequality and hostility between the Catholic and Protestant populations of Northern Ireland resulted in a conflict referred to as the Troubles, which began in the late 1960s and lasted to the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 and the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995). Northern Ireland has been described as a 'distinctive society' in terms of culture, demography and politics (Stringer and Robinson, 1991). In general, Northern Ireland remains far more socially conservative than the rest of the United Kingdom (Thomson, 2016). Neither the 1967 Abortion Act nor the 2013 Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act apply in the region and while civil partnerships are legal, this is mainly because they were enacted in 2004 by a direct rule administration in the absence of a local assembly. Socially conservative attitudes around contested social issues, particularly with regards to abortion, cut across ethno-national and party-political divisions (Horgan and O'Connor, 2014). Whilst issues around clear-cut topics of nationality, such as flags and language, are strongly divided along nationalist-unionist lines, socio-cultural issues such as those described here are not so easily categorised. Though there is a small minority of political representatives who are



campaigning for reproductive rights, there is a general tone of social conservatism in the political debates on abortion in Northern Ireland. Abortion as a political and rights-based issue therefore has received especial consideration in what is a sui generis social, cultural and political setting (see Pierson and Bloomer, 2017).

Perhaps, the most salient feature is that legal abortion is highly restricted in the Northern Ireland context. The British 1967 Abortion Act, which provided greater access to abortion for women in England, Scotland, and Wales has not been extended to Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland remains under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act and subsequent case law renders abortion a criminal act unless it is to save the life or long-term health of the mother. Official guidelines for health care practitioners on interpreting the law have gone through a series of legal challenges which has had a “chilling effect” on many health care providers’ willingness to consent to provide abortion services (Pierson and Bloomer, 2017). As a result, only 12 abortions were performed in Northern Ireland in 2017/2018 on the National Health Service (Department of Health, 2019), with approximately 1,000 women per year travelling to England to have the procedure performed privately (at their own expense). However, this does not show the whole picture, as other unknown numbers of women travel elsewhere or obtain the abortion pill from an online provider (Pierson and Bloomer, 2017; Aiken et al., 2019).

Repeated opinion polls indicate that there is appetite for at least limited reform of abortion laws in Northern Ireland, yet politicians continue to block legislative change (Gray, 2017; Amnesty International, 2018). An Economic and Social Research Council

(ESRC) funded study at Ulster University using data from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) shows the Northern Irish public favour reform of abortion law (Gray, 2017). The strongest support for reform of abortion law was where the life or the health of the pregnant woman is at risk, with 82 percent of people believing abortion should be legal in these circumstances. While the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) has clearly stated that it will not support any change in the law in Northern Ireland, its supporters believe abortion should be definitely or probably be legal in six out of seven scenarios showing a higher level of support for reform of abortion law than Sinn Fein or SDLP (Social Democratic Labour Party) voters. Sinn Fein and SDLP voters were the least likely to say that abortion should definitely be legal in the seven scenarios posted in the Life and Times Survey. Across the range of scenarios presented in the survey, supporters of the cross-community ‘small u’ Unionist Alliance party were most likely to support legislation of abortion (Gray, Horgan and Devine, 2018).

Despite public support for at least limited reform of abortion laws, in February 2016, when two amendments to the criminal justice bill were put forward to allow for abortion in the most limited circumstances (Fatal foetal abnormality and sexual crime), they were voted down (BBC News, 2016). Outside of the devolved assembly, politicians in Westminster (who have legislative power over human rights issues) have taken few steps to attempt to liberalise abortion law in Northern Ireland and have retreated from the issue when Northern Ireland politicians affirm that any change to abortion law would be a “threat to the peace process” (Bloomer, 2013). The UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, maintains that abortion law reform is a matter for politicians at Stormont, the Northern Ireland assembly, to which issues of health and justice are devolved. The DUP, which is bolstering Theresa May’s minority UK government, is intensely anti-

abortion and insists that any changes are a matter for the devolved government (Tonge et al., 2014). Former Health Minister, Jim Wells DUP MLA, is on record as stating his opposition to abortion even in cases of rape (Belfast Telegraph, 2012). Unlike the DUP's unequivocally conservative position on abortion, Sinn Fein's stated policy is vague in that they claim to be opposed to both the criminalisation of "those who make the decision" and "to the attitudes and forces in society, which pressurise women to have abortions" (Sinn Fein, cited in Thomson, 2015). But, a further complicating factor is that the assembly has not sat since January 2017, after power sharing between nationalist and unionist parties collapsed. Pressure for Westminster intervention has gathered pace for a range of reasons including a legal case taken by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission arguing that restrictions on abortions in Northern Ireland amount to a violation of human rights, the prosecution of women in Northern Ireland who have purchased abortion pills online and strong criticism of the UK Government in a report of an inquiry into reproductive rights in Northern Ireland published by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 2018).

International bodies in particular the CEDAW have noted the UK's non-compliance with international standards relating to abortion. Since 1999, CEDAW have made multiple statements on Northern Irish abortion law in their recommendations to the UK. In 2013, they recommended that "the State party should expedite the amendment of the anti-abortion law in Northern Ireland with a view to decriminalise abortion" (CEDAW, 2013). Other international bodies that have highlighted the inadequacies of abortion law in Northern Ireland include the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Committee on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Despite a vibrant feminist movement in the region,

civil society activists are somewhat marginalised in a political discourse that is largely the monopoly of the political parties that represent the two main ethno-religious blocs. Larger-scale human rights organisations have mostly remained silent on the issue of abortion, arguably for the practical reason of ensuring broader support for human rights in general (Pierson and Bloomer, 2017). Amnesty International launched its international My Body My Rights campaign in 2014 in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The campaign is primarily concerned with the decriminalisation of abortion but as a result of this, Amnesty International lost its support in certain schools. Activists groups such as Alliance for Choice, the main Northern Irish activist group, has supported the Amnesty campaigns, but also developed a more radical political approach of “trust women”.

## **Masculinity and Mental Health in Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, decades of violent conflict have left a legacy of entrenched social issues and problems, particularly in interface communities that had suffered during the conflict (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). Northern Ireland has the highest incidence of suicide and mental ill-health within the UK, and the prevalence of suicide among young people remains disturbingly high, particularly in the most deprived neighbourhoods (Wilson, 2016). Existing research indicates that suicide rates in Northern Ireland amongst males are consistently higher than in females (Tomlinson, 2012; Northern Irish Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), 2017). Harland (2011) proposed that the legacy of the Troubles, and the social and economic problems that came with it, should be considered in unison when examining mental health and young men in Northern Ireland. Reporting on a case study examining the needs of young men in Northern

Ireland, Gallagher and Hamber (2014) suggested that social exclusion, youth unemployment and limited prospects remain key issues for concern. They reported that young men often felt that they had access to limited services or resources and they often felt isolated in post-conflict Northern Ireland. The end of the conflict has seen a changing of men's roles and many behaviours that were once deemed acceptable, even admirable, are no longer so. It is of particular concern that, while young men are often reluctant to seek help from others for mental health problems, they are even less likely to seek help if they have suicidal ideation due to stigma (O'Neill et al., 2015). While the Troubles in Northern Ireland may be over, the negative impact is still being felt, with poverty, deprivation and intergenerational trauma (Fargas-Malet and Dillenburger, 2016) going unaddressed by the unequal distribution of the peace dividend (Knox, 2016).

### **A Changing Society?**

It is important to note that whilst this study was being conducted in Northern Ireland, numerous changes were taking place in the Republic of Ireland. The marriage equality (2015) and Eight Amendment (2018) referenda were widely acknowledged to have signalled a shift in the Irish socio-political landscape, and as post-accord Northern Ireland has become increasingly culturally, economically, politically and socially connected to its neighbours, it is undoubtedly the case that the discussions in the Republic of Ireland would put social issues back on the agenda in NI. The almost total focus on the political fallout of Brexit may have displaced the renewed focus on rights in the wake of the changes in the Republic of Ireland, but the increasing sense that

Northern Ireland is even more so ‘a place apart’ will be a fascinating area for research in coming decades.

## **My Own Context**

Alongside starting my degree in social work in 2013, I also began working with a large regional charity as a residential support worker with young people leaving care. My first placement in social work was in a children’s residential home and the second was in a Probation Office in an area of high deprivation in Belfast. What struck me about both of these placements, was that the young men I was working with were sometimes seen as inherently problematic. At the level of ‘the group’ young men were perceived as being more violent, more prone to sexual risk taking and their drug and alcohol use was viewed as out of control. I compared those in my own ‘middle class’ social milieu, who society would view collectively as ‘nice middle-class boys’, from stable and loving families, whereas these young men were often from areas of Belfast with high levels of deprivation and they were often on the margins of school and social institutions. I began to reflect on how inequalities in opportunities, class and status impact on these young men’s transitions into adulthood. Within this context, it was clear that many of the young men I was working with found that their lack of education, and working-class status of ‘limited possibilities’ acted as a filter for potential future life choices. During a conversation with a young man I was working with while on placement in Probation, he asked what I was going to do after I finished university, I told him that I was going back to university to do a PhD. To this, he responded, ‘lucky you, I left school at 13’. It became very apparent to me that I was in a privileged social position, and that these young men, by their very existence, were seen by society as a “problem”. It was often

clear that at a very young age some had decided what was “for them” and “what wasn’t for them”, and in some cases education was something that “wasn’t for the likes of them”.

I have been working as a Residential Support Worker with a large regional charity for over five years, with young people aged 16 – 21 who are leaving care. I work in a semi-independent residential unit, working evenings, weekends and sleepovers. It is a great privilege that the young people I work with allow me into their lives, to help and support them, to be a shoulder to cry on, to take them for a McDonalds when they just need a drive and a chat, and to be there to help them pick up the pieces when life doesn’t go the way they expected. Throughout these five years, I have worked with many young men who before I have even met them, I have been told that they are ‘violent’, ‘drug-users’ and ‘hard to engage’. Yet, when I meet these young men, who at 16 or 17 years of age, find themselves living alone in a flat, all I see are young men who despite their circumstances and very real needs are often resilient and brave. I have witnessed how these young men negotiate what is it to be a ‘man’ and I began to reflect on what discourses, ideologies and common-sense understandings of ‘maleness’ in Northern Ireland were informing or influencing these young men’s thinking.

Before commencing my PhD, I was working with one young man, whose girlfriend became pregnant. The joy on this young man’s face when telling me that he was going to be a ‘Daddy’, soon disappeared when his girlfriend’s parents decided he was to have nothing to do with his girlfriend or the baby. It was clearly impacting upon this young man’s mental health; however, it was clear that he could not articulate how he was

feeling about what was going on in his life. Despite this young man being excluded from his girlfriend's pregnancy, every Friday after he got paid, he went into the town centre and purchased something for the baby, one week it could be baby clothes, one week he bought a teddy bear. This young man's experiences made it very clear that young men can be made completely invisible in relation to pregnancy and pregnancy decision-making, despite the young man's best intentions to be involved. It was this young man's story that piqued my interest in how young men experience a pregnancy, as it wasn't until this point that I had really considered the young man as part of the equation. This young man's story made me ponder questions about how individual young men's conditions and their role and place within class and status hierarchies, may influence their understanding and response to an unintended pregnancy. I hope that this study has allowed young men to tell their stories, in a realm in which they are often excluded or neglected.

## **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The overarching aim of the study is to explore young men's experiences and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives.

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Systematically explore what is known about young men's experience in relation to unintended pregnancy and unintended pregnancy outcomes.
2. Explore young men's experience and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives.



## **Thesis Structure**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters: this introduction, three conceptual/theoretical chapters, two empirical chapters and a discussion.

### **Chapter One. Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter, as previously described, is to outline key contextual and background information before proceeding to the main body of the thesis. In short, I argue that young men have been under represented in the literature on unintended pregnancy and reproductive decision-making. I contend that such a deficit should be addressed.

### **Chapter Two. Integrative Review**

Chapter two positions the study in the current knowledge and research in the form of an integrative review of the literature. The choice to review the literature systematically was driven by a need to provide a robust and unbiased synthesis of relevant evidence that directly focuses on the particular topics of interest. The integrative review focuses on two questions:

- 1. What are adolescent men's attitudes to an adolescent pregnancy?**
- 2. What are adolescent men's attitudes and decision making in relation to pregnancy outcomes?**

Findings from this review provide context regarding the advances of recent empirical research in the area. Additionally, lessons learned during the review helped to shape a

loose framework which is then used to guide further inquiry into the research area more generally.

### **Chapter Three. Content Analysis**

Chapter three reports the findings from a content analysis of Northern Irish print media on the referendum on abortion in Ireland. This chapter provides the reader with a background to the Eighth Amendment in the Republic of Ireland and the political, social and legal landscape on abortion in Northern Ireland.

### **Chapter Four. Theory**

In the theory chapter, I establish the theoretical underpinnings which will guide my inquiry into the research area. Beginning by situating the thesis within the prism of Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities, I focus on the key aspects of this framework relevant to young men's experiences and decision-making in relation to unintended pregnancy, and contextualise my aims in the thesis within this area of scholarship. Bringing theoretical links to the inquiry facilitates a more structured consideration of potential underlying factors influencing how young men experience their worlds and how they understand their role in pregnancy decision making.

### **Chapter Five. Methodology**

Chapter four sets this study into the context of the research methods employed, describes the underlying methodology and explains how the data for this study was collected, stored and processed. It also gives consideration to the role of the gatekeeper

and questions of ethics, confidentiality and informed consent. Chapter four includes a short profile of the ten young men who participated in this study.

### **Chapters Six. Findings**

Chapter six comprise the empirical section of the thesis. I explore young men's experiences and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy via my analysis and interpretation of the data.

### **Chapter Seven. Discussion**

Chapter seven combines the conceptual and empirical elements of the study in order to understand young men's experiences and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives. I summarise the purpose of, and main arguments made in each preceding chapter, in order to provide a condensed account of the body of the thesis, before highlighting its key findings. I reflect on what this study adds to existing knowledge in relation to how young men experience an unintended pregnancy, including what cautions should be taken before extrapolating these findings to other contexts. I consider the strengths and limitations of the study and highlight areas of future research.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have established the justification for undertaking this thesis and outlined its foundations and intended direction. In the next chapter, the context for this thesis will be further expanded upon via an integrative review, in which I collate and

discuss existing research pertaining specifically to young men's attitudes to unintended pregnancy and unintended pregnancy outcomes.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Adolescent Men's Attitudes and Decision Making in Relation to Pregnancy and Pregnancy Outcomes: An Integrative Review of the Literature From 2010 – 2018<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Worldwide Government strategies to reduce adolescent pregnancy have been largely gender neutral or targeted at young women (United Nations (UN), 2006; World Health Organisation (WHO) 2011; WHO, 2020). Within this global policy initiative to reduce unintended pregnancies, however, organisations such as the WHO and the UN recognise that adolescent men's involvement in decisions in relation to preventing and dealing with unintended pregnancies should be considered in clinical practice, health promotion and sexual health education (WHO, 2007; WHO, 2010; WHO, 2014; UNFPA, 2014; UNESCO, 2014). Today, there is a considerable breadth of research on men and boys – particularly on health, sexuality and masculinities which establishes that their meaningful participation in gender equality produces positive changes in their attitudes, perceptions and behaviours (Peacock et al., 2009; Scambor et al., 2013; Kato-Wallace et al., 2016; Lohan et al., 2018). This review seeks to explore if this considerable breadth of research on men and boys includes their attitudes and decision making in relation to pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this review has been published in the Journal of Adolescence. See: Kane, J., Lohan, M. and Kelly, C. (2019) Adolescent men's attitudes and decision making in relation to pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes: An integrative review of the literature from 2010 to 2017. *Journal of Adolescence*, 72, 23-21.

A previous review conducted in 2010 (Lohan et al., 2010) found a small amount of research had been conducted on adolescent men's attitudes to adolescent pregnancy and pregnancy outcome decisions. Findings from this review suggested that adolescent men mostly want to avoid an unintended adolescent pregnancy and that pregnancy resolution choices presented difficult moral choices and that there was a dilemma for adolescent men between wanting to have a say in such choices and wanting to be supportive of a woman's right to choose.

This previous review highlighted a number of gaps in the current research. Firstly, that research on attitudes to pregnancy resolution options tended to over represent the perspectives of university students, as well as men living in socially deprived neighbourhoods. Secondly, there is very little research on men's actual experiences of an unintended adolescent pregnancy, as opposed to research based upon a vignette methodology. Thirdly, there are very little international comparative research studies. Such internationally comparative studies could inform how structural constraints on decision-making, such as the availability of abortion services and cultural norms around reproduction in society, affect how adolescents view adolescent pregnancy and make pregnancy-outcome decisions. Lastly, this previous review suggested that future research needs to develop creative recruitment strategies which go beyond recruiting adolescent men through their female partners and clinical settings as current research has tended to over-represent the perspectives of those most engaged in their relationships and/or who are willing to come forward to health services.

This review seeks to inquire if the field of research on adolescent men and unintended pregnancy has developed since the previous review, taking into account research conducted in low-income countries which the previous review excluded.

This review will address two questions:

**1. What are adolescent men's attitudes to an adolescent pregnancy?**

**2. What are adolescent men's attitudes and decision making in relation to pregnancy outcomes?**

## **Methods**

Whittemore and Knafl's (2005) updated integrative review (IR) framework will guide this review. The IR is a broad type of research review method that allows for inclusion of empirical studies with diverse methodologies. The five-stage integrative review of the concept of integration proposed by Whittemore and Knafl (2005) was used: (a) problem identification; (b) literature search; (c) data extraction and evaluation; (d) data analysis; and (d) presentation of the results. By using an integrative review approach that includes both qualitative and quantitative research studies, a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon is possible.

## **Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

The primary **inclusion criteria** were as follows:

- Peer reviewed journal articles pertaining to adolescent men where the mean age is between 10 and 24 years in relation to pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes.

This age range represents the outer boundaries used in research on adolescents and pregnancy.

- Papers written in the English language.
- Empirical (both quantitative and qualitative) research.

The primary **exclusion criteria** were as follows:

- PhD and Masters Theses — first because of the difficulties of access, and second because of the absence of peer review.
- Literature that pertained primarily to adolescent sexual behaviour or activity and/or contraception, or fatherhood, but not in relation to unintended pregnancy or abortion. Additionally, any papers that were focused on the effectiveness of interventions or pregnancy prevention programmes were not included in this literature review, as this was regarded as a separate question.
- Literature primarily related to adults that did not include a sub-analysis of an adolescent population.
- Involuntary pregnancy outcomes such as still birth and miscarriage as the experience of involuntary pregnancy loss is different to unintended pregnancy resolution decision making.

## **Search Methods**

Three different methods were used to search for the appropriate literature; database searching, hand searching of key journals and citation searching. Five electronic



databases were systematically searched using keywords and MeSH terms, where possible (see Appendix 2.1). These databases were; CINAHL, PsychInfo, Medline, Web of Science and Embase. The databases were searched between 2010 and March 2018 as the previous review (Lohan et al., 2010) was dated up to 2009.

### **Search Outcome**

A five-stage screening process was undertaken: removal of duplicates, screening of title, abstract review, full paper review and reference tracking on the final selected papers. From the original 804 papers, 38 papers were included in this review. Results from all database searches were exported into RefWorks.

### **Data Abstraction**

All duplicate records were removed and I and my supervisor (ML) title screened the remaining 804 papers. I undertook review at the abstract and full paper stage, with a second researcher (ML) reviewing 25% of the included papers. Reference lists of all included papers were also reviewed.

### **Quality Appraisal**

The Mixed Methods Assessment Tool (MMAT) was used to critically appraise the quality of the included studies because it has moderate to excellent reliability (Pluye et al., 2011) and can be used to assess multiple study designs. The final papers were reviewed by myself with my supervisor (ML) conducting an independent review of

25% of the final papers. Using the MMAT classification, 29 studies scored 100%, seven studies scored 75% and two studies scored 50%. The limitations section on the table of included studies (see Appendix 2.2) highlights any weaknesses in design that were identified during this process.

### **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Articles were recorded on data collection sheets that consisted of the following subheadings: author and title, study design, participants, relevant results and limitations (See Appendix 2.2 for table of included studies). The results from quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method studies were described, compared item by item, and explored for similarities, differences and relationships between data (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005). A narrative synthesis approach was used to synthesize both qualitative and quantitative evidence. This process involved the conversion of all data into narrative through qualitative analysis (Mays, Pope and Popay, 2005). The quantitative findings were translated into narrative statements, and then closely apposed to the qualitative evidence in order to enable a deeper understanding of, and a critical reflection upon the quantitative findings (Popay et al., 2006). Similar findings were then categorized and grouped through an iterative process of reading and re-reading of the studies retrieved. Themes related to young men's attitudes to unintended pregnancy and pregnancy resolution decision making were identified (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005).

## **Results**

From an identified 804 papers, 38 papers were included in this review (see Appendix 2.2 for table of included studies). A range of methodological designs were included: qualitative (n = 19); quantitative (n = 15) and mixed methods (n = 4). Most studies were conducted in the US (n =19) and Africa (n=9) followed by Australia (n=2), Ireland (n=2), Thailand (n=2), Canada (n=1), Scotland (n=1) and Sri Lanka (n=1).

### **What are Adolescent Men's Attitudes to an Adolescent Pregnancy?**

#### **Pregnancy as a negative event**

Several studies have emphasized that adolescent pregnancy was a major concern for young males (Deslauriers, 2011; Smith et al., 2011; Lanre, 2011; Rink et al., 2012a; Rink et al., 2012b; Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2012; Lohan et al., 2011; Lohan et al., 2013; Chili and Maharaj, 2015). Smith et al. (2011) discuss how the men in their study described their anticipated fear, disappointment and shock if faced with a pregnancy. In a cross-comparative study of high school students in Australia, Ireland and Italy conducted by Lohan et al. (2013) 80% of Australian students said that an adolescent pregnancy "would ruin my future," compared with 50% and 60% of Irish and Italian male adolescents. In relation to the negative aspects of adolescent pregnancy and having a baby, differences emerged in this study that are not only statistically significant but are also sizeable in the terms of the percentage differences. Australian male adolescents were unhappier with the financial cost and responsibility of babies compared with the Irish and Italian men, and, significantly more Australian male adolescents agree that

there would be negative aspects, such as losing sleep and having to change nappies (37% of Australian participants compared with 24% of Irish participants and 7% of Italian participants). In this study only a small minority of young men in each country said they would be happy if their partner got pregnant (Australia, 4%; Ireland >1%; Italy, 1%).

In multiple studies, the consequences of an unintended pregnancy were often conveyed from a life course perspective of personal sacrifices and future restrictions (Buston, 2010; Deslauriers, 2011; Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2012; Lohan et al., 2011; Rajapaksa-Hewageegana, 2014; Chili and Maharaj, 2015). Perceptions of having low personal control over decision-making once pregnancy had occurred were evident in participants' expectations of being "stuck" or "trapped" (Deslauriers, 2011; Smith et al., 2011). Personal disadvantages of fatherhood at this life stage revolved around the anticipated restrictions on social freedom and lifestyle options such as travelling. Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson (2012) explore young men's attitudes towards how adolescent pregnancy would change their future, such as marrying or moving out of the family home earlier than expected. This study of young fathers highlights how an adolescent pregnancy had altered their future for job training, social lives and even getting a new job. All young men spoke of it being more difficult in the future to do what they really wanted.

### **Responsibility**

Financial responsibility to rear a child was a core component in the framing of young men's negative attitudes to an adolescent pregnancy, and most especially for young men

from working class backgrounds (Buston, 2010; Deslauriers, 2011; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2012; Tanner et al., 2013; Daugherty, 2014; Chili and Maharaj, 2015; Madiba and Nsiki, 2017). This sense of financial responsibility coupled with a broader sense of patriarchal responsibility was also apparent in studies of university men's attitudes to an unintended adolescent pregnancy (Olmstead et al., 2013; Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015; Chili and Maharaj, 2015). Sharp, Richter and Rutherford (2015) conducted in-depth interviews with ten university students aged 20 – 23 in Australia about their views on the role of young men in the decision-making process regarding pregnancy, views about their rights in unplanned pregnancy and their views on abortion. A prominent theme throughout the interviews was the young men's struggling between their own values of wanting to maintain their current way of life and their moral responsibility towards the mother and child. An emerging theme in this study was that these men – who were all in university - felt a responsibility to protect both mother and child and thereby preserving their own identities as upstanding young men.

Jackson, Karasz and Gold (2011) in their study of low-income fathers in New York, highlight how young men assumed that, as fathers, they would now take on the role of a mature, responsible man, whereas an emerging theme across a range of studies of men in university education, men who were marginally older, from middle class backgrounds, was an expressed desire to be a mature, responsible man before becoming a father (Smith et al., 2011; Olmstead et al., 2013; Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015). These findings echo the work of Smith et al. (2011) that highlights that a prominent discourse among young males was the anticipated impact on a male's role as the family "provider". Men in this study stated how "setting yourself up" was important before

becoming a father and starting a family and represented the importance of being able to financially support a family. Tanner et al. (2013) explore how pregnancy and childbearing readiness in response to an unplanned pregnancy were limited to discussions of finances amongst men rather than emotional or mental preparation. Olmstead et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study with 148 college men regarding their views on pregnancy resolution and marriage in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. 86.5% of participants felt an obligation to raise the child and maintain involvement in their lives. They acknowledged that being young and in college wasn't a convenient time to have a child, however, they identified with a sense of duty and responsibility for their actions. A minority of men in this study (10.1%) stated that they would not raise the child, stating that their current lifestyle was not compatible with that of fatherhood.

In a study of incarcerated young male offenders, Buston (2010) highlights how young men reported that they would like children at some point in their lives, however, they were not yet ready to become fathers. Explanations ranged from their own young age and immaturity, exposure to young children and their inability to provide financially for a child. Nearly all of the men in this study, unprompted, raised the issue of financial responsibility if they were to become a father. Their responses included having a house or a flat and a job. A study by Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson (2012) echo this dominant theme of financial responsibility. Work and money was an issue for all men in this study and fear was associated with awareness of the impending financial responsibilities that fatherhood would bring.

## **Pregnancy prevention is the girl's job**

Despite the pervasiveness of an adolescent pregnancy being perceived as a negative event in the research throughout the studies young men's remarks also reflected an implicit belief that pregnancy prevention was primarily the woman's job (Buston, 2010; Sathiparsad, 2010; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Smith et al., 2011; Weber, 2012; Rossier et al., 2013; Tanner et al., 2013; Daugherty, 2014; Chili & Maharaj, 2015; Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015). In a qualitative study of 26 adolescent fathers, Weber (2012) highlights how all but four of the men placed responsibility for the pregnancy directly on the women. In telling the story of what happened, the men in this study drew heavily on norms of masculinity in an attempt to construct themselves as not responsible for the pregnancy. The young men in this study relied on the common cultural assumption that it was the woman's responsibility to prevent a pregnancy. Young men in this study spoke about being "talked into it" even though they weren't ready and "women" not being on birth control. Not all men in this study blamed the woman per se, but they still placed the responsibility for the pregnancy with her. Men spoke of issues with women and birth control, despite their own reluctance to wear a condom.

In an Australian study with university students aged 20 - 23, young men generally assumed that the woman was using a form of female contraception (Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015). This view was influenced by a common assumption that the young women they would be having sex with would not want to get pregnant; therefore, if she was not on the pill, the responsibility to prevent pregnancy was hers. This attitude was prevalent in most interviews, despite a certain level of recognition that both parties

should be equally responsible for preventing pregnancy. That both parties should be equally aware of pregnancy prevention and contraception, but that women have ultimate responsibility is consistent with previous studies on young men (Ekstrand et al., 2007).

Rossier et al. (2013) reveal distinct inequalities between the two sexes and social classes regarding the prevention of unwanted pregnancies in a study of men and women in Ouagadougou, Africa. Their findings show that young men are expected to prove their masculinity by having sexual relations before marriage, and to place the responsibility for contraception up to their female partners. However, there were sound clear differences, only men and women from the higher social classes, can avoid these expectations as they are more likely to have stable premarital relationships, and they want to avoid pregnancy. Rossier et al. (2013) discuss how these preferences are shaped by the important role that education plays in the lives of young people from more advantaged backgrounds. Chili and Maharaj (2015) conducted in-depth interviews with seven fathers at the University of Durban, South Africa. The findings from these interviews suggest that the young men did not use contraception to protect against pregnancy as they 'trusted' (p.32) their partner was using contraception. In a mixed-methods study of 294 male youth from 10 schools in South Africa (Sathiparsad, 2010), survey results indicated that 45.5% of the sample felt that when a girl has a baby, "it's really her problem". Smith et al. (2011) highlight a contradiction between participants' desire to avoid pregnancy and the level of personal responsibility taken to achieve this. Exploration into the reasons why these young men abandoned control over contraception and pregnancy prevention revealed commonly held beliefs and discourses associated with a woman's role in contraception and pregnancy prevention.



Smith et al. (2011: p.40) describe how seeing pregnancy as something that physically happens to a woman, shaped beliefs of birth control as being “a girl’s responsibility.” Seeing pregnancy as something that physically happens to a woman shaped beliefs of birth control as being “a girl’s responsibility”. Categorising birth control as a females’ job limits the degree of ownership that young males’ accept over reproduction and reproductive decision-making.

There was one study, which was exceptional in this regard. Zukoski et al. (2011) conducted a study with Latinos residing in the US. Through in-depth interviews with young Latinos (n = 58, men = 29, women = 29) living in rural communities in the Northwest US, this study explored who makes reproductive decisions within heterosexual relationships. Findings from this study do not support the view that pregnancy prevention is the girl’s job. The majority of men in this study reported that both decide if they will use contraception to avoid an unintended pregnancy. The researchers revealed that these findings may be reflective of changing cultural beliefs about gender roles within sexual relationships and/or changes that occur in cultural values in the context of immigration to the United States.

### **Pregnancy as a positive event**

Despite many of the men across these studies viewing an adolescent pregnancy as a negative event, there were some men who viewed adolescent pregnancy as a positive life event, mainly those who had gone on to become fathers (Buston, 2010; Deslauriers, 2011; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011 Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2012; Weber, 2012; Frost, Lindberg and Finer, 2012; Daugherty, 2016; Mann, Cardona and Gomez,

2015; Wachira et al., 2016). A study of low-income men in the US who had brought about a pregnancy explored how participants viewed continuing pregnancy as an important way to atone for the sexual behaviour that led to pregnancy (Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011). The majority of men in this study (95%) had experienced their first pregnancy by the age of 24, and it is important to recognise that their views are seen retrospectively through the prism of fatherhood. Some of the men viewed their first pregnancies as personally and morally transformative (Buston, 2010; Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana, 2010; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Weber, 2012; Daugherty, 2016). In a qualitative study of African American and Puerto Rican men aged 18-25 from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Philadelphia and Hartford, young men believed that having children would make them more mature and some of the men in the study had experienced fatherhood in this way (Daugherty, 2016).

These reported transformative and positive effects of an adolescent pregnancy contrast with findings from studies with college men, and young men in education, who uniformly describe an unintended pregnancy in negative terms (Smith et al., 2011; Olmstead et al., 2013; Lohan et al., 2010). These studies have exposed how the value attached to pregnancy and fatherhood is linked to a lack of opportunity faced by participants. These findings echo the work of Cazenave (1979), who, in a study of working-class men showed how men ranked masculine roles in the following order: provider, husband, father and worker. Young men in economically deprived areas such as low-income neighbourhoods in New York or South Africa (Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana, 2010) do not possess the social capital or resources to be a husband and provider and may find securing employment difficult. Therefore, becoming a father and the responsibility it brings may be the only way to

assert their masculinity. A study by Hendricks, Swarts and Bhana (2010) explores why young men in South Africa plan to become teenage fathers. Results of this study explore how young men were 'excited' at the news of pregnancy. Amongst the prominent reasons for wanting an adolescent pregnancy were to keep a partner, followed by their social and peer context and these reasons are driven, in some form, by poverty and a drive for alternative pathways to exert their 'maleness'. A cross-sectional survey conducted in South Africa describes how in multi variate analysis among men, wanting the pregnancy and having a sense of future were associated with the outcome of an adolescent pregnancy (Mchunu et al., 2012). Lohan et al. (2013) discuss how in their study, survey items concerning the positive consequences of having a baby produced only one substantively sizeable difference between the three countries, Italy, Australia and Ireland, relating to enjoying being a Dad. Italian participants are more likely than the Australian and Irish adolescents to idealise the positive aspects linked to continuing with an unintended pregnancy, more than 80% of Italian participants rate as "important to me" the responsibility linked to becoming a father and the possibility of having a baby to love. Frost, Lindberg and Finer (2012) state that 74% of men in their study said that every pregnancy is a blessing and Rajapaska-Hewageegana (2014) in their survey of teenage pregnancy in Sri Lanka, stated that 85% of men had welcomed the pregnancy. Other positive aspects of an adolescent pregnancy consist of young men trying to live a healthier lifestyle, such as eating healthier, giving up smoking and drugs (Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2012).

## **Pregnancy Ambivalence**

Pregnancy ambivalence, or conflicted desire about pregnancy, has been associated with decreased contraceptive use and unintended pregnancy (Rocca et al., 2010; Higgins, Popkin and Santelli, 2012; Sipsma et al., 2012; Tanner et al., 2013; Lewin et al., 2014; Yoo, Guzzo and Hayford, 2014). The above studies have highlighted how young men were especially disposed to a lack of clarity about pregnancy desire. Tanner et al. (2013) highlight how young men discussed gendered discourses related to unintended pregnancy. Young men focused on the immediate outcomes (e.g. pleasure) of having sex rather than the consequences of their sexual behaviour, suggesting that these young men have not considered how having a baby would limit their life. One possible explanation put forward for these findings is that because pregnancy and parenthood are less associated with masculinity than with femininity, men may be less certain about entering into parenthood (Higgins, Popkin and Santelli, 2012). This study suggests that women have a better sense of how their lives would be changed and potentially limited by a baby, and therefore have clearer intentions to avoid pregnancy, while men might feel that pregnancy is ultimately their partner's choice and primary responsibility, and therefore may not have coherently formed opinions on this topic.

## **What are Adolescent Men's Attitudes and Decision-Making in Relation to Pregnancy Outcomes?**

In terms, first of attitudes to pregnancy outcomes, most studies focus on a single outcome – namely abortion. For example, a number of quantitative studies using surveys of attitudes of adolescent men have been conducted (Adaji et al., 2010; Salami and Ayegboyin, 2015; Altshuler, Gerns Storey and Prager, 2015). Altshuler, Gerns

Storey and Prager (2015) recruited adolescents in the US between the ages of 13 – 29 through web-based social media to complete an online survey about sex and pregnancy related decision-making, including abortion. The statement that ‘abortion should not be allowed for anyone under any circumstances’ was supported by 23% of males and 19% of females, and that ‘abortion should be allowed and I can imagine some circumstances where I’d have an abortion or I’d want my partner to have an abortion’ was supported by 36% of males and 33% of females.

By contrast to the generally liberal views in the US, a cross sectional descriptive survey of in- school adolescents in Kenya using random sampling and an inter-generational survey in Nigeria found that most participants expressed conservative views towards abortion and premarital sex (Adaji et al., 2010; Salami and Ayegboyin, 2015). In Kenya, the majority of male respondents disagreed with allowing abortion for schoolgirls with unwanted pregnancies (86.9%) (Adaji et al., 2010). Their negative attitude is, however, in conflict with the high rates of abortions among women aged 15 – 49 in Kenya, reported in a recent 2015 study (abortion rate of 30 per 100 live births) (Mohamed et al., 2015). Salami and Ayegboyin (2015) conducted an intergenerational study, the study population consisted of 300 respondents from three main groups of different generations; teenagers, both girls who were currently pregnancy and the boys who made them pregnant, teens who had already become parents, and the parents of those teenagers. The author notes that 50% of the respondents in this study were Christians (National Population Commission, 2006) and about 39% were Muslims and regards religiosity as being influential in their negative attitude to abortion.

Findings from a qualitative study with young men from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in the US, concerning pregnancy and fatherhood, (Daugherty, 2016), found the young men to be generally anti-abortion and pro-life. The men in this study who were already fathers depicted pregnancy as a foregone conclusion. They expressed the belief that if you had an unintended pregnancy, you should proceed with the pregnancy, none of the young men in this study mentioned discussing any other alternatives, such as abortion, with their partner.

A qualitative study conducted in Thailand (Sriyaska, 2016), interviewing young couples expecting their first child, reveals how teenage mothers and fathers had similar negative feelings about abortion as it meant going through a physical operation and was against the law. They also expressed concerns about religious beliefs. They believed a Buddhist sin called 'bap', and feared the consequences of this sin. Similarly, Wachira et al. (2016) conducted in-depth interviews with 65 Street Connected Children and Youth (SCCY), of which 69.2% were male, in Eldoret, Kenya. Findings from this study highlight that unwanted pregnancies are commonly terminated or dealt with when the infant is born, e.g. selling of infants, abandon of infants and infanticide. Even though it commonly occurs, abortion is not an acceptable practice among SCCY and is illegal in Kenya. The strong anti-abortion stance is influenced by the street community's religious beliefs that abortion is a sin.

## **Adolescent Men's Involvement in Pregnancy Decision-Making**

This section deals with studies which examine adolescent men's real and hypothetical involvement in pregnancy decision-making. In a cross-national study using a vignette methodology of a scenario of an unintended pregnancy to a 16-year-old man in a relationship with the female partner, Lohan et al. (2013) report that adolescents in Ireland and Italy were much more likely to choose to continue the pregnancy by comparison with adolescents in Australia. The study confirmed that young men in Australia were relatively more comfortable with an adolescent mother's right to choose an abortion. The authors highlight that the social freedom to choose to terminate a pregnancy may be greater in more highly secularized and liberal countries such as Australia, when compared with Ireland and Italy.

Two further qualitative studies using a vignette methodology with adolescent men attending third level education in Australia and the USA serve to further draw out adolescent men's involvement in pregnancy decision-making. In Sharp, Richter and Rutherford's (2015) Australian study, ten young men were interviewed about their views on their roles in imaginary scenarios and real-life unplanned pregnancy situations ranging from a one-night stand to a two-year relationship. These young men displayed very liberal attitudes to abortion. Some of the young men said that they would not mind if they were not told that the woman decided to have an abortion, as "it would save a lot of stress". However, by contrast, Olmstead et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative content analysis of written responses to hypothetical scenarios from 148 men in higher education in the USA, to questions about pregnancy resolution and marriage in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. The sample was drawn from undergraduate students

enrolled in a course on family development at a large South-Eastern University. In this study, 86.5% of young men said they would expect to raise the child, 10.1% of young men did not expect to raise the child, with a large number of these men focusing solely on abortion as the way to resolve an unplanned pregnancy and 3.4% said that they would let their partner decide.

Furthermore, some qualitative studies tease out the nuances within the data on men, between the woman's right to control her body and the man's right to be involved (Buston, 2010; Deslauriers, 2011; Smith et al., 2011; Olmstead et al., 2013; Tanner et al., 2013; Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015; Madiba and Nsiki, 2017). An Australian study (Smith et al., 2011) of men aged 15-25 explored their perceptions of having low control over decision making once the pregnancy had occurred. In this study, the perception that women had more power in relation to pregnancy decision making heightened young males' concern regarding unintended pregnancy. However, the young men generally accepted that the final decision was "completely up to a woman". Tanner et al. (2013) conducted six gender stratified focus groups with 13-19 year olds in Baltimore, Maryland, a city with high rates of teenage pregnancy. There was a consistent message across groups that pregnancy decision-making was the women's responsibility.

Other qualitative studies (Buston, 2010; Deslauriers, 2011; Olmstead et al., 2013) with young men clearly suggest that some men believe they do not have the right to be involved. Buston (2010) found that some of the incarcerated men in their study did not question their lack of power in the decision-making process. Buston (2010) highlights



that pregnancies tended to be seen as belonging to the female partner, reflecting both the power of the female partner to claim a pregnancy as her own, and the power of the male partner to be able to leave the consequences of sex and reproduction largely to the woman. Deslauriers (2011) in a qualitative study with young fathers in Quebec found that the young fathers did not play a role in the decision to bring the pregnancy to term. The majority of the young fathers reported that they let their partner make the final decision, however, they did accept responsibility for the pregnancy.

Uniquely in this review period, there was only one study which explored men's actual experiences of the support they offer women when terminating a teenage pregnancy. A small qualitative study in Thailand (Chatchawet et al., 2010) explored the type and amount of support men can offer to women who are terminating an unwanted pregnancy. In-depth interviews were conducted with eleven men who had been involved in abortion decision-making. These men reported that being involved in the decision and being able to support their partners was a positive experience for them as they were able to support their partner mentally as well as emotionally.

## **Explanations of trends in attitudes to adolescent pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes**

This review will now consider the evidence for the explanations of adolescent men's attitudes to pregnancy occurrence and pregnancy outcome choices.

### **Social Class**

Lower socio-economic status and/or lower educational background of parents is associated with higher incidence of teenage pregnancy and more favourable attitudes

towards pregnancy (Buston, 2010; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Rossier et al., 2013; Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana, 2010; Crosby et al., 2015; Kagesten et al., 2015). In a study of low-income and medically underserved men, participants stated that pregnancies, even when unplanned, were viewed positively and few would have considered abortion (Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011). Similar findings arose from a Scottish study on young incarcerated men (Buston, 2010) where some men did not even consider abortion as an option to an unintended pregnancy; instead, they simply accepted that a pregnancy would proceed. A study conducted with young men in impoverished communities in South Africa (Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana, 2010) found a number of reasons why adolescent men chose to become fathers. These reasons included keeping a partner, followed by their social and peer context. Men in this study speak of “leaving something behind”, implying that ownership is paramount to these young men. The researchers discuss how in the absence of property, a business or bank account, these young men view a child as a means to make their mark on the world. Rossier et al. (2013) in a study of young black men in Sub-Saharan African discuss how young men from lower classes may be vulnerable; unable to construct a strong social identity in a context of high unemployment, they may see having multiple sexual partners and experiences as a means to assert their masculinity. Studies with economically disadvantaged adolescent men have shown how fatherhood and pregnancy may be viewed as a source of self-esteem, and clearly contrasts with findings from studies with college and older adolescents who almost uniformly describe unintended pregnancy in negative terms.

In contrast to studies that have found class to have an impact on young men’s attitudes to pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes, Lohan et al. (2011) found class to have no

significance in predicting adolescent men's choices, and they noted that this was surprising. Acknowledging that this result runs counter to their hypothesis they discuss how their findings are consistent with broader research on 'equalisation' which suggests that social class demonstrates an ambiguous relationship with health behaviours such as sexual risk taking (Henderson et al., 2002). Adolescence has been described as a period of increased risk-taking and it is possible that lifestyle changes during this time cut across social differences with the effect of flattening inequalities (West, 1997; West and Sweeting, 2004; Chen et al., 2006).

### **Social Class and Education**

The socio-economic status of parents, particularly mothers, has been associated with the probability of a recent unintended pregnancy. Kagesten et al. (2015) reveal that the effect of (higher) a mother's education on unintended pregnancy is surprising. As a possible explanation they discuss how men raised by mothers with greater educational attainment may expect to exert greater personal control over their reproductive goals. Therefore, they may be more likely to view a pregnancy as unintended, if it did not fit their reproductive plans.

Two studies conducted on college men, found that college men were more likely to view pregnancy as a negative event in their life (Olmstead et al., 2013), with more favourable attitudes towards abortion (Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015). Sharp, Richter and Rutherford (2015) explain that all the participants in their study were from middle-class backgrounds in university education. They reveal that neither religion nor the morality of abortion was an issue for the men in their study, whereas; in a study of

economically disadvantaged young men, abortion was viewed as “sick in the heid” (Buston, 2010: p. 2214).

## **Ethnicity**

Data from studies conducted in Kenya and Sub Saharan Africa (Adaji et al., 2010; Rossier, 2013), show that African men have more conservative attitudes towards pre-marital sex and abortion, with a majority of high school students in Kenya disagreeing with allowing abortion for schoolgirls with unwanted pregnancies (Adaji et al., 2010). U.S. data has shown that significantly greater proportions of blacks and Hispanics than of whites agreed that every pregnancy is a blessing (85 – 95% vs. 68%), with Hispanics, especially foreign born, would be the least upset and the most pleased if they experienced an unplanned pregnancy (Yoo, Guzzo and Hayford, 2014). Regarding ambivalent feelings towards pregnancy, U.S. data has shown that a greater number of ambivalent respondents were Hispanic (21% and 11%) (Higgins, Popkin and Santelli, 2012). However, these studies suggest that the explanatory weight of ethnicity is mediated strongly by social class (Rossier et al., 2013), religiosity (Adaji et al., 2010) and gender identity (Rossier et al., 2013). Rossier et al. (2013) in a study of black men in sub-Saharan Africa point to pronounced inequalities between social classes regarding the prevention of unwanted pregnancies. They reveal how men from a lower social class are expected to prove their virility by having sexual relations before marriage, and to leave contraception up to their partners. However, they discuss how men from a higher social class can free themselves from such expectations. They often prefer marriage to be based on a strong emotional attachment and want to avoid pregnancy. These differences in attitudes towards pregnancy are shaped by the dominant role of education in the lives of men from more advantaged background.

## **Religion**

Attitudes to abortion are also influenced by religious attitudes, this can be seen most clearly in studies conducted in less developed countries with young men who have experienced an unintended pregnancy (Sriyasak et al., 2016; Wachira et al, 2016). Wachira et al (2016) conducted in-depth interviews with 65 Street Connected Children and Youth (SCCY), of which 69.2% were male, in Eldoret, Kenya. Findings from this study highlight that unwanted pregnancies are either terminated before term or dealt with when the infant is born. Even though it commonly occurs abortion is not an acceptable practice among SCCY and is illegal in Kenya. The strong stand against abortion is influenced by the street community's religious beliefs that abortion is sin. Young fathers in Thailand who had experienced an unintended pregnancy (Sriyasak et al., 2016) expressed feelings of fear regarding getting an abortion. The young men in this study believed in a Buddhist sin called 'bap' and feared the consequences of this sin. In studies conducted in Africa young men have more conservative attitudes to abortion which authors have attributed to the significant social and moral influence on religions (Adaji et al., 2010).

## **Gender Identity**

Several of the studies have revealed that some males (especially those from a poorer background) may view getting a girl pregnant and becoming a father as a means of asserting their masculinity (Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana, 2010; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Adaji et al., 2010; Weber, 2012; Rossier, 2013; Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015). Crosby et al. (2015) explore how inequality in opportunities, class and status impact upon young men's ability to assert their masculinity. Their study with young black men in three southern U.S. cities highlights a structural issue that involves

the relative scarcity of young black men in contrast to young black women, thereby creating a “sellers” market for young black men looking for a female sex partner. The authors highlight how this sex ratio imbalance is part of what has been described as a “sexual habitus” for young black men that also includes the expectation that they prove their manhood sexually, given a lack of ability to do so economically (Crosby et al, 2015: p.943).

## **Discussion**

We now summarise findings in relation to:

- 1. What are adolescent men’s attitudes to an adolescent pregnancy?**
- 2. What are adolescent men’s attitudes and decision-making in relation to pregnancy outcomes?**

One of the most important conclusions of this review is that the findings of studies can often be contradictory. This is because attitudes to unintended pregnancy, contraception and abortion can be contextual and contingent on the dominant or prevailing social norms and roles within a given time, space or social group. In addition, religiosity, age and relationship status are further complicating factors. However, in general, we can conclude that in the vast majority of studies young men perceive an actual or potential unintended pregnancy as a life event that will present them with moral and material dilemmas.

## **What are adolescent men's attitudes to an adolescent pregnancy?**

In general, there are some clear identifiable differences in the attitudes to adolescent pregnancy between working class young men in high and low-income countries and middle-class men in third-level education, reflected in their language and perceptions of unintended pregnancy and fatherhood. Young men from working class backgrounds are more likely to view an unintended pregnancy as a positive life event (Buston, 2010; Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana, 2010; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Mchunu et al., 2012; Rossier et al., 2013; Crosby et al., 2015), an opportunity to transform into a mature, responsible man and father, whereas studies of men in third level education suggest men view an unintended pregnancy as a barrier to becoming a mature and responsible man, as it would affect their ability to plan a career and then plan a baby (Olmstead et al., 2013; Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015).

The findings from this review build on existing understandings of the relationships between marginalized masculinities and social exclusionary processes for young men (Hyde et al., 2009). The recognition that social and economic inequalities affect the performance of masculinities by effectively blocking deprived and working class young men from some of the key tenets of hegemonic masculinities including wealth and status has been demonstrated in a number of empirical studies (Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana, 2010; Mchunu, 2012) and was succinctly summed up by Mac an Ghail's (1994: p.56) summary of working class masculinities as "fighting, fucking and football". Some of the studies in this review highlight how some young men are marginalized and rely on the limited aspects of hegemonic masculinities such as getting a girl pregnant, and, being a father.

## **What are adolescent men's attitudes and decision-making in relation to pregnancy outcomes?**

It is clear from some of the studies in this review that young men, certainly in high-income societies may be exposed to conflicting pressures when faced with an unintended pregnancy. They may feel that they must play a role in discussing or planning for the future with the woman, while at the same time they are influenced by dominant cultural narratives of pregnancy and women's reproductive rights to have control over her body and pregnancy.

On the whole, research based upon large scale surveys suggest that there is broad support for a woman's right to have an abortion among adolescent men. However, this is not a unilateral right. A study conducted by Adaji et al. (2010) on the attitude of Kenyan in-school adolescents on abortion showed that attitudes were largely conservative. A majority of young men in his study disagreed with induced abortion for school girls with unintended and unwanted pregnancies. Studies conducted in less economically developed countries such as Africa report more conservative attitudes towards a woman's right to abortion, which the authors have attributed to the significant social and moral influence of religions (Adaji et al., 2010).

Attitudes to pregnancy outcome choices, just as attitudes to unintended pregnancy are also influenced by social class differences with more favourable attitudes to abortion prevalent among men in third level education. These attitudes were sharply contrasted in two qualitative studies which explore adolescent men's experiences of pregnancy resolution decision making. Young men in third level education discussed how they



would not mind if they were not told that a woman was having an abortion as it would “save a lot of stress” (Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015: p.158), whereas, young men in a Young Offenders Institute in Scotland spoke of abortion as being “sick in the heid” (Buston, 2010: p.2214).

Three studies in this review (Buston, 2010; Deslauriers, 2011; Olmstead et al., 2013) drew on adolescent men’s actual experiences of an unintended pregnancy and pregnancy outcome choices and these studies showed that some adolescent men did not question their lack of power or involvement in the unintended pregnancy outcome decision-making process. These young men did not feel they had, or should have, any right to influence their partner’s decision. One unique study (Chatchawet et al., 2010) within this review illustrates that where men are afforded the opportunity to support a woman who is terminating an unintended pregnancy they often find it a positive experience. This involvement may provide adolescent men more of a sense of ownership and responsibility due to their proximity to the process.

## **Limitations of Review**

Reviewing the studies systematically highlights methodological limitations of the evidence. Notably, the studies were overall based on small non-random samples and lacked generalizability. Several studies used a vignette methodology, with researchers discussing how they could not illicit large numbers of young men’s responses based on their actual experiences. An integrative review offers a unique perspective of the current literature regarding young men’s attitudes in relation to pregnancy and pregnancy

outcomes; however, there are limitations associated with using different research methods that can contribute to a lack of rigor and bias when developing themes from the data. This review was limited to peer-reviewed articles. Inclusion of grey literature, book chapters and articles not in the English Language might have brought other perspectives.

### **What This Review Adds**

Out of the 38 studies in this review only 11 studies focused on young men's actual experiences of an unintended pregnancy. Ten of these studies focused on the attitudes and experiences of young fathers, with only one study focusing on young men's actual experiences of abortion (Chatchawet et al., 2010). It is clear that there is almost a complete absence of studies conducted that focus specifically on the thoughts and feelings of young men who have experienced an unintended pregnancy and do not go onto become a father. As a result, there are gaps in our understanding concerning the responses of young men whose experience of unintended pregnancy has not been mediated through interaction with, and emotional attachment to, their child. This review also adds new insights over the last review because it has included studies from low-income countries which were excluded from the previous review. These studies add considerable more variation in adolescent men's attitudes to an unintended pregnancy and especially attitudes to abortion and demonstrate even more clearly how the socio-legal context of abortion as well as prevailing norms influence adolescent men's attitudes. From the previous review, we are now seeing studies which have taken more creative routes of recruitment, such as recruiting 'street kids' in Kenya. Nonetheless,

there remains a significant bias in research towards safe samples taken from young men in third level education or groups of low-income fathers.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Despite the considerable progress in research on adolescent men and unintended pregnancy from the previous review to include studies being conducted in low-income countries and research based on the actual experiences of young men and not just hypothetical experiences, there are still gaps in our understanding. There is a gap in the research on the attitudes and experiences of those young men who do not go on to become a father. Future research should seek to engage with those young men whose partner has gone on to have an abortion. Further research should focus on researching couples together. The overwhelming majority of studies conducted on adolescents and unintended pregnancy up to this point have focused on women *or* men, despite the fact that partners attitudes and intentions have reciprocal influence on one another. This review has highlighted the breadth of research being conducted in low-income countries, mainly Africa. Future research should include international comparative research studies to draw out how young men's attitudes and decisions making are affected by the wider structural constraints they face in their everyday lives, such as the availability of abortion services, access to counselling services and socio-cultural norms around reproduction in society. An understanding of young men's experiences of an unintended pregnancy is also a fundamental first step in developing interventions targeted to men to prevent unintended pregnancy. Equally, such knowledge is a necessary first step in offering support and counselling services to adolescent men who experience an unintended pregnancy with a partner. Currently this literature review

demonstrates that we do not yet have a significant body of literature to inform practice development.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, there is a lack of qualitative research which explores young men's *actual* experiences of unintended pregnancy, and how they locate and perceive their role in unintended pregnancy decision-making. To date, research has mainly focused on young men's responses to hypothetical scenarios of unintended pregnancy or their responses to large scale surveys on their opinions on abortion. Also, research in this area has tended to recruit young men through their female partners or accessed young men through third-level education, leaving a gap in the research on those young men who are not in a relationship with their female partner and those young men not in third-level education. There is a clear lack of research on young men who did not go on to become a father, those young men whose female partner had an abortion, and whose experiences of an unintended pregnancy has not been mediated through interaction with, and emotional attachment to their child. On this basis, a qualitative study, with young men who had experienced an unintended pregnancy, whatever the outcome, was designed to yield new and deeper understandings and insights into how young men experience an unintended pregnancy and how they locate and understand their role in the pregnancy decision-making process. This study extends the current research on young men and unintended pregnancy by recruiting young men independent of their female partners, and not exclusively through third-level education institutions. This study explores young men's *actual* experiences of an unintended pregnancy, those

young men who went on to become fathers and those young men whose partner had an abortion.

# **Chapter Three: A Content Analysis of Northern Irish Print Media on the Referendum in the Republic of Ireland on Abortion between April and June 2018**

## **Introduction**

The media play a central part in shaping, or providing context for, public opinion (Maeroff, 1998; Wilson and Wilson, 2001). Detailed analysis of print media data enables us to consider the social context in which stories are produced, and to examine and understand the interaction between media representations and normative understandings/attitudes (Altheide and Schneider, 2013). Questioning how a health issue is constructed – the overall framing and specific language used – is crucial to understanding how it might be interpreted and experienced in everyday life.

This chapter will firstly provide the reader with a background to the Eighth Amendment in the Republic of Ireland (from hereafter known as Ireland) and the political, social and legal landscape in Northern Ireland on abortion. The chapter then reports the findings from a content analysis of Northern Irish print media on the Referendum on abortion in Ireland.

The focus in this chapter is on Northern Irish media reporting on the Eighth Amendment Referendum in Ireland as the vote for repeal in Ireland sent a seismic jolt through Northern Ireland, where at the time of the study and up until the time of writing abortion remained illegal in Northern Ireland. It has intensified public conversation about the issue, inspiring pro-choice activists and pro-choice politicians to renew their demands for a change in the law and pro-life politicians and activists to assert their demands that no change is made to abortion law in Northern Ireland.

## Background to the Eighth Amendment

Abortion was already illegal in Ireland under the Offences against the Person Act of 1861 (Offences Against the Person Act 1861). In 1983, pro-life activists who feared that this could be changed set about securing protection for the unborn in the constitution, by lobbying the government for a referendum. A vote was then held on 7 September 1983 which proposed adding an eighth amendment to the Constitution of Ireland. It read as follows:

*“The state acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.”* (Irish Family Planning Association, 2018).

The referendum was passed, with 66.9 per cent voting Yes, and 33.1 per cent voting No. The turnout was 53 per cent, amounting to around 1.2 million people. Only five constituencies returned No votes, including four in Dublin. This effectively gave equal rights to the mother and the unborn, all but banning abortion (Independent, 2018). The campaign to introduce the amendment, which would make it illegal for women to travel for an abortion was extreme. In his book, *the Transformation of Ireland*, Diarmuid Ferriter quotes a pro-life poster that was circulated at the time, it stated “the abortion mills of England grind Irish babies into blood that cries out to heaven for vengeance” (Ferriter, 2005: p.717). Abortion was already illegal in Ireland at the time, but the amendment engraved the strength of a single pro-life lobby group into national policy

and public consciousness. The Eighth Amendment took its place in the Irish constitution at a time Ireland was heavily controlled by Catholicism, and unintended pregnancies were kept hidden and the national tendency was to brush problems out of sight and across to England.

Abortion had been legal in the United Kingdom since 1931. The total ban on abortion in the United Kingdom was lifted after a teenager was gang raped by a group of soldiers and permission was granted to induce a miscarriage (see *R v Bourne*). Since that ruling 85 years ago, people have travelled from Ireland to the United Kingdom to terminate pregnancies. The demand for abortion was as high then as it is now. The shame of having a baby outside of marriage and the potential imprisonment in a Magdalene laundry meant that an illegitimate pregnancy for a woman living in Ireland at the time was a dangerous thing.

In 1992, “Case X” marked a landmark moment in Ireland’s abortion journey. A 14-year-old girl who became pregnant as a result of rape claimed to be suicidal after she was prevented from travelling to Britain for an abortion. The Supreme Court then decided that the girl had the right to an abortion, with the Eighth Amendment considered, since there was a “real and substantial risk” to her life – and that of the unborn. This sparked great debate in Ireland, and highlighted problems with the Eighth Amendment (Smyth, 1993). As a result, three referendums were held simultaneously on the same day in November 1992. The 12th Amendment attempted to remove suicide as grounds for an abortion but was defeated. The 13th and 14th Amendments acknowledged that women could travel abroad for terminations, and that information



about services in other countries could be made available to them. These were both passed and added to the Constitution, effectively acknowledging that despite the ban, many women simply went abroad for terminations (Kenny, 2018).

In 2010, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Ireland was violating the European Convention on Human Rights, citing the lack of clarity available to women on what circumstances would constitute grounds for a legal abortion (Erdman, 2014). In 2012, the case of Savita Halappanavar caused shock waves around Ireland and the world after the dentist died in a Galway hospital due to complications from a septic miscarriage, which took days to unfold. She repeatedly asked staff to terminate her pregnancy but they refused, telling her that Ireland was “a Catholic country.” She died at the hospital, from severe sepsis, five days after she had started miscarrying. The case angered many who had previously been apathetic about abortion law and reinvigorated the abortion-rights movement in Ireland (Amnesty, 2015).

In 2013, the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act was passed into law, defining the circumstances in which abortion could be carried out legally. This consisted of three scenarios: risk of loss of life from physical illness, risk of loss of life from physical illness in emergency, or risk of loss of life from suicide (Amnesty, 2015). In 2016 Ireland’s Citizens’ Assembly was established by Parliament to deliberate on a number of issues, including same sex marriage and the Eighth Amendment. The 99 Assembly members were chosen at random to reflect the Irish population in terms of age, gender, social class and geography. They included pro-lifers, pro-choicers and undecideds.

These Assembly members deliberated on abortion across five weekends, over five months between November 2016 and April 2017. They heard from people from both sides of the abortion debate, including medical, legal and ethical specialists, and people giving personal testimonies about their experiences. Members were also given the opportunity to deliberate amongst themselves, and to listen and reflect on the views of others in the room. Many of the expert contributions and speeches to the Assembly were streamed online and the submissions made to the Assembly, as well as its recommendations, are publicly available. These resources became a valuable asset to the wider public in the lead up to the referendum (Guardian, 2019).

The findings were published in a report at the end of 2017 and debated in Parliament in 2018. The Citizens' Assembly results initially faced criticism. Some commentators felt that they didn't represent the views of the public. Opinion polls at the time showed a different picture. An Irish Times/ Ipsos MRBI poll in May 2017 found just 23% of the public in favour of legalising abortion in all circumstances (Irish Times, 2017). However, once the public had a chance to consider the matter more deeply during the referendum campaign, the results were strikingly similar to that of the Assembly. In the Assembly 64% voted in favour of "terminations without restrictions". In the referendum, 66.4% voted in favour of repealing the eighth amendment, effectively legalising abortion in Ireland. That the referendum result so closely reflects that of the Citizens' Assembly shows that the Assembly was more aligned with the national consciousness than some had thought (Involve, 2018). Members of the Citizens' Assembly have spoken out since the result to reflect on the role of the Citizens' Assembly in the referendum vote (The Irish Times, 2018).

*I felt relieved the rest of the country listened to the same amount of facts that we heard. I don't think anybody went into this celebration abortion being anything other than a tragic necessity at times. We were not guided by emotion. We were guided by facts and by experts. It seems that somehow that got into the national consciousness. I believe that as an exercise in deliberative democracy, the citizen's assembly proved its worth. (Fionnuala Geraghty, Member, Citizens' Assembly)*

### **How has this impacted Northern Ireland?**

Abortion is understood to be so central to the history and culture of Northern Ireland that the British Parliament, up until recently, has let it keep its own distinct policy from the rest of the United Kingdom. This can be accredited to the existence of a strong belief system in the population consisting of large groups of Catholics and Protestants.

At the time of this study, abortion in Northern Ireland was a criminal offence under sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. The only exception to this was where abortion was carried out in good faith to preserve the life of the woman or prevent long-term serious effect to her mental or physical health. However, the successful passing of the referendum in Ireland shone a new spotlight on the failures in Northern Ireland in relation to abortion rights.

On 9 July 2019, an amendment was successfully attached to the government's Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill requiring the government to act to liberalise abortion

law in Northern Ireland if the Assembly did not reconvene by 21 October 2019. The amendment passed by a huge margin, with 332 votes to 99. MPs also voted to extend same-sex marriage legislation to Northern Ireland (BBC, 2019). The abortion amendment, proposed by Labour MP Stella Creasy, required the Secretary of State to introduce measures giving effect to the recommendations of a 2018 report by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The CEDAW report found that the UK government was violating human rights by restricting access to abortion in Northern Ireland and made a number of recommendations for liberalisation. The case was bolstered by a UK Supreme Court decision later that year examining the legality of Northern Irish abortion law. As the case had not identified an individual who had been harmed by the law, the Supreme Court determined that there was no jurisdiction to act. However, the majority of judges agreed that the lack of access to legal abortion in Northern Ireland was incompatible with European human rights law, and a fresh case has since been brought in the name of the campaigner Sarah Ewart.

Abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland on the 22 October 2019. Section 58 and Section 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 – which made abortion a criminal offence – have been repealed. The legislation took effect after the 21 October deadline passed, without a devolved government being re-formed. The DUP – and some politicians from other unionist parties – triggered a recall of the Northern Irish assembly in an attempt to block the lifting of a near ban on terminations. But the move failed because a new speaker could not be elected on a cross-community basis.

The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 has also placed a duty on the government to implement the recommendations of a report by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), published in 2018. The CEDAW report said abortion should be legalised where there is a threat to a pregnant woman's mental or physical health, without the conditionality of "long-term or permanent" effects. It recommended terminations should be permitted in cases of rape or incest. The committee also said abortions should be allowed where there is "severe fetal impairment", but that provision should not "perpetuate stereotypes" towards disabled people. It added that social and financial support should be ensured for women who decided to carry such pregnancies to term (BBC, 2019). A further series of recommendations included providing access to "high quality abortion and post-abortion care in all public health facilities", and making "age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education" on "sexual and reproductive health and rights" a compulsory part of the curriculum. The government in London will decide on more detailed measures to fulfil the requirements of the legislation. Northern Ireland Secretary Julian Smith is mandated to put in place regulations by 31 March 2020. The government has issued guidance to medical professionals which covers the period from now until that date (BBC, 2019).

This has all taken place in the absence of a sitting Assembly (in Northern Ireland the Assembly is the devolved Parliament of Northern Ireland). The Assembly was dissolved in January 2017 following the collapse of the power-sharing arrangement between the Democratic Unionist Party and the second-largest party, Sinn Féin, and subsequent talks have failed to result in a resolution of parliament.

## Methodology

A selection of three Northern Irish newspapers were chosen, The Irish News whose editorial line tends to lean to the Nationalist/Republican community, and the News Letter and The Belfast Telegraph whose editorial line tends to lean towards the Unionist/Loyalist community (Gosling, 2005). Northern Ireland is a polarised society and the newspapers in the province continue to reflect this: “A Catholic who picked up the [Belfast] News Letter might throw it down in either anger or indifference, though most Protestants would never look at the Irish News” (Gosling, 2005). The Belfast Telegraph is also the paper of record in Northern Ireland. This typology helps to ensure a sample that represents diverse readerships in terms of social class and political alignment. Articles were identified using the electronic database Nexis UK for the time period 1 April to 30 June 2018, two months prior and one month after the Eighth Amendment in Ireland. This timeline was selected because it was a time of intensive coverage of this social topic. Search terms (abortion, referendum, pro-life, pro-choice) were used to ensure all articles discussing the abortion referendum in Ireland could be assessed for inclusion. Duplicate articles were removed, and articles were manually excluded if they did not predominantly focus on abortion, or if they were not in the news, feature, letter or editorial formats. Initial searches identified 637 articles, of which, 466 met the inclusion criteria and were eligible for coding and analysis.

Thematic analysis was then conducted manually to address the framing in each article as a whole, as well as commonalities and differences in language across the sample. A ‘constant comparative’ approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was adopted to identify thematic patterns and develop explanations for differences.

Articles were read for emergent themes such as negative language and discrediting associations.

From this descriptive stage, I moved onto a conceptual stage analysing emerging 'latent' content, including less explicit and perhaps unintended themes (Clarke and Everest, 2006). Thematic categories were re-read paying attention to framing and language that might potentially stigmatise abortion. Also examined were the more subtle or implicit meanings suggested by associations made in the articles; and how these relate to normative constructions of women, femininity and reproduction.

## **Findings**

The results of this qualitative content analysis will be presented in three sections;

1. An analysis of newspaper articles according to themes that emerged out of a process of comparing and contrasting reporting of the issue from the three media sources.
2. An analysis of letters to the editor according to themes that emerged out of a process of comparing and contrasting reporting of the issue from the three media sources.
3. An analysis of opinion pieces according to themes that emerged out of a process of comparing and contrasting reporting of the issue from the three media sources.

## Newspaper Articles

The table below provides information on how many news articles, letters and opinion pieces were in each newspaper.

**Table 3.1 Overview of news article, letters and opinion pieces**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>News Articles</b>	<b>Letters</b>	<b>Opinion Pieces</b>
Belfast Telegraph	82	56	28
News Letter	93	26	7
The Irish News	97	54	23

## Contributions to the debate from religious organisations

The table below shows a breakdown of reporting on religious organisations stand points and responses to the referendum.

**Table 3.2 Breakdown of reporting on religious organisations views**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Protestant Religion</b>	<b>Catholic Religion</b>
Belfast Telegraph Articles	4	10
The Irish News Articles	2	12
News Letter News Articles	5	4

Newspaper reports reported a consensus of opposition across Christian religions to the repeal of the Eighth Amendment. In response to the Repeal of the Eighth Amendment newspapers reported how the leader of Ireland's Catholics (Archbishop Eamon Martin) was 'deeply saddened' (Belfast Telegraph, May 28, 2018) by the result and he will pray for the 'courageous' no campaigners (News Letter, May 27, 2018). A Sligo bishop stated that Catholic's who voted yes in the referendum should consider going to



Confession (Irish News, May 29, 2018). A Catholic bishop was reported saying that abortion ‘was far worse than rape’ for women who have experienced both (The Irish News, May 12, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, May 12, 2018). Pope Francis was later reported comparing abortion to Nazi killings, ahead of his visit to Ireland in summer 2018. He denounced abortion as the ‘white glove’ equivalent of the Nazi-era eugenics programme (The Irish News, June 18, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, June 18, 2018).

A widely reported story was that of a Newry couple who had been told by their priest that if they support abortion it could prevent them being married in the Catholic Church. Fr Damien Quigley had taken a screenshot of the groom’s Facebook page where he had expressed support to repeal the Eighth Amendment in the Republic’s referendum (Belfast Telegraph, May 30, June 4, June 5, 2018; The Irish News, May 30, May 31, 2018; News Letter, May 30, 2018). The Belfast Telegraph reported that Protestant Churches in Northern Ireland had declared that they would not interrogate couples wishing to marry about whether they support abortion (Belfast Telegraph, June 1, 2018).

Similar to the response of the Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland expressed ‘a profound sense of sadness’ after the repeal of the Eighth Amendment (News Letter, May 27, 2018) and expressed fears of a ‘tsunami effect’ in Northern Ireland following the referendum (Belfast Telegraph, June 6, 2018; News Letter, June 6, 2018). The Presbyterian Church in Ireland spoke out against ‘regressive’ abortion reform in Ireland prior to the referendum (News Letter, April 30, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, April 30, 2018; The Irish News, May 3, 2018).

## **Contributions to the debate from political parties in Northern Ireland**

Whilst party members may have individual views on abortion, official positions from the six main parties on abortion reform in Northern Ireland are presented here:

**Sinn Fein:** In June 2018 the party voted to change their policy on abortion to allow access within ‘a limited gestational period’. This is in line with legislation proposed in the Republic of Ireland following the referendum in May 2018. The party also supports abortion in cases of fatal foetal anomaly and sexual crime.

**Democratic Unionist Party:** the DUP oppose any change to Northern Ireland’s abortion law.

**Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP):** the SDLP consider themselves a ‘pro-life party’ but since May 2018 have stated that it will allow members vote with their conscience even if that goes against party policy.

**Ulster Unionist Party:** the UUP consider abortion to be a matter of conscience for elected representatives.

**Alliance Party:** The Alliance Party consider abortion to be a matter of conscience for elected representatives, however legislative change has been proposed by two elected representatives.

**Green Party:** The Green Party support full decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Irish print media reported the reactions and opinions of individual politicians and political parties to the Eighth Amendment Referendum in Ireland and to subsequent reform of abortion law in Northern Ireland. In response to the repeal of the Eighth Amendment in Ireland, the DUP leader Arlene Foster stated that the DUP had been contacted by nationalists and republicans to say that they will be voting for the DUP because they are the only party that supports the ‘unborn’ (News Letter, June 3, 2018; The Irish News, June 4, 2018). The DUP leader Arlene Foster stated that the result of the referendum in Ireland would have no impact upon abortion law in Northern Ireland (News Letter, May 27, 2018). Newspapers reported Sinn Fein’s response to the above claim that nationalists and republicans would vote for the DUP due to their pro-life stance. Sinn Fein was reported stating that it was not “credible to suggest” that views on abortion would make republicans and nationalists vote for the DUP.

Newspapers reported on the opinion of DUP MLA and former Stormont health minister, Jim Wells, who claimed the numbers murdered by the Nazis in concentration camps were comparable to the number of abortions since abortion laws were relaxed in England, Scotland and Wales (News Letter, June 6, 2018). DUP leader Arlene Foster was reported as distancing herself from Jim Wells remarks stating, “I don’t agree with that”. (Belfast Telegraph, June 8, 2018).

The response of Sinn Fein’s leader Mary Lou McDonald to the repeal of the Eighth Amendment was widely reported. Mary Lou McDonald was reported advocating for women in Northern Ireland to have access to the planned new abortion services in Ireland, and claiming that ‘the north is next’ (The Irish News, May 25, 2018; The Irish News, May 28, 2018; The Irish News, May 28, 2018; News Letter, June 4, 2018; News Letter, June 17, 2018). Newspaper reports reported tensions within Sinn Fein and their party-political line on abortion. Two former Sinn Fein members, Francie Brolly a former Sinn Fein MLA and Anne Brolly a one-time Sinn Fein Limavady Mayor, publicly criticised Sinn Fein for not allowing their members a conscience vote on abortion. Sinn Fein’s new abortion policy ratified at the ard fheis in Belfast in June 2018 commits all MLAs and TDs to act “in line with the view of ard chomhairle” (party high council) (News Letter, June 13, 2018; News Letter, June 14, 2018; News Letter, June 15, 2018; News Letter, June 20, 2018; News Letter, June 21, 2018).

The media reported how deep divisions developed in the SDLP over abortion with some of their representatives supporting liberalisation of the law in Northern Ireland and others remaining strongly opposed to change. At a private party conference in May 2018 the SDLP members were allowed the freedom to vote as they see fit on abortion matters – even if it goes against the party’s stated pro-life position (Belfast Telegraph, May 21, 2018; News Letter, May 21, 2018; The Irish News, April 12, 2018; The Irish News, May 16, 2018). Current and former members of the SDLP were reported speaking out against the leader of the SDLP Colum Eastwood who supported the repeal of the Eighth Amendment in Ireland (Belfast Telegraph, June 6, 2018; News Letter, June 6, 2018, News Letter, May 20, 2018; News Letter, May 22, 2018; The Irish News, May 18, 2018; The Irish News, May 21, 2018; The Irish News, June 21, 2018).

## **Contributions to the debate from civil society**

Northern Irish media reported on the opinions of civil society organisations and actors in relation to the repeal of the Eighth Amendment in Ireland and reported on pro-life and pro-choice protests.

A widely reported story in the Irish News was that of GAA (Gaelic Athletics Association) manager Mickey Harte filming a pro-life video encouraging people to vote no in the referendum, part of a Love Both campaign at a GAA ground (The Irish News, April 23, 2018; The Irish News, April 25, 2018; The Irish News, April 26, 2018; The Irish News, May 2, 2018). This resulted in the GAA issuing a statement that it was a non-political organisation and how citizens vote is ‘none of a GAA club’s business. It was reported that Tyrone Pro-Life network staged a protest outside Michelle O’Neill’s constituency office, and they were reported stating they would continue to target Sinn Fein’s vice-president because they view her as the main advocate for British style abortion in Northern Ireland (News Letter, June 27, 2018; News Letter, June 27, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, June 28, 2018; The Irish News; June 28, 2018).

Newspaper reports reported on pro-choice rallies which took place outside Belfast’s High Court and City Hall. A group of women protested outside the High Court dressed in the costumes of women from the television show *The Handmaids Tale* (Margaret Atwood’s tale of the repression of women’s rights in a futuristic dictatorial regime). They were reported to be chanting; “Hey you legislators, we are not your incubators!”, and demanded reform of abortion law in Northern Ireland to mirror that of Ireland (Belfast Telegraph, June 1, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, June 11, 2018; The Irish News, May 23, 2018).

## **Abortion pills**

During this time period there were eight articles published that focused on the use of abortion pills in Northern Ireland and Ireland. Pro-choice campaigners took illegal abortion pills outside Belfast's High Court during a demonstration. A medical law expert was cited as saying that if anyone who was pregnant took the abortion pills, they may be guilty of a criminal offence (News Letter, May 31, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, June 1, 2018). In Ireland a mother was reported describing how she had to watch her daughter go through 'agony' while taking abortion pills and how it is not something she wants 'any other mother in this country to have to witness' (News Letter, May 31, 2018). Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar by May 18 was describing crisis pregnancy as a health issue as opposed to a moral one citing that 'it was only a matter of time before a woman dies taking online abortion pills' (The Irish News, May 19, 2018). So, the framing of the debate from the most powerful voices in the country was a frame that focused on abortion as healthcare.

## **Travelling home to vote**

Three news articles highlighted those travelling home to vote in the referendum. The Irish News and the Belfast Telegraph reported that people were travelling from countries as far away as Argentina to cast their vote and interviewed those who were on both sides of the abortion debate (Belfast Telegraph, May 26, 2018; The Irish News, May 25; May 26).

## **Abortion advertisements**

A widely reported issue during the referendum was that Google and Facebook had decided to ban all adverts related to the abortion referendum (The Irish News May 10, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, April 18, 2018; May 9; May 10; May 14, 2018). Anti-abortion campaigners spoke out accusing the Taoiseach of lobbying Facebook and Goggle to restrict adverts in an attempt to stifle debate. However, these claims were rebuked by the Culture Minister Josepha Madigan. Facebook was reported saying that it would no longer allow advertising linked to the abortion referendum “as part of [their] efforts to help protect the integrity of elections and referendums from undue influence” (Belfast Telegraph, May 9, 2018).

## **Letters to the editor**

Due to its historical watchdog and mediator function, journalism provides citizens direct access to the public sphere, in the form of diverse means of participation, ensuring that the voice of the people can be heard in the democratic process (McNair, 2009). In that context, writing letters to the editor is one of the existing vehicles for participation in the printed press, enabling the exchange of information, ideas and opinions between different groups of people, and thus providing a significant forum for public debate.

Although these letters appear to reflect an open dialogue on current events, they reflect editorial policy, implicit both in terms of the prior selection of subject matter to which they respond and in the process by which they are selected. The criteria by which they

are selected are invisible and discretionary, and there is no editorial accountability concerning their publication. Letters to the editor do not necessarily represent a full spectrum of topics or positions, nor do they identify which issues or positions are those most widely endorsed by the public. They are not a public opinion poll.

The table below provides information on how many letters and opinion pieces were pro-choice, pro-life or had no clear view.

**Table 3.3 Letters and Opinion pieces broken down by pro-choice, pro-life, no clear view**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Pro – Life</b>	<b>Pro – Choice</b>	<b>No clear view</b>
Irish News Letters	40	9	5
Irish News Opinion Pieces	9	7	7
Belfast Telegraph Letters	23	24	9
Belfast Telegraph Opinion Pieces	14	11	3
News Letters	20	6	0
News Letter Opinion Pieces	5	1	1

### **Letters to the editor: Pro Choice**

Of the 133 letters to the editor in this study, 40 of these expressed a pro-choice view point in relation to abortion in general and repeal of the Eighth Amendment Referendum in Ireland. Various themes arose within these letters for advocating a pro-choice opinion which this chapter will now explore in greater detail.



## Women's Rights/ Human Rights

The recent repeal of the constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion in Ireland has brought Northern Irish abortion law into the international spotlight. A main theme within the letters to the editors in all three newspapers was the issue of women's rights and freedom of choice in relation to their bodies. Letters focused on women being able to have a choice over her own body and reproductive decisions.

*It is time we got real. Why should I, a 71 year old male, any priest, any lawyer, any politician, have the right to tell a woman what to do with her body...It has nothing to do with politicians, lawyers, or the clergy, It is strictly a matter between a doctor and patient ONLY. (John Fair, Co Mayo, News Letter, May 28, 2018).*

*Northern Ireland politicians should wake up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and follow the example of its southern and hopefully united neighbour one day. All those who participated in the referendum can take pride in the fact that their country is fast becoming one of the globes most tolerant and democratic to live in due to the yes vote, where women have choices over their own bodies (Noel Harrington, Co Cork, The Irish News, May 31, 2018).*

Within the letters writers express how no-one is able to fully comprehend what a woman goes through when deciding to have an abortion and therefore the decisions to have one

is a personal one. One of the letters talks about how women should not be treated as ‘second class citizens’ and be denied access to healthcare.

*I’m in the fortunate position of never having faced a pregnancy as the result of rape. I’ve never received the devastating diagnosis of fatal foetal abnormality. I’m lucky and I know it. But I also know others haven’t had my good fortune. So, how can I, from my position of privilege, honestly claim that I know what I would do if I were faced with their difficult choices? The simple answer is that I can’t, and I shouldn’t assume that I can. That’s why I’ll be voting ‘YES’ in tomorrow’s referendum. (Elbha O’Callaghan, Co Kerry, Belfast Telegraph, May 24, 2018).*

*My little girl will not be treated as a second-class citizen in the country she loves. She will not be denied access to necessary healthcare by virtue of her sex or be forced to travel abroad to healthcare. Not if I can help it. If you want your daughters and granddaughters to be able to receive compassionate abortion care in their own country should they need it, vote Yes on May 25<sup>th</sup>. (Blathnaid O’Loughlin, Cork, News Letter, April 26, 2018).*

### **Declining influence of religion on Irish society**

For half a century after Ireland won independence from Britain in 1922, the Roman Catholic Church, with the allegiance of more than 90 percent of the population, dominated the new state in areas of education, health, social policy and sexual morality.

But the economic and social revolution of the 1960s was felt in Ireland, too, albeit more gradually. Then from the 1990s a series of scandals unfolded, battering the church's moral authority: clerical child sex abuse, the incarceration of unmarried mothers, orphans and unwanted women in church-run "Magdalene Laundries," and revelations of neglect, forced adoptions, and secret burials in "mother and baby homes" for unmarried pregnant women.

*Here we are in 2018 with the Catholic Church and its proxies trying to deny Irish women the right to decide what happens to their own bodies. Is this still the Ireland we want – the Ireland of mother and baby homes and symphysiotomy? (Sarah Ni Mhairtin, Belfast Telegraph, April 23, 2018).*

In the last census, 78.3 percent of people still identified themselves as Catholics, but studies show that few still adhere to the strict teachings of the church. The letters below show how people living in both Ireland and Northern Ireland believe that religion should have no influence on the state.

*...Archbishop Eamon Martin has reflected on the fact that Irish society now consists of a large majority who...have either drifted away from religious practice or are quite hostile to the church's teachings. He does not, however, appear to be reflecting on the fact that this very exodus from the Catholic Church seems to be what was needed in order for Ireland to turn into a more compassionate nation (Ingrid Seim, Cork, News Letter, May 31, 2018).*

*The abortion debate has radically confronted the relationship between Church and state. We are now more aware that the legal and political order of our social lives have a moral foundation but have no mandate to assert morality.* (Philip O'Neill, Oxford, Belfast Telegraph, June 6, 2018).

*It is now time for Presbyterian Ulster to accept reality and allow same sex marriage and abortion to take place in Northern Ireland. The Province can no longer remain an outpost of Oliver Cromwell's English Commonwealth of the 1650's.* (James Annett, London, News Letter, May 30, 2018; Irish News, May 31, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, May 31, 2018).

### **Letters to the editor: Pro Life**

Of the 133 letters to the editor during this timeframe, 83 of these had a pro-life view point. This section will now explore the themes that arose from these letters.

### **Flood-gates argument**

The argument of 'opening floodgates' has been used by pro-life campaigners claiming that the floodgates will open and either thousands of women will seek out abortions for any reason or that we will move on to others such as the 'disabled'.

*If we have now reached the stage of advocating "ending the life" of the unborn primarily due to narcissism, then what is the next stage? Well, logically, those*

*who are disabled may be next (and what will be the definition of disability and the cut-off point)? When we have dealt with the disabled, we could move onto the aged (Robert Downey, Portadown, Belfast Telegraph, May 14, 2018).*

## **Pro Life Votes**

The DUP opposes changes to abortion law in Northern Ireland, while nationalist Sinn Fein is in favour of reform. Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald and deputy leader Michelle O'Neill are in favour of change to abortion laws in Northern Ireland. Arlene Foster leader of the DUP has stated that some Sinn Fein voters backed her party's stance on abortion.

*"I have had emails from nationalists and republicans in Northern Ireland, not quite believing what is going on and saying they will be voting for the DUP because they believe we're the only party that supports the unborn".*

Letters to the paper provided some evidence that some voters who previously voted Sinn Fein state that they would now vote DUP due to their pro-life position on abortion.

*The Democratic Unionist Party is now the only party on the island of Ireland, with parliamentary representation, which promotes a culture of life (Dr Ciaran O Coiling, Dublin, News Letter, May 1, 2018).*

*For me I will start to vote for the DUP party whose only redeeming feature is their unequivocal defence of the unborn no matter what nationality their parents...I would even vote against uniting Ireland, even though it was my dearest wish. My Ireland is dead (Gerard Herdman, Belfast, The Irish News, May 31, 2018).*

Within the letters one writer conflates the current debate about abortion with longstanding arguments concerning the conflict in Northern Ireland.

*It should be no surprise to anyone that Sinn Fein should support abortion. After all the republican movement have been murdering children, both born and unborn, for generations (Rev Brian Kennaway, South Antrim, News Letter, June 18, 2018).*

A theme within the letters was the belief that Sinn Fein's pro-choice stance on abortion strikes against republican values specifically that it goes against the ideals put forward by the authors of the 1916 Proclamation.

*As an Irish republican I am saddened by the Sinn Fein abandonment of principles that were enshrined in the Easter Proclamation and in particular by the departure of the commitment to 'cherish all the children of the nation equally' (Kevin McGill, Derry, The Irish News, April 18, 2018).*

*So much for the promise contained in the Proclamation that all the children of the nation shall be cherished equally. Does Sinn Fein now intend to omit that part whenever the Proclamation is read out at all future Easter commemorations?* (Sean Maskey, Belfast, The Irish News, June 21, 2018).

### **Letters as a forum for religious organisations to speak**

Ireland's major Christian denominations position themselves in opposition to abortion. The Presbyterian Church describes itself in a statement from June 2017 as a pro-life Church because even unborn life is incredibly precious and special to God. In the same year, the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland also campaigned against changes to the law on abortion, arguing that more lenient abortion laws would threaten human dignity and the right to life. These religious beliefs are reflected in the views of those pro-life letters who use the words 'immoral' and 'sinful' and who describe abortion as the 'murder' of 'innocent babies'.

*Some 60 million babies have been brutally murdered in mainland Britain since the introduction of similar legislation, with as many as one in five pregnancies now ending in abortion...governments could do well to heed the words of Christ. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and [that] he were drowned in the depth of the sea." Matthew 18:6.* (Lee Maginnis, Portadown, News Letter, May 27, 2018).

*It is its mission, and anyone reading at, or attending, mass who thinks that abortion is compatible with their Catholic faith had better think again* (Wilson Burgess, Londonderry, Belfast Telegraph, April 26, 2018).

### **Abortion harms women**

Alongside the right to life of the fetus, the limiting of abortion rights in both Northern Ireland and Ireland has been positioned as a means of protecting women, mimicking the discourse of anti-choice groups in Northern Ireland that use the slogan “Love them both”. Such discourse positions rights as a paternalistic protectionary measure, as opposed to an emancipatory framework, and politicians as protectors of the vulnerable.

*Brian O’Driscoll and Liam Neeson, both big strong men, support aborting defenceless babies. Do they not see the damage abortion also does to women?* (Dr Owen Gallagher, Glenavy, News Letter, May 24, 2018).

*Abortion is not natural. As I have previously mentioned, a 13-year-old rape victim from Northern Ireland had her baby aborted in England. Sadly, she suffered underlying depression for years until helped by Christian counselling* (Donald Gale, Belfast Telegraph, May 4, 2018).

This positioning of women seeking an abortion as vulnerable reflects global trends (Cannold, 2002). The frame has shifted from selfish women, too busy with careers or



social lives, to one of women who are in need of guidance or incapable of making a rational decision. Within the 2013 debate on abortion provision in Northern Ireland, the word “vulnerable” was used 31 times and the word “protect” was used 75 times, compared to 11 times in the 2007 debate (Pierson and Bloomer, 2017).

### **Nazi Germany comparisons**

A theme within the pro-life letters was that as a result of the Repeal of the Eighth Amendment there will be abortion on demand which will be similar to the Nazi idea of eugenically creating a population is made up of people with certain characteristics.

*Merely because the majority in the Republic voted in favour of abortion does not make it right otherwise the slaughter of the Jewish people would be justified by the vote for Adolf Hitler (Lyle Cubitt, Ballymena, News Letter, June 2, 2018).*

*We have been down this road before and it was called Nazism. The Nazis had the ‘master race’ and we know where this led to...once people start down these roads, the problem is there is no stop sign, as the Abortion Act 1967 has clearly illustrated (Robert Dowet, Armagh, Belfast Telegraph, May 14, 2018).*

*We call the Nazi killing of Jews ‘genocide’, but we call the modern killing of developing babies ‘women’s rights’. Abortion has become the Final Solution (Sean Doyle, Belfast Telegraph, June 1, 2018).*

## Opinion Pieces

Opinion pieces were considered to be valid sources of information in exploring different perspectives and opinions in relation to the Eighth Amendment Referendum in Ireland.

### Pro – Life

Three opinion pieces were written by pro-life activist organisations (Life NI, Both Lives Matter and the Iona Institute). An opinion piece published in The Irish News (May 31, 2018) written by Marion Woods Chair of LIFE NI, advocated for society to do ‘better in eradicating the crisis some women face in such a way that we enable and empower mothers to continue with their pregnancy not end their baby’s life’. Both Lives Matter, an organisation that advocates for both the life of the mother and the unborn baby to be protected, published an opinion piece in The News Letter (April 26, 2018). Their message echoed that of LIFE NI, that allowing abortion not only harms the unborn it also harms mothers. The News Letter (May 24, 2018) published an opinion piece written by Mary Lewis of the Iona Institute. The Iona Institute is a socially conservative Roman Catholic advocacy group based in Ireland. Iona promotes conservative Christian values and opposes abortion, euthanasia, same – sex marriage and civil partnerships. Mary Lewis encourage those in Ireland to vote no and in voting no she states, ‘you would be generously considering the right of all, not just one privileged group’.

During this time period eight pro-life opinion pieces were written by current or former politicians in Northern Ireland. Alban McGuinness a column writer for The Belfast Telegraph and a former SDLP MLA, wrote four opinion pieces advocating for a No Vote in the Eighth Amendment Referendum and for no change to be made to abortion

law in Northern Ireland (Belfast Telegraph, May 9, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, May 23, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, June 6, 2018; Belfast Telegraph, June 13, 2018). Four opinion pieces were written by current or former Unionist politicians, Nelson McCausland (Belfast Telegraph, May 31, 2018), Dr Esmond Birnie (The Irish News, June 28, 2018), Jim Wells (Belfast Telegraph, June 7, 2018) and Ian Paisley (Belfast Telegraph, June 5, 2018). Ian Paisley spoke of constituents who had been ‘let down by the SDLP and Sinn Fein’ on the issue of abortion who were now looking for other parties to represent their interests. Dr Esmond Birnie an economist and a former Ulster Unionist MLA, wrote how freer access to abortion throughout the western world ‘may have had one of the most profound social and economic consequences imaginable – fewer children being born’ (The Irish News, June 28, 2018).

Nine opinion pieces were published from a religious viewpoint, five of these from a Catholic viewpoint and four from a Protestant viewpoint. Peter Lynas, Northern Ireland Director for the Evangelical Alliance, writes in The Belfast Telegraph (June 8, 2018) that his organisation believes that ‘both lives matter and that the compassionate and just response is to work together to provide better support for women’. He states in another opinion piece that ‘Ireland’s vote is not progress, it is darkness masquerading as light’ (Belfast Telegraph, May 28, 2018). The Government and Morals Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church wrote in The News Letter that ‘for anyone to sentence the life of an unborn child to its physical death is an act of murder and rebellion against God the creator’ (News Letter, May 4, 2018). Fr John McKeever, assistant chancellor in the Archdiocese of Armagh wrote in The Irish News that ‘at this critical moment in Irish history the Church must raise its voice and use its laws to protect the unborn’ (The Irish

News, June 7, 2018). Fr Patrick McCafferty wrote in The Belfast Telegraph (May 30, 2018) that ‘you cannot be a Catholic and be in favour of abortion’.

### **Pro – Choice**

Nineteen pro – choice opinion pieces were published during this time period. Eight of these opinion pieces were published after the Referendum result in Ireland and focused on the liberalisation of abortion law in Northern Ireland. Emma Campbell, co - chair of Alliance for Choice, wrote in the Belfast Telegraph that Northern Ireland needs Westminster to ‘do its job and support the people, not the politicians of Northern Ireland in enacting access to abortion healthcare’ (May 28, 2018). Michelle O’Neill vice president of Sinn Fein wrote in The Belfast Telegraph that ‘the DUP and Tories can’t continue to block equality indefinitely. They cannot prevent the emergence of a new Ireland where all citizens, north and south are treated equally’ (May 30, 2018).

Eight of the opinion pieces focused on women’s right and how the rights of women in Northern Ireland are being denied. Stella Creasy, Labour MP for Walthamstow, wrote in The Belfast Telegraph that ‘the law isn’t fit for purpose...and it’s time to trust women with their own healthcare’ (May 31, 2018).

Out of the fifty-eight opinion pieces published during this time period only two articles focused on the opinions of men on the issue of abortion. Fionola Meredith wrote in The Belfast Telegraph (May 25, 2018) that she feels a ‘rage rising’ inside her when she reads about a ‘high-profile GAA manager using his prominent position to speak about respecting and cherishing women but calling repeal “a culture of death”. She goes on

to ask, ‘What gives them the right to decide what happens with a women’s uterus?’ Fionola concludes her piece by stating that ‘for men, a vote for repeal is a vote for respect, care, generosity, love – and the right for every person to choose their own destiny’. An opinion piece published in *The Irish News* (April 2, 2018) before the Repeal of the Eighth Referendum responded to the video published by Mickey Harte stating that Mickey Harte, or anyone else, ‘male or female, is entitled to express their views on pro-life or pro – abortion...and that contributions to the abortion debate cannot be confined to a particular sex’.

## **Discussion**

In this chapter I have examined the public debate and media reporting on the repeal of the Eighth Amendment in Ireland as it took place in mainstream media represented by three Northern Irish newspapers. Citizens were given the opportunity to have a voice in the debate through the segments ‘letters to the editor’ and ‘opinion pieces’. A qualitative content analysis was conducted of the Northern Irish print media’s reporting on the abortion referendum in Ireland between April and June 2018. The overall analysis is presented firstly in relation to the different types of ‘articles’ in newspapers, news stories, opinion pieces and letters to the editor and cross cuts the different papers representing the two communities in Northern Ireland.

The themes identified through this chapter are varied, with both pro-life and pro-choice opinions represented. Mostly, the debate can be divided into two understandings: moral on the side against Repeal and of any liberalisation to abortion law in Northern Ireland and somewhat feminist in favour of repeal. Within the letters to the editors and the opinion pieces, most citizens mean what they say literally, including that abortion is

murder and a sin. The tone of the letters and opinion pieces is often emotional in trying to evoke sympathy for either the foetus or the women. Notably, there is a complete dearth of coverage on men's roles in abortion decision-making as individuals or as supportive or unsupportive partners.

From the news stories what we learned is that there is support for Westminster to reform Northern Ireland's abortion law across UK and Northern Irish political parties, amongst the Northern Irish public and from human rights, medical and legal bodies and this support has been re-ignited following the repeal of the Eighth Amendment in Ireland. The news stories highlighted a division in both Sinn Fein and the SDLP over the Eighth Amendment referendum result and any subsequent liberalising of abortion laws in Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein and SDLP leaders believe the Irish law should apply to women in Northern Ireland, however, not all-party members agree with this viewpoint with newspapers reporting that some Sinn Fein and SDLP members had left the party as a result.

The news stories also report on those political and civil society actors who did not support the repeal of the Eighth Amendment and do not want any change to be made to abortion law in Northern Ireland, mainly the DUP, Both Lives Matter, The IONA Institute, The Christian Evangelical Alliance and Christian organisations on both sides of the community.

What we learn from letters to the editor is that there is a strong feeling amongst some in Northern Ireland, Ireland and England that abortion is murder. In this frame, abortion

is compared to the Nazi era eugenics programme. The tone of these arguments is de-gendered as there is no mention of women and their bodies, instead the abortion industry is pitted against the lives of unborn children. The arguments represent the moral understanding on abortion since it focuses on the protection of unborn children.

Letters to the editor from a pro-choice viewpoint frame abortion as a women's fundamental right, including her right to health care. Arguments are made that the lack of abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality and rape or incest goes against women's rights. The frame is gendered and reflects the feminist understanding in that abortion concerns women's rights. The prognosis presented in these letters becomes to ensure that women can access their rights fully and they demand a liberalising of abortion law in Northern Ireland. Abortion is also framed as a healthcare issue within these letters, describing the numbers of women travelling from Northern Ireland to England and Scotland to access healthcare. Letters describe how these women have already experienced an injustice and they experience further trauma by having to travel for healthcare they need. This reflects the understanding of pragmatic consequences as it presents the effects of criminalising abortion as forcing women to obtain them under increased health risks, particularly mental health risks through the adding of further trauma.

What we learn from opinion pieces is how pro-life organisations such as Both Lives Matter are advocating for both the unborn and for a women's right to proceed with a crisis pregnancy, calling for funding to help women to be able to continue with a crisis pregnancy. Both Lives Matter have spoken in the print media about how the 'feminist'

narrative of “my body, my choice” in their opinion hurts women and stems from a patriarchal structured world. Opinion pieces written by members of Both Lives Matter and also from the Christian Evangelical Alliance state that pregnancies should be continued regardless of fatal foetal abnormalities and that there should be more support offered to women in this situation to continue with their pregnancy. The largest pro-life organisation Precious Life is synonymous with its founder Bernadette Smyth; however, I note that she was not allotted much space in the Belfast Telegraph, News Letter nor Irish News to voice her opinion in the specified time period.

## **Conclusion**

The repeal of the Eighth Amendment saw Ireland go from having one of Europe’s strictest abortion laws to arguably one of the most permissive. The vote illustrates the monumental shift in attitudes towards women’s rights in Ireland. Exit polls asked people about their reason for voting Yes. They revealed “women’s right to choose” as the top influencing factor. This is indicative of a wider shift in attitudes towards women. Throughout the campaigning there was a clear north-south solidarity on the island with media reporting how Alliance for Choice was campaigning for a Yes vote in the Irish counties bordering Northern Ireland.

While I was conducting the research for this thesis a UN inquiry into Northern Ireland’s abortion laws found them to be a grave and systematic violation of women’s rights. While opinion polls consistently show strong appetite for change, the Northern Irish print media also highlights those voices that are strongly campaigning for no change to



be made to Northern Ireland's abortion laws. At the time of writing this chapter, abortion was made legal in Northern Ireland on the 22 October 2019.

This chapter provides context to the preceding findings chapters and sheds light on why difficulties were faced recruiting young men to this study. The voice of men as people who might be going through an abortion experience alongside their female partners was completely absent in this content analysis. Of course men were well represented as supporters of change to legislation as well as opposers but not as those who experience an abortion in their lives. This thesis is unique in that it spoke to those who have never been spoken to before, young men. It is clear that young men in Northern Ireland are not considered within the public debate on abortion as only two opinion pieces specifically focused on the role of men in the abortion debate, and one of those pieces was unfavourable to the role of men.

## Chapter Four: Feminism, Masculinities and Reproduction: Theoretical Insights

### Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical approach that will inform my analysis in the thesis. I explore the importance of feminist theory and feminist achievement in reproductive health care and consider its relevance to understanding men and reproduction. I then introduce what theoretical approaches will be considered in this chapter and justify why these were selected.

The literature on masculinity, reproduction and the changing of men's roles and positions within society is expansive and to some extent the researcher just has to 'jump in somewhere'. Identifying the literature began by reading key texts by some key theorists in the area of the study of men and masculinities, such as Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and Raewyn Connell. From there, I began to look more deeply for literature that explored masculinities in relation to reproduction. There I encountered the work of William Marsiglio, Maria Lohan, Cynthia Daniels and Katie Buston and a special issue of men and reproduction edited by Lorraine Culley, Maria Lohan and William Marsiglio. Overall my approach was to begin with the broader literature and move in towards literature on men, masculinities and reproduction.

The chapter is informed by the work of a number of researchers and theorists (Hearn, 1983; Connell, 1987; Marsiglio, 1993a, Marsiglio, 1993b; Connell, 1995; Hearn, 1996; Dudgeon and Inhorn, 2004; Hearn, 2004; Oudshoorn, 2004; Daniels, 2006;

Lohan, 2007; Inhorn et al., 2009; Lohan, 2009; Connell, 2012; Marsiglio et al., 2013; Hearn, 2015; Lohan, 2015). Arguably, feminist scholarship has tended to center reproductive experiences in women's lives, however, feminist theory could also be of relevance to exploring meanings of reproduction in men's lives. Men's intimate involvement in sex and reproduction cannot be disputed. Yet, reproduction in men's lives is relatively under researched and men are largely absent in the literature on family planning, fertility, reproductive health and midwifery (Greene and Biddlecom, 2000; Dudgeon and Inhorn, 2009; Culley, Hudson and Lohan, 2013). Feminist theory, despite its orientation to women's lives could offer keen insights into how we might understand men's roles in reproduction, and it will be argued in this chapter that this is especially helpful in theorising men and reproduction.

### **History of Feminist Theory – The Three Waves**

The history of feminist politics and theory is often referred to as consisting of three "waves". First-Wave feminism generally refers to the period of political agitation for women's property rights, increased educational opportunities and suffrage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Wrye, 2009). The Second-Wave of feminism is associated with the women's liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The 1960s saw a flourishing feminist movement created through a "mixture of activism, political work, policy development and research" (Hearn et al., 2016: p.552). The women of this wave saw themselves as successors of the politics of the First-Wave which focused primarily on the legal obstacles to women's rights, however, Second-Wave feminists began focusing on those less

“official” barriers to gender equality by addressing issues like sexuality, reproductive rights, the rigidity of women’s roles, their position in the home, and patriarchal culture (MacLean, 2009). This Second-Wave was about breaking down gender stereotypes, thus emphasising that feminism was of importance to “men as well as to women.” (Munro, 2013: p.23). However, whilst this Second-Wave of feminist thought sought to expand gender roles and expectations through political and collective action, feminist discourses of the time suggested that the new opportunities might be confined to those who were “white and middle-class” (Bruns, 2010: p.21). Though the Second-Wave feminists were active during and heavily influenced by the Civil Rights movement, they were criticised for their failure to include women of colour (Collins, 1996; Collins, 2000; Thompson, 2002; Breines, 2006) and writings from the Second-Wave often treated white womanhood as the norm. Women of colour were regularly marginalised within feminist activism during this time (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981; Hull, Scott and Smith, 1982) and the feminist movement was “critiqued from within and without regarding how well the feminist perspective represented the experience of women of colour, lesbian and bisexual women, transgender women, poor and working class women” (Bruns, 2010: p.21). By 1990, the activism of feminists of colour led to movements like Black feminism, which accounted for the experiences of women of colour and their unique interests. Black feminists understood that, “because women of colour experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of colour and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, anti-racism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms” (Crenshaw, 2010: p.485).

It is difficult to discuss Third-Wave feminism with any degree of clarity, as few agree on when it started, or if it is still going. Theorists have discussed how the confusion regarding what constitutes Third-Wave feminism is in some respects its defining feature (Walker, 1995; Siegel, 2007; Finley and Reynolds Stringer, 2010). What we do know is that Third-Wave feminism was a marked shift away from Second-Wave feminisms' adherence to the idea of shared interests among all women (Jervis and Zeisler, 2006; Berger, 2006). While feminists in the Third Wave acknowledged and thanked Second-Wave feminists for their work, they also argued that their generation are living in times and under conditions that render "political activity and cultural critique difficult to engender" (Zheng, 2016: p.23). This wave of feminism locates itself outside of the 'power/victim framework', aiming to explore the messy and complex picture of young feminism and to re-theorise gender as a more diffuse social structure (see for example Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Budgeon, 2001; Aapola et al., 2005; Rich, 2005). As Aapola et al. (2005: pg.25) suggest "this wave is more individualistic, complex and imperfect than previous waves". Whereas First and Second-Wave feminism focused on rights or the politics of representation, in recent years there has been a notable shift in emphasis on to "the politics of self-representation" (Attwood, 2007: p.235), self-determination (Snyder-Hall, 2010) and a new focus on disturbing "the limits of acceptable feminine behaviour and the boundaries of heterosexual style and performance" (Attwood, 2007: p.235). The main point to note here is that, to a greater or lesser extent, all waves of feminism ask questions of and challenge men's roles and identities and relations to women, they problematise the power that is a "very significant, pervasive aspect of men's social relations, actions and experiences" and they analyse the "ideological conditioning" that makes men's

power seem natural and taken-for-granted (Hearn, 2004: p.51). However, alongside other critical work and theory, they also challenge the taken-for-granted category of 'men', they deconstruct hegemonic ideas about relationships within and between genders, and they critique and add to the discursive practices that structure 'being' or 'practicing' maleness. These discursive practices and the new identity positions they have the potential to create (See Edley and Wetherell, 2001), men's navigation, internationalisation and interrogation of both dominant and emerging counterhegemonic discourses of masculinity, and the interaction between traditional and emerging gender narratives and other social categorisations (Phoenix and Frosh, 2001) will be central to this study.

In the context of this study, one of the most important issues in feminist thought has been ideas around choice, reproductive freedom, and more specifically, abortion rights. Reproductive rights and the "belief that women have a right and a need to control their own fertility" (Bryson, 1999: p.148) have long been a central unifying issue among feminists, and a "women's right to exercise choice has been one of feminism's central political claims" (Budgeon, 2015: p.303). Whilst there is much debate and diversity of opinion among feminists on a range of issues, "virtually all feminists seem to agree that women must gain control over their own reproductive lives if they are to be liberated from male dominance" (Sherwin, 1994: p.316). Reproduction as a central unifying theme in feminist theory and practice led to the politicisation of issues such as women's access to contraception, access to and the availability of abortion and mothering as a foundation for feminist ethics (Rosen, 2000; Gerodetti and Mottier, 2009). Abortion rights and reproductive choice became "the items of a general feminist agenda in the Second-Wave" (Roth, 2004: p.179)

and a women's right to bodily integrity, including the right to terminate an unintended pregnancy, is one of the fundamental principles of feminist thought and scholarship (Petchesky, 1986). Within this argument over rights to abortion, discussion regarding women's reasons for having an abortion have been dismissed, because if the reason for seeking an abortion were relevant to whether or not a woman should be allowed one, then arguably abortion is not a *right* in a meaningful sense (Sharp and Earle, 2002). In line with new trends in feminist thought that emphasise self-determination, individualisation and empowerment, in recent years there has been a reorientation in feminist thought away from the constraints women face in making free choices to a focus on recognising and validating the choices women are actually making (Budgeon, 2015: p.303). However, women's 'responsibilisation', ideas about 'choice' and 'control', and the representation of reproductive rights in a neoliberal society (Bay-Cheng, 2015) have proven contentious within feminist thought and led to a number of theoretical disputes about whether free choice is possible in a patriarchal and capitalist society (Bryson 1999; Solinger, 2001; Smith, 2005). An overt focus on neoliberal ideals such as free choice, empowerment and self-determination have the potential to obscure how social power and the ability to make choices vary greatly across social hierarchies, with white middle or upper-class women being "viewed as legitimate decision makers, in contrast to poor women of colour" (Katz and Tirone, 2015: p.317). With notions of 'responsibility' and 'choice' being so prominent in a wide range of policy areas in the UK and Northern Ireland, but practically expunged from elite political discourses on abortion, this study will explore the extent to which young men have been socialised into neoliberal narratives with regard to unintended pregnancy.

The next section looks in detail at men's experiences of reproduction. Men's involvement in reproduction and reproductive health is a topic of growing interest within social science and health research. However, as noted above the majority of research to date has been conducted with women and this overemphasises' female responsibility leaving men's positions and behaviours neglected (Greene and Biddlecom, 2000; Dudgeon and Inhorn, 2009; Culley, Hudson and Lohan, 2013). Undertaking reproduction research with men requires careful consideration regarding epistemological and philosophical positioning. Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities (CSM) - which arises from feminist theory, involves the study of the *gendered* nature of men's lives, seeks to challenge hegemonic masculinity and gendered power relations – offers a sophisticated and appropriate theoretical framework for such research (Hearn, 1996; Hearn, 2004; Connell, Hearn and Kimmel, 2005; Hearn and Pringle, 2006).

## **Reproductive Masculinity**

Globally, discussions of sexual and reproductive health and rights are still largely focused on women. In terms of family planning, programmes have “selectively accommodated rather than challenged prevailing gender norms” and by targeting family planning towards women, some programmes reinforce “the idea that reproduction and family welfare are women's responsibilities” (Schuler, Rottach and Mukiri, 2011: p.102). In addition, to the discursive deployment of rigid gender norms, there are structural barriers to men's engagement in sexual and reproductive health, with health services potentially incapable of addressing the specific health and emotional and psychological needs of males (Mahalik, Good and Englor- Carson, 2003; Smith,



Braunack-Mayer and Wittert, 2006; IPFF and UNFPA, 2017). In essence, men are often seen as being on the side-lines of reproductive and sexual health issues (Wentzell and Inhorn, 2014). Marsiglio et al. (2013: p.1012) highlight how throughout the world, men contemplate having children, imagine themselves as fathers, receive news of unwanted pregnancies, are involved in abortion decision-making, and also become parents. Men have captivating experiences of reproduction that should be given more attention (Marsiglio, Lohan and Culley, 2013).

Academics have highlighted how men have traditionally been uninvolved in reproductive health interventions targeting maternal-child health, the use of contraception, or other reproductive health problems (Ndong et al., 1999; Collumbien and Hawkes, 2000). A number of factors have contributed to men's lack of inclusion in these reproductive health interventions. Firstly, limited resources have traditionally been focused on women, as they obviously play a more direct role in pregnancy (Kagesten et al., 2016) and importantly women's access to contraception and maternity care are often viewed as opportunities for the empowerment and liberation of women (Chiaporri and Oreffice, 2008; Upadhyay, 2014). Second, assumptions held about men's lack of interest in being involved in reproductive health programmes has negatively influenced their inclusion in such programmes (Kululanga, 2011; Kabagenyi, 2014). Lastly, ideological issues have had an impact on research agendas; for example, a lack of research and development on male contraceptives is partly due to assumptions about men's lack of desire for contraceptives (Green and Biddlecom, 2000; Inhorn et al. 2009; Dismore et al., 2016).

Patterns of contraceptive use worldwide provide an interesting lens for considering men's engagement in sexual and reproductive health (Ross and Hardee, 2017). Worldwide, the responsibility for contraceptive use is traditionally viewed as the responsibility of women (Schuler, Rottach and Mukiri, 2011; Campo-Engelstein, 2012; Campbell, Prata, and Potts, 2013). In developed countries, male contraception methods accounts for 27 percent of use in comparison with 73 percent for female contraceptive methods (UN, 2011). In developing countries, male contraceptive methods account for 7 percent of use compared with 93 percent of female methods (UN, 2011). Various factors have been offered to explain these disparities in the use of male and female contraceptive methods. Alongside the availability of contraception, accessibility and information regarding different contraceptive methods and cultural norms of masculinity that emphasize reproductive responsibility as a woman's role, significantly shape men's perceptions about and use of contraceptive methods (Blanc, 2001). Therefore it could be the case that involving men in reproductive health interventions and reproductive decision-making is central to the incremental process of achieving gender equity (Petchesky, 2003; Pullerwitz et al., 2010; Connell, 2012; Tallis, 2012; Jewkes et al., 2015; Kabeer, 2015; Pearse and Connell, 2015).

The concept of 'reproductive masculinity' was developed by Cynthia Daniels (2006) as a set of assumptions about men's relationships within human reproduction. She defines reproductive masculinity in terms of four interrelated elements: "First, men are assumed to be secondary in biological reproduction; second, men are assumed to be less vulnerable to reproductive harm than women; third, men are assumed to be virile; and fourth, men are assumed to be relatively distant from the health problems of the children they father" (2006: pp.6-7). This

construction of reproductive masculinity sets up a set of assumptions through which researchers might explore and open up questions concerning how men experience reproduction and socially constructed ideas around reproduction, gender and masculinity.

Daniels (2006: p.4) argues that the very ideals of masculinity, in particular reproductive masculinity, not only inhibits discussion and research into the reproductive problems men face but also when discussion and research do emerge they have a way of skewing them. Daniels argues that the ideals of masculinity “are double-edged, for while they perpetuate assumptions about the superior strength of the male body, they lead to a profound neglect of male reproductive health and a distorted view of men’s relationship to human reproduction” (2006: p.4). Daniels suggests that this misrepresentation is extremely problematic, because of what it says about masculinity and ultimately what it does to men. The argument is made that patriarchy can, and does, harm men as well as women. As Daniels (2006, p.70) writes: "In the end, this is not a story about the 'gender wars' but about the price men pay for gender privilege". In the context of this ‘gender privilege’, this thesis will explore the extent to which patriarchy in the context of an unintended pregnancy ‘harms’ or hinders young men in terms of their emotional and psychological wellbeing and their involvement in pregnancy decision-making.

## **Why Men and Reproduction Now?**

Lohan (2015: p.6 ) argues that “two of the main global developments driving interest in men and reproduction are changing understandings in the field of population and

development and changing understandings of fatherhood”. Since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the report that followed (United Nations, 1994), international family planning has slowly given way to a different paradigm. The report made an official recognition that more equitable relations between men and women and reproductive rights are important ends in themselves, as well as being a way of achieving population stabilisation. Involving men has been an important part of the shift from family planning to the human rights and reproduction agenda in recent decades (Bustamante-Forest and Giarratono, 2004; Sternberg and Hubley, 2004; Sherr, 2010).

In turn, this movement has also been significantly affected by the HIV and Aids epidemic which sharpened the recognition of men’s sexual practices and the potential control that men exert over family planning within couples (Gutman, 2011). The aim of most of this global drive away from traditional female focused family planning models is to encourage men to take more responsibility for planning reproduction, and to engender in society greater attention to women’s health needs and the broader goals of women. This shift in tone and practice was born out of the experience of many health agencies in the 1980s and 1990s who realised that without working with men, change would be very difficult or impossible (Sternberg and Hubley, 2004; WHO, 2010). It has also been proposed that men should be more involved in decision-making because their active participation would be crucial to the success of programs and the empowerment of women (Lohan, 2015; Inhorn and Patrizio, 2015; Levtoev et al., 2015; Promundo, 2016; Morrell et al., 2016).

The second driver for including men in reproduction, which is especially notable in high-income countries, is the new cultural and policy importance of fatherhood (Dudgeon and Inhorn, 2004; McAllister et al., 2012; Marsiglio et al., 2013; ILO, 2014) and public interest in fathers and fathering — in the media, academic and popular literature has increased in recent years (Wall and Arnold, 2007; Robinson and Hunter, 2008; Gregory and Milner, 2011; Marshall et al., 2014). In essence, and reflective of wider responsabilisation narratives, social policy discourse has followed and made explicit attempts to “make men into fathers” (Hobson, 2002: p.1; Lewis, 2002; Collier and Sheldon, 2008). This new public agenda, often called “new fatherhood,” also appears to reflect real change in household behaviours which are associated with generational change in gender attitudes and socio-demographic change (Sayer et al., 2004; Goldscheider, Bernhardt and Lappegard, 2015; Endendijk, Derks and Mesman, 2018). However, the extent to which real social change has happened may be slower than the public debates suggest. Family research highlights tensions between work and home pressures for men, limiting the extent to which they are able (and/or willing) to renegotiate their gender roles at home and at work (Lyonette and Crompton, 2014; Moss, 2015). For example, Henwood and Proctor’s (2003) analysis suggests that fathers want to be more involved with their children and family life and have broadened their understandings of masculinity to include caring, yet they are prevented by work from doing so. However, Demott’s (2008) research suggests otherwise. Dermott (2008) posits that fatherhood has indeed changed, yet it has not become motherhood, and it does not deliver a “backdoor route to gender equality” (Featherstone, 2009: p.29) that some feminists may have been hoping for. In other words, changing attitudes and dispositions may not be enough to change behaviour. Dermott (2008) argues that

conceptualising contemporary fatherhood as an intimate relationship allows for an emphasis on the aspects of male parenting that fathers themselves view as most significant – emotions and the expression of affection to their children but this contemporary and emerging notion of fatherhood is not necessarily about an equal sharing of childcare with mothers. However, this growing recognition of the emotional ‘work’ of fathers is unique in that it may be in tension with the tenets of hegemonic masculinity and the traditional notions of fatherhood that had the potential to detach men from reproduction and parenting (Johansson and Klinth, 2007).

The push towards a ‘new’ fatherhood agenda is associated with wider social changes (lower birth rates and higher incidence of divorce). Many academics have attributed public interest in fathering to the rise in divorce rates in western societies (Smart and Neale, 1999; Hobson, 2002; Kalmijn, 2015; Jeynes, 2016) which has created a “discourse of crisis”, (Hobson, 2002: p.2) around fears of social disintegration caused by absent fathers and concerns about responsibility for children falling to lone parents. The tensions between this ‘new’ fatherhood and this ‘discourse of crisis’ regarding ‘absent fathers’ has resulted in a public debate in many countries that contains contradictory messages about men and fathers (Schmitz, 2016). Fatherhood is viewed as both a problem and resource, fathers are seen as both absent and present and responsible and irresponsible (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003). This study seeks to explore how these contradictory discourses play out in how young men experience an unintended pregnancy and subsequent fatherhood, and how young men construct their identity as a ‘father’.

Despite this keen policy and research interest on fatherhood and its changing nature, we are still left with a research lacuna on men's participation in reproductive planning and limited knowledge on 'men's procreative consciousness' (men's subjective experiences related to reproductive issues) and 'procreative responsibility' (men's sense of duty regarding contraception, pregnancy resolution and child support and care) (Marsiglio, 1993a). This chapter therefore will refer to on-going socio-cultural research into broader themes regarding men and reproduction, rather than specifically focusing on 'fatherhood'. This will widen the analytical lens to include the cultural, social, economic and discursive 'messiness' out of which notions of fatherhood and responsibility arise.

## **Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities**

Critical studies on Men and Masculinities (CSM) is a useful starting point for developing an analytical framework for research on men and reproduction. CSM emerged from strands of feminist, queer and Marxist perspectives, and there is a notably sociological focus on power (see e.g. Hearn, 2004). Lohan (2015) highlights how CSM has been an important foundation for exploring the gendered construction of men's lives and deconstructing the oppositional ways masculinities and femininities have been constructed within traditional feminist theory, instead looking for the ground between. She describes how in CSM, the political response to men goes beyond radical feminism (all men as oppressors) and liberal feminism (achieving parity with men) to explicitly engaging men in the co-construction of equitable gender relations. The considerable growth of CSM over recent decades has several implications for how men, and their involvement in reproduction might

be seen and understood and how research in this field may be developed. There are three feminist informed principles integral to CSM: (i) seeing gender as socially constructed; (ii) hegemonic masculinity; and (iii) challenging gender power relations (Lohan, 2007).

### **Seeing gender as socially constructed**

Up until the 1970s, the differences between men and women were attributed to biological and genetic differences (West and Zimmerman, 1987). However, in the late 1970s, these views began to be unpicked and challenged, with feminist academics and theorists, advancing the idea that gender was socially constructed and not a product of biological or genetic differences (See Goffman, 1976/1977; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974; Unger, 1979; Oakley, 1981; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Perhaps the most frequently confirmed tenet of masculinities research is seeing gender as socially constructed. Gardiner (2005) states that this is one of the most important accomplishments of 20th-century feminist theory. Connell (1987: p.69) disputes arguments from various ‘natural difference’ perspectives on the relationship between sex and gender and instead posits that gender is something that is ‘done’, (as opposed to biological sex). As West and Zimmerman (1987: p.26) state, “doing gender involves a complex set of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘nature’”. West and Zimmerman’s theory can be understood as three core ideas. First, gender is achieved through social interactions. Second, gender is dependent on context in that different versions of masculinities and femininities will be played out by individuals dependent on their situation. Third, men and women adopt particular displays of gender



that others expect of them (Sallee and Harris, 2011). What this means for young men experiencing an unintended pregnancy is that they can choose their actions and behaviours, but they do so at the risk of social judgement. In this way, the young men in this study could be said to be constrained by what is deemed to be socially 'gender acceptable' in their society and culture. In West and Zimmerman's words: 'the doing of 'gender' is undertaken by men and women whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production' (West and Zimmerman, 1987: p.126).

The first point in understanding how young men's experiences are impacted upon by gender is to acknowledge the contribution of CSM to examining gender in men's lives. This is about recognising "that men have gender too" (Annandale and Riska, 2009: p.123). It means holding a mirror to the "male gaze" and researching the gendered constructions of men's lives alongside that of women's (Lohan, 2015: p.218). It suggests that, "masculinity and femininity are loosely defined, historically variable, and interrelated social ascriptions to persons with certain kinds of bodies - not the natural, necessary, or ideal characteristics of people with similar genitals" (Kegan-Gardiner, 2005: p.35). In examining the social construction of gender in men's lives, there is, as in feminist research in women's lives, a challenging of the equation of sex with gender and recognition of the historically and cultural construction of masculinities across different societies and with respect to ethnicity, sexuality, age and social class (Kimmel, 1987). From this perspective, men and masculinities are understood as socially constructed, produced and reproduced rather than as just 'naturally' one way or another. Hearn (2015: p.165) describes how men and masculinities are variable and changing across time and space, within societies, and through life courses and biographies. The gendering of men involves

both naming and deconstructing men and masculinities; distinguishing men as subjects of analysis; and seeing men and masculinities as subject to change, no change, and retrogressive change (Hearn, 2015).

Early research on men and masculinities aimed to “understand that the construction of masculinity contains a political dynamic, a dynamic of power, by which ‘the other’ is created and subordinated,” (Kimmel 1990:p.96) and many resulting publications focused on the construction of masculinities and their links to power. Messner’s “Power at Play” (1992) shows how masculinity is constructed by power relationships in institutionalized sport, and the effects this has on men’s bodies, lives and relationships. Pascoe’s “Dude, You’re a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School” (2007) depicts the construction of heterosexual, dominance-based masculinity in American high schools. This is depicted through sexual boasting, bullying, the belittling of girls and women and the rejection of the “fag” identity. Schilt’s research on transgender men and employment (2006, 2010) illustrates how power and privilege comes to men through their interactions, even in cases where an individual was previously known as a woman. By showing that these benefits accrue to individuals as they move across genders, Schist (2006, 2010) argues that they arise from the socially constructed category ‘men’, and not from anything about the individual. This view of gender as a social construction is used in this study as a theoretical lens in which to examine how young men navigate gender systems and construct gendered identities within the context of an unintended pregnancy and decision-making.

## Hegemonic Masculinities

Relatedly, a key analytical concept within CSM is that of hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1987: p.183) argued that there is no one form of constant or dominant masculinity. The concept of hegemonic masculinity, as used by Connell (1987) and Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985), proposes the existence of a contextually and historically contingent version of 'hegemonic masculinity', which is 'always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women'. Hegemonic masculinity has been proposed as a form of masculinity, which is in contrast to other less dominant forms of masculinity that are subordinated, and marginalised (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985; Connell, 1995).

The strength of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical tool lies in its ability to describe a hierarchical collection of masculinities and how these develop not as isolated acts but as 'configurations of gender practice' generated in particular situations (Connell, 1998: p. 81). Connell's (1995) conceptual framework of hegemonic masculinities has been used broadly in research across the social sciences and humanities. It enables an understanding of masculinities as fluid but also hierarchical. Men can be said to display differing forms of masculinity and 'maleness' dependent upon whether they are enacting hegemonic, marginalized or subordinated forms of masculinity. What this means is that in situations where men are denied the social power and resources in order to construct hegemonic masculinity, they will strive to employ other methods for constructing gender identities that validate their 'maleness', despite their marginalized position within society. For example, among groups of working class men, physical strength is seen

as a sign of masculinity and ‘maleness’, in the absence of wealth as a signifier of masculinity (Dolan, 2011). It is important to note that Connell’s (1995) conception is not intended to provide a checklist of masculine traits and instead, it highlights how hegemonic forms of masculinity inform and structure the multiple ways in which men construct themselves as masculine.

In addition, there is no single form of hegemonic masculinity, instead, there are ‘multiple, context-dependent strategies for doing hegemonic masculinity’ (Noone and Stephens, 2008: p. 713). Dominant masculinities may also exist within subordinated or marginalized positions in that ‘it is possible to be subordinated by hegemonic masculinities and assume a dominant position in relation to other men’ (Coles, 2009: p.33). It is clear, that the categories of hegemonic masculinities are not ‘fixed’. Men may differ in how strongly they hold and act out hegemonic masculine attitudes and beliefs. Men may also move back and forth between hegemonic, subordinated or marginalized masculinities, depending upon the social context. As Messerschmidt (1993: p.31) suggest masculinity is “never static or a finished product but rather, men construct masculinities in specific social situations”.

Some academics have perceived CSM’s use of the concept of hegemonic masculinities in a variety of ways as a weakness (McMahon, 1993; Hearn, 1996; Clatterbaugh, 1998; Hearn, 2004). Many of these theorists have argued that men demonstrate a diversity of masculinities, with different masculinities being demonstrated by the same man (Smiler, 2004; Sheff, 2006), and masculinities being

formed inter-sectionally with sexuality, class, age, etc., (Hearn, 2011). Donaldson (1993) has highlighted that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is messy and unclear and fails to highlight individual agency within the gender system. Additionally, he posits that pinpointing specific examples of hegemonic masculinity in practice is challenging because it is difficult to identify features which categorically support or undermine the concept. For example, it is unclear whether increased involvement in parenting and fatherhood represents an adherence to or a rejection of hegemonic masculinities (Donaldson, 1993; Hearn, 2004). Whitehead (1998) states that while hegemonic masculinity outlines a dominant cultural understanding of masculine dominance which is underpinned by an assumption of biological essentialism and the policing of gendered behaviours, it does little to address how such a system is experienced by individuals. Hearn (2004) questions the ways in which multiple dominant characteristics exhibited by individual men interact with each other. Others state that CSM's emphasis on hegemonic masculinity has meant that it has overlooked other factors such as economic class despite their importance to analyses of power relations (Donaldson, 1993; Hearn, 2004). To counter this Hearn (2004) argues for a move away from seeking and exploring a fixed form of hegemonic masculinity, to instead understanding 'the widespread repeated forms of men's practices'. This he argues would involve exploring 'the hegemony of men' and 'the examination of that which sets the agenda for different ways of being men in relation to women, children, and other men' (Hearn, 2004: p.60).

Lohan (2015) argues that hegemonic masculinities as a concept, though widely used, is also widely contested. At its core, however, is a useful construct to

conceptualise culturally dominant ideas of the prevailing ideals of masculinity, relevant at a particular time in a particular place. Hence, it demands of the researcher that we first investigate what are those ideals, how widely held are they and the ways in which they are open to contestation. Central to the criticism of hegemonic masculinities is challenging the assumption that traits of masculinity can be simply read off (Moller, 2007). This means that in order not to essentialise what masculinity means in a society or amongst a particular group of men in society, masculinity should be an empirical question. However, this argument in favour of employing the concept of hegemonic masculinity sometimes gets lost in texts where perceived dominant norms of masculinity become very evident. The legacy of an essentialist style family in which the man is viewed as the main economic earner and overall protector of the family is a cultural norm which often lives on in contemporary societies and becomes read as hegemonic masculinities thus obscuring the question of what is hegemonic masculinity in that specific place and time.

## **Gender Relations**

It has been argued there are many intersectionality's that come together to make up our individual experiences of life (Crenshaw, 1997), but that perhaps none are as comprehensive as gender. When we are born, we are assigned group membership even before birth based on our ultrasound image and our lives are implicitly directed by socially constructed rules and expectations (Ruble and Martin, 1998; Paechter, 2007). From an early age we identify ourselves and others as either male or female and the rules governing that group membership have an impact on our own personal identity, the choices that we make, how we behave, our opportunities and how we are recognised

and treated by those around us for the rest of our lives (Connell, 1995). In relation to challenging gender power relations, Hearn (2004) argues the need for critical examination of the taken for granted dominant constructions, powers and authorities of men in relation to women, children, young people and each other. As Hearn (2004) notes the reference to 'Critical' in CSM centrally concerns questions of the power men hold in society as a group. While power functions, flows and re-forms in multiple ways, it is difficult to avoid the fact that in most societies, and certainly those of western, 'advanced' capitalism, men are structurally and interpersonally dominant in most spheres of life (Walby, 1986, 1990). This approach does not downplay differences among and between men in terms of age, class, ethnicity and other differences, including their relations with women. Instead it recognises men as a group while also acknowledging the complex interplay of unities and differences between men within patriarchies (Hearn and Collinson, 1993).

Masculinity as described by Connell (1998, 2005) is a conceptual discourse that supports the structure of gender relations whilst blurring the view of the individual. Men's long history of dominance throughout history, and the subordination of women, has made 'doing' gender an unconscious habit in our society. Because of the relational nature of gender, binaries such as male strength and female fragility automatically limit women simply based on their gender category, often with the goal of reproducing the gender hierarchy. In other words, historical formations of masculinities and femininities are still heavily controlled to sustain compliance to patriarchal expectations. (Connell, 1998, 2000, Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

## Young Men and Hegemonic Masculinities

It has been over three decades since the concept of hegemonic masculinity was introduced to theoretical discussions of gender. In that time, a significant body of empirical research has developed that focuses on the links between hegemonic masculinity and the construction of masculine identities among men. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: p.833) note, “the research into hegemonic masculinity has been quite considerable, with numerous papers, edited volumes, journals, encyclopaedias, and bibliographies published on the field, and continued interest for international and interdisciplinary conferences on the topic”. Within this vast body of knowledge, the concept has been used to examine the influence of hegemonic masculine ideologies across a vast array of arenas and contexts including sexual practices (Mac an Ghail, 2000), men’s health (Courtenay; 2002; 2003; 2004), and the family (Donaldson 1991; Howson 2006). While the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been challenged, Lohan (2015) and Haywood and Mac an Ghail (1996) conclude that the concept retains analytical value;

*[...] for probing questions concerning the salient cultural and symbolic ideals of masculinities in a given context and how power relations among men may be structured around such ideals. (Lohan, 2015: p.9)*

Similarly, Haywood and Mac an Ghail (1996) conclude that the construct retains utility as a;



*[...] highly useful concept with incisive scope to examine the asymmetric nature of gendered power relations, while at the same time arguing that dominance is never secure but must always be won. (1996: p.52).*

Overall, research into hegemonic masculinity has recognised that dominant ideologies and discourses of masculinity permeate a great deal of men's lived experiences, and they are exhibited in multiple ways through social practices, in different local and global settings. Hegemonic masculinity has provided significant insight into the ways in which young men construct legitimate masculine identities in relation to hegemonic masculinity. A collective starting point for many of these analyses is the acknowledgement that young men now operate within gender landscapes that are hugely different to those of their fathers and grandfathers. The subtle yet significant changes that followed second-wave feminism brought about what some have referred to, as a 'crisis of masculinity' (Kimmel 1987) where established modes of masculinity that had existed for generations had come under question. This created tensions within the lives of young men who were now required to negotiate and manage their own masculinities within a shifting gender context. Hearn (1987: p.5) notes that as the rise of modern feminism has brought about a questioning of what it is to be a woman, so too has it directed attention at what it is to be a man, especially in an environment of significant socio-cultural and structural changes in regard to gender.

## **Young Men and Unintended Pregnancy and Pregnancy Resolution**

The question I now address is how feminist theory, and CSM, opens up for analysis a critical understanding of the experiences and attitudes of young men who have

experienced an unintended pregnancy in their lives in a Northern Irish context. This critical analysis entails not only an exploration of men's experiences of unintended pregnancy but also seeks to unpack their involvement in pregnancy resolution decision-making. This means exploring how young men's experiences and decision-making choices are situated in the context of gender relations with their partners, family and friends, and more broadly in the gendered structures of contemporary Northern Irish society. Going forward, I will especially explore the social construction of gender, hegemonic masculinity and gender relations of power in the narratives of young men who have experienced an unintended pregnancy in their lives.

CSM acknowledges that men's lives are shaped, as much as women are, by gender constructions and gender relations. Turning this 'male gaze' on young men's experiences of pregnancy resolution choices, specifically abortion, it is clear that there is little known about how young men make sense of abortion in their lives, since the body of research on men and abortion is notably thin. Some research investigates men's attitudes to abortion (Lohan et al., 2013; Altshuler et al., 2015) or perceptions of men's roles in contraception, reproduction, or pregnancy in general (Adaji et al., 2010; Buston, 2010; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Kagesten et al., 2015; Daugherty, 2016). However, far less research has been conducted in the area of men's own experiences with abortion. As noted in the literature review (Chapter 2), out of the 38 studies included only 11 studies focused on young men's actual experiences of an unintended pregnancy. Ten of these studies focused on the attitudes and experiences of young fathers, with only one study focusing on young men's actual experiences of abortion (Chatchawet et al., 2010). It is clear that there

is almost a complete absence of studies conducted that focus specifically on the thoughts and feelings of young men who have experienced an unintended pregnancy and do not go on to become a father. Illustrating the salience of cultural views about male responsibility, research has shown that some young men identify responsibility as central to definitions of masculinity and that both abortion and fatherhood may be an expression of responsibility (Smith et al., 2011; Olmstead et al., 2013; Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015). However, even as men articulate the importance of responsibility and may internalise expectations to behave responsibly, it is not clear how that value is actualised in pregnancy prevention or abortion decisions.

A central concept of CSM is that of hegemonic masculinity and much of the literature on young men involved in unintended pregnancies and/or young fathers relies on narrow conceptions of gender and masculinity. These narrow conceptions rest heavily on norms of breadwinning and being a provider. However, the scope of research and theoretical debate demonstrates that masculinity is much more complex than that (Moller, 2007). Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as a set of cultural ideals or dominant notions about what it means to be a "real man." Here there is a focus on behaviours and processes that privilege certain forms of masculinity over (and against) femininity and other subordinated or marginalised masculinities (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

In addition, CSM highlights the ways in which hegemonic masculinities can be contested. The narratives of young men involved in an unintended pregnancy allows for insight into the ways in which these young men see themselves. In addition to

creating a private sense of self, narratives also help us in conveying and negotiating that self with others (Linde, 1993). Moreover, the young men in this study do not exist in isolation. In constructing personal narratives, these young men will draw on resources, such as cultural discourses, to navigate various norms, and masculinity serves as one such resource. Young men involved in an unintended pregnancy are located in a difficult position, having openly violated various societal expectations, especially those that dictate that young men follow the 'normal' life path of getting an education, job, marriage and then having children. Experiencing an unintended pregnancy outside of this path is generally considered a mistake, and a challenge to societal beliefs about the timing and context of parenthood (Kiselica, 2006; Furstenberg, 2007).

Exploring young men's narratives of unintended pregnancy and pregnancy resolution decision-making reveals the ways in which discursive constructions of masculinity can both enable and constrain young men. Young men who have experienced an unintended pregnancy may rely on masculine stereotypes of young men as heterosexually obsessed, as a means to signify their manhood, as well as mitigating the stigma of unintended pregnancy. However, these same images also are used to stigmatise young men involved in unintended pregnancies as selfish, even predatory (Paschal, 2006; Kiselica, 2008).

Masculinity does not afford direct privilege to all men, in all contexts. The roles and identities of young men involved in an unintended pregnancy locate them in a unique position of empowerment and powerlessness. Gender is not the only

structural influence that young men must navigate when involved in an unintended pregnancy. Their identities and experiences are also anchored to social class and age. In other words, the experiences and consequences of an unintended pregnancy are felt and understood differently based on the young man's location within hierarchies of gender, class, and youth. CSM explores what might be the prevailing hegemonic masculine ideals among men of differing class and creed. Lohan (2015) suggests that we might hypothesize that hegemonic ideals might vary along a continuum of wanting to be an involved, caring, reproductive partner through to masculine agnosticism of women's problem. This will be central to my analysis of the data.

## **Conclusion**

The central purpose of this chapter is to explore theories which can help us understand men's roles in reproduction, specifically young men's experiences and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives. The results of the feminist movement have been immense in terms of advancing control for women over when they become pregnant, however, the results of this movement may also have added to the reconstruction of family planning and reproductive health as a 'women's responsibility' or as being synonymous with femininity. This body of work and feminist theory and practice may have neglected men and reproduction.

However, CSM, whilst deeply rooted in feminist theory, may help us to understand gender in men's lives and power differentials between men as well as between men and women. In particular, CSM may assist in opening up the 'gendered box' of

young men's stories and experiences of unintended pregnancy. CSM can help us explore how young men receive the news of an unintended pregnancy, how they make decisions regarding the pregnancy and how they become parents.

## **Chapter Five: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This research explored young men's experiences and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives. To do so, qualitative methods were employed to explore their personal narratives and experiences. In this chapter I focus on the practical research design for the study and how I developed an appropriate research strategy for accessing, collecting and analysing the various data. The issue of access to participants is discussed, and the challenges I encountered are highlighted in order to throw more light on the complexities that arise in researching a sensitive topic within a 'hard to reach' population. The ethical issues that emerged during the study are discussed, as is the way emerging ethical questions influenced the progression of the research. I provide an examination of the methodological rigour of the study and describe my strategy and techniques for analysing the data. Finally, it is worth noting that reflexivity is woven throughout the chapter as this has formed a critical part of the study.

### **Research Approach**

The research was qualitative, consistent with an interpretivist epistemology focused on understanding the meanings given to human behaviour and how social actors interpret the social world (Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2013). The choice of research method reflect a particular epistemological stance, and not just the mere application of a specific data-gathering technique. Quantitative methodologies can have greater breadth, however, were considered less suitable for this study because they can obscure complex, nuanced experiences and may preclude an in-depth exploration of meaning (Yilmaz, 2013).

Though there is much debate about the generalisability of qualitative findings, the aim was to capture rich description of experiences and perspectives so that we can better understand the social processes at work within the population from which the sample is drawn (See Gobo, 2004).

In this study, the research methodology involved a qualitative approach which utilised 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). This involved writing detailed portrayals of the participants' experiences, going beyond a report of the surface phenomena to their interpretations, uncovering feelings and the meanings of their actions. My qualitative approach allowed me to build up a picture of the young men, their social circumstances, the events under study and the perceptions and discourses that share their accounts. In this study young men describe their involvement in a women's decision to have an abortion or to proceed with the pregnancy and to understand this experience, with all its nuances and messiness. I sought to build a deep, detailed account of their experiences, including the setting, those involved and any perceptions the young man had about their behaviour, circumstances and decisions. Denzin (1989, p83) describes how this kind of thick description can provide 'deep, dense, detailed accounts of problematic experiences'. Thick description is a way of achieving a type of external validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) for by describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations and people. In other words, thick meaning of findings leads the reader to a sense of 'verisimilitude', wherein they can cognitively and emotionally place themselves within the research context (Ponterotto, 2006).



## Researcher Reflexivity

As part of my commitment to reflexivity and openness about my own role within the research, I kept a reflexive journal throughout my research journey. This enabled me to record my reactions, thoughts and feelings about an interview or contact with a participant immediately after the event. These reflections often contributed towards my reflexive reading of the data during analysis; helping to remind me of my initial reactions to the interview and any specific details I might have otherwise forgotten. The reflexive diary helped me to identify my own subjective location in relation to the participant and factors that might have influence on the interview. Sorsa, Palli and Mikkola (2015) and Byrd Clark (2009) have suggested that, used in this way, a reflexive diary can enhance rigour within the research process by forming an audit trail of decisions and encouraging critical reflection of the researcher's role within data collection.

The reflexive diary was helpful in identifying when my own personal opinions and values could have potentially impacted upon the interview. One particular example was when a young man from a Protestant background who identified as a member of a Unionist political party in NI, discussed how he disagreed with abortion and in the future would vote against its legalisation in Northern Ireland, yet he believed that 'it was ok' for him to have an abortion. During this interview I probed him about these values that he held and at times found it difficult and frustrating that he was unable to see the hypocrisy of his views. Acknowledging this frustration helped me to ensure that my 'frustrations' did not impact upon the subsequent data analysis and enabled me to focus on interpreting his account in relation to his individual story rather than on

searching for meaning behind what I had identified as inconsistencies in his views (Gilgun, 2008; Probst, 2015).

As researcher it is important to reflect on my own status as a young woman conducting interviews with these young men, and how this may have shaped the data collected. I was aware that the way that I engaged with the young men, the form of knowledge created and produced, and my interpretation of it, were shaped by my age, class position and my identity as a female (Manderson et al., 2006).

In many ways I can be understood as an ‘outsider’ to the young men I interviewed; I do not have a shared experience in terms of gender. Filiault and Drummond (2009) discuss the benefits and drawbacks on an ‘insider’ identity, arguing that assumptions of shared perspectives and experience can lead to over-identification with research participants. They note that participants may not share certain insights or information where they assume the interviewer has shared knowledge of the issue. Thus. Filiault and Drummond (2009) note that ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ positions are not inherently ‘better’ or ‘worse’, rather researchers have an obligation to reflect on their own position within the research process.

I was particularly aware of the interaction between me as a young female researcher talking to young men about ‘sensitive’ topics. During some of the interviews, I was struck by the sense that some of the young men were trying to ‘protect’ me by not being overly explicit when discussing their own sexual practice. For example, one of the young men apologized for talking about ‘pulling out’. It is important to consider, as such the young men may have adjusted their accounts accordingly. However, I feel that

as a result of my experience in working with young men, I came across as confident during the interviews about broaching the topic of their sexual practices sensitively, while continuing to ask for further explanation and clarification about their experiences.

It is important to consider the ways in which the differences between my experiences and priorities and those of my participants may have influenced the data I obtained and analysed. While I was relatively close in age to some of the young men, it is certain that the age difference between us was still significant enough to guarantee differences in experiences. Consequently, I may have underplayed factors that a young person may find more relevant. For example, dating apps are much more prevalent and influential for young people now that they were when I was in my teens. However, I did try to investigate such issues with the young men and how this shaped their ideas around dating and relationships.

## **Sampling**

As this was a qualitative study, non-probability and convenience sampling was the most appropriate way to select participants, as the participants would need to have reason to think about my research questions in a meaningful way (Gibbs et al., 2007; Bernard, Wutich and Ryan, 2017). A convenience sample is selected primarily on the basis of what the researcher is able to access. One of the strongest rationales for this method of sampling is when the group (young men), or phenomenon (unintended pregnancy), is generally difficult to access, but the researcher is able to establish a sufficient degree of trust with particular participants to conduct a viable study. The recruitment aimed to identify young men aged 16-24, resident in Northern Ireland, who had experienced an unintended pregnancy, whatever the outcome was. I decided that 16 years old was the

appropriate minimum age of selection. This was due to the fact that parental consent would be required for young people below the age of sixteen and given the sensitive nature of the study topic, I felt that parental consent would be unlikely and that discussions to obtain consent may cause difficulties for the young men and compromise their confidentiality.

## **Sample Size**

The goal in designing a qualitative sample is to ensure a range of perspectives when recruiting a small number of people (Curtis et al., 2000; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Walsh and Downe, 2006). My aim in this study was to use convenience sampling to recruit young men aged 16-24 in Northern Ireland, who had experienced an unintended pregnancy, whatever the outcome was. I adopted a pragmatic approach to sample size based on the practicalities of fieldwork and the time and resources involved.

This thesis does not claim that data saturation has been reached with a sample size of ten young men, however ten young men was the maximum amount of participants that I was able to recruit to this study. These young men were hard to reach, the topic under investigation was sensitive and also, illegal, and I was restricted by the time constraints of a PhD study. Although the final sample size for this study was relatively small, this had a number of benefits. It enabled me to maintain a focus on the individuality of the young men's stories. I was able to dedicate time and energy to each and every interview account, meaning that I respected the uniqueness of the young men's stories. Participants' accounts were detailed and complex, therefore a small sample size facilitated a deeper exploration and analysis of the layers of narrative contained within

them. I would have wished to recruit a larger sample size for this study; however, this was not feasible.

Sample size in qualitative research has been the subject of enduring discussions (Sandelowski, 1996; Morse, J.M. 1995; Morse, J.M. 2000). Qualitative research experts argue that there is no straightforward answer to the question of ‘how many’ and that sample size is contingent on a number of factors relating to epistemological, methodological and practical issues (Baker, 2012). Sandelowski recommends that qualitative sample sizes are large enough to allow the unfolding of a ‘new and richly’ textured understanding’ of the phenomenon under study, but small enough so that the ‘deep, case-oriented analysis’ (p.183) of qualitative data is not precluded.

There are no formal guidelines on sample size in qualitative research but data saturation can be said to be reached when there is enough information to replicate the study (Trotter, 2012; Walker, 2012; O’Reilly and Parker, 2013), and further interviews are not producing any new information (Sobal, 2001; Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Methodological studies in this area aim to provide guidance about saturation and develop a practical application of processes that ‘operationalise’ and evidence saturation. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson analysed 60 interviews and found that saturation of themes was reached by the twelfth interview. They noted that their sample was relatively homogeneous, their research aims focused, so studies of more heterogeneous samples and with a broader scope would be likely to need a larger size to achieve saturation.

## Sample Size and Hard to Reach Groups

‘Hard to reach’ is a term primarily used by researchers to describe groups of people who have been historically difficult to find or contact due to geographical location, social and economic situations, concealment of identity due to fear, social pressure, stigma or social invisibility (Stone, 2003; Liamputtong, 2007; Shanghagi, Bhopal and Sheikh, 2011; Sydor, 2013).

Researchers across academic disciplines have reported difficulties in recruiting and retaining subpopulations of people variously described as “hidden” (Faugier and Sargent, 1997; Bonevski, et al., 2014; Vangeepuram, et al., 2016), “hard to reach” (Abrams, 2010; Sheriff et al., 2011; Sydor, 2013), “at risk” (Borek et al., 2010), “minority” (Shahabi et al., 2011), and “vulnerable” (Ward and Henderson, 2003; Liamputtong, 2007; Taylor, 2009). The difficulty in accessing young fathers in particular has been discussed in the literature (Smith, Buzi and Weinman, 2002; Reeves, 2006; Scourfield et al., 2014).

For the purpose of this research, hard to reach refers to populations that have traditionally been difficult for researchers to access (young men), concealment of identity due to stigma (abortion was illegal in Northern Ireland at the time of study) and also social invisibility as young men are often excluded from the topic of unintended pregnancy decision making.

One of the first challenges researchers face when conducting research with hard to reach and hidden populations is identifying potential participants within that population. For example, research demonstrates that identifying sexual assault survivors is difficult because women do not always label or identify their experiences as assault or abuse (Wood and Rennie, 1994; Harned, 2004; Orchowski, Untied and Gidycz, 2013). Similar challenges existed in the recruitment for this study, in that young men may not even be aware that they are eligible for the study if their partners choose not to inform them about the unintended pregnancy or abortion. The young men in this study represented a hidden population within a hidden population.

Hard to reach groups often face heightened social and psychological risks when identified as a member of a particular social group, thus making them more hesitant to identify themselves to researchers. This study asked young men to come forward and discuss their experiences of an unintended pregnancy, including their experiences of an abortion. At the time of the study abortion was illegal in Northern Ireland. This is the first and the last study to recruit young men while abortion was still illegal in Northern Ireland. It is important to locate this study within the wider research conducted with women in Northern Ireland and the U.K. who have had an abortion. To date, only two qualitative studies have been conducted that explore women's experiences of acquiring an abortion while living in Northern Ireland (Boyle and McEvoy, 1998; Aiken et al., 2018).

Aiken et al. (2018) conducted telephone interviews with thirty women in Northern Ireland who had either travelled for an abortion or taken abortion pills. Participants were

invited through three organisations that have frequent contact with women in Northern Ireland who are seeking abortion and participants were offered £80 for their time;

1. The abortion support network (ASN) which provides information and financial assistance to women who travel from Northern Ireland to access abortion and which sent invitations to their mailing list.

2. Women on Web (WoW) which sent invitations to women who have used their online telemedicine service.

3. Alliance for Choice, a Northern Irish organisation that provides information and support to those seeking abortion and which shared the information via social media.

Boyle and McEvoy (1998) recruited seven women from Northern Ireland who had travelled to England for abortions revealing the strong links between the women's experience and the very negative public constructions of abortion in Northern Ireland.

The difficulties in recruiting young men for this study have been mirrored in the literature on young women, unintended pregnancy and abortion. Hoggart and Phillips (2010) conducted research with in London on young women's abortion experiences. The study was located in ten local health authorities in London. The researchers described how they had hoped to interview up to eight young women from each locality resulting in 80 interviews, however, they described how they were only able to recruit three young women, in total, this way. They interpreted this difficulty as being partly due to what was often viewed as shame and stigma attached to abortion. They adapted their research design, and interviewed extra key informants and also recruited seven



young women who had terminated their pregnancies through a central provider – BPAS (British Pregnancy Advice Service). In total, they were able to recruit ten young women to participate in a qualitative interview about their abortion experience.

The above studies would suggest that my approach of recruiting through social media, public and gatekeepers was relatively successful given the striking differences in resources and access and the nature of the population I was trying to access. As I go forward and build on this research I will be able to utilise some of the recruitment strategies used by researchers in environments where abortion is legal. For example, as abortion has now been decriminalised in Northern Ireland the option to recruit directly through abortion clinics and hospitals will be available in the future.

## **Recruitment**

Recruitment for this study began in January 2017 and ended in February 2018. Ten young men were recruited and interviewed for the study. Three methods of recruitment were utilised for this study:

- Recruitment through social media
- Recruitment through the public
- Recruitment through gatekeepers

This chapter will now describe each method of recruitment in greater detail and the difficulties encountered with recruitment and how these were overcome.

## **Recruitment through Social Media**

In August 2016, I began working with a design studio (Studio Stereo) in Belfast to design a recruitment video. On advice from the graphic designers it was decided to keep the recruitment video to less than a minute long, and all information about the study would be provided in text form on the video as it was advised that the majority of young people watch videos on social media without audio. The design of the video included young men with their faces concealed with a white bubble, this was to hint at the fact that young men were not seen or heard when an unintended pregnancy occurred and also to highlight the confidential nature of the study (See Appendix 5.1 for screenshots of the recruitment video)<sup>2</sup>. The final version of the video was completed in October 2016, ethical approval for the study was granted in December 2016 and recruitment for the study began in January 2017.

The recruitment video was shared on my personal Facebook and Twitter accounts (see Appendix 5.2 for screenshots of recruitment call). I shared the recruitment video on a fortnightly basis from January 2017 to December 2017. The recruitment video was shared on Twitter by academics within Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, social workers and youth workers within Northern Ireland, PhD students, Men's Health Forum Ireland and Men's Voices Ireland.

In February 2017, I contacted a research fellow on the 'If I Were Jack' project. 'If I Were Jack' is a unique intervention developed collaboratively with academics,

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<sup>2</sup> Link to the recruitment video: <https://vimeo.com/201758105>

government bodies, pupils and teachers over several years in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Australia. It is designed to help young people avoid an unintended pregnancy during their teenage years. It is especially intended to help young men become aware of their responsibilities in avoiding an unintended pregnancy during adolescence. My study was advertised on the 'If I Were Jack Website' (see Appendix 5.3).

In March 2017, I made contact with Colin Fowler, the Director of Operations for the Men's Health Forum in Ireland. The recruitment video alongside details of the study was included on the Men's Health Forum in Ireland website, their monthly newsletter, and their Facebook and Twitter page (See Appendix 5.4 for details of the recruitment call through the Men's Health Forum in Ireland).

I also sent messages via Facebook messenger to various sports clubs, societies and charity and youth groups, during February and March 2017, describing my research and asking them if they would share the recruitment video on their social media sites (See Appendix 5.5 for a list of organisations contacted via Facebook and Appendix 5.6 for screenshots of an example of the messages sent via Facebook messenger). This was a time consuming exercise and I contacted over twenty nine different organisations.

The issue that arose with this was that my message went to their 'spam' folder, therefore many of the organisations did not actually receive my message. I had thought about sharing the recruitment video on various organisations Facebook pages via a post, however, I felt that this could alienate myself if certain organisations chose not to be

involved in the recruitment. On one occasion I shared the recruitment video and details about my study on a Facebook page entitled 'Belfast Friendship Club' which has over 2,000 members, however, I was sent a message from one of the administrators asking me to delete the post as it was against their rules and regulations.

Despite the wide spread and persistent 'sharing', 'tweeting' and 're-tweeting' of the recruitment video, I did not recruit any of the young men directly through social media, however social media did prove effective in creating and maintaining links with gatekeeper organisations. For example, one of the young men was recruited through a youth club that I contacted on Facebook. One of the youth workers advised that she would speak to a young man that would be eligible for the study and we kept in contact via Facebook and phone to arrange an interview. Liaising with the youth worker in this youth club involved multiple phone calls explaining my study and what I would be asking in the interview.

Through 'tweeting' the recruitment video, I was contacted by a youth worker who worked with young fathers via private message on Twitter. Through this contact I made phone contact with this youth worker and went to his office to discuss my study on two occasions.

### **Public Recruitment**

Alongside recruitment through social media, I also advertised the study by putting leaflets and posters advertising the study in public places. These places included The

Students Union in Queen's University, Belfast, The Physical Education Centre at Queen's University and the McClay Library.

In the McClay library, the recruitment poster for the study, was shown on all the plasma screens throughout the library from March – August 2017 (See Appendix 5.7). This involved making contact with library staff and receiving permission from them to advertise my study. I went to the library and spent time with a staff member explaining what my study was about and who I was trying to recruit.

Alongside this, I attended five under graduate law lectures, three social policy lectures and two social work lectures in Queen's University, between January and May 2017. Before each lecture began I explained the study to the class and then played the recruitment video and handed out leaflets explaining the study with my contact details on them.

In order to reach beyond the student population I also left leaflets in coffee shops, community centres and gyms and sports centres throughout Belfast. Over the course of January – May 2017, I left over five hundred leaflets in public places throughout Belfast. This involved walking around Belfast and calling into organisations and asking would it be possible to leave my leaflets there and if possible would I be able to speak to a staff member who would be able to help with my recruitment process. Through this I contacted a coffee shop in Belfast called the 'Thinking Cup', which is a social enterprise that employs young parents who have previously been in prison. They allowed me to leave leaflets in the coffee shop and also put up a poster. I was able to

speak to some of the young men working there about my research, however, when I asked them if they would like to be interviewed, they said that the pregnancy wasn't unintended, and that they wanted their children. I got a sense from these young men that now that they were fathers they were reluctant to reflect on the intendedness of the pregnancy.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2017, I attended a play in the MAC theatre in Belfast entitled "I Told My Mum I was Going on an RE Trip", which focused on young women's experiences of abortion. I contacted the MAC Theatre about the possibility of handing out leaflets about my study at the beginning or end of the play or leaving leaflets on seats. However, the production company of the play said no to this request as they could not be seen to be endorsing any particular view point (See Appendix 5.8 for correspondence with the production company). At the end of the show there was a panel discussion and during this discussion I asked a question about young men's experiences of abortion and spoke about my PhD study. I said that I would be happy to speak to anyone who would be interested in participating in the research or if anyone would like any further information on the study. After the play finished, a young man approached me and said that he would like to speak to me about his experiences of abortion. I took the young man's contact details and emailed him the information sheet about the study, and we arranged to meet that weekend to conduct the interview. I arranged to meet him in the coffee shop of the MAC theatre as it was a large space which was rarely busy or noisy. On the day of the interview the young man did not turn up and I sent him a text message letting him know that I was in the coffee shop. He apologized and said that he had slept in and wouldn't be able to meet that day. I attempted to re-arrange the interview for another date, but this was unsuccessful. I contacted the young man once

more towards the end of the recruitment period in November 2017 to make him aware that I was still recruiting if he wanted to participate, but I did not hear back from him.

In relation to both the social media and public recruitment, Tisdell, Davis and Gallagher (2009) have suggested that young people are unlikely to respond to an advert requesting participation in research, particularly when they do not know who the researcher is. I therefore also required a targeted recruitment strategy that enabled me to identify and make contact with a potentially limited number of possible participants. The next section will explain in detail the decision I made to access young men through practitioners and youth workers who had contact with young men, specifically young fathers.

### **Recruitment through Gatekeepers**

Gatekeepers are arguably the most important contact when trying to establish contact with an organisation (King and Horrocks, 2010). A gatekeeper is described as an adult who controls or limits a researcher's access to participants (Saunders, 2006, p.49). Gatekeepers can be adult-centric, and researchers have described how they can regard young people as dependent and in need of protection, in addition, if they have a formal or institutional role may be preoccupied with considerations regarding time, inconvenience, and unwillingness to expose themselves or their organisations to scrutiny (Leonard, 2007; Heath et al., 2013). I kept these issues in mind when approaching and engaging with gatekeepers.

For this study, it was considered most suitable to recruit young men from non-statutory agencies, due to the nature of services they provided to young people. As abortion is illegal in Northern Ireland, it was not possible to recruit from abortion clinic waiting rooms. Due to time constraints it was decided not to seek ethical approval to recruit from abortion clinics in England or Scotland. It was anticipated that the less bureaucratic approach adopted by non-statutory agencies would encourage easier dialogue with the young men. Another reason for using non-statutory organisations was that if on-going support became necessary for the participants due to the sensitive nature of the issues raised, there would have been facilities already in place at the referring agencies, to support the participants through any issues (Melrose et al., 2007; Melrose, 2011). However, as McFayden and Rankin (2016) observed, navigating through the internal policies within agencies, of whatever type, can be intimidating. They describe the power and control that agencies could potentially have over the direction of the study, and the methods of access.

Before ethical approval for this study was granted I had already begun to network with relevant agencies such as the Family Planning Association, Brook, Start 360, Include Youth and Barnardo's. In January 2017, I made initial contact via email with various youth and community groups (See Appendix 5.9 for an example email and Appendix 5.10 for a list of the main organisations I contacted). This was through my existing knowledge of organisations that worked with young people through my experience as a Residential Support Worker with a large regional charity, and by carrying out Google searches for non-statutory agencies tailored to young people.



Making a connection and establishing rapport with gatekeepers and potential participants alike is as an integral part of the research process in a study such as this (Abrams, 2010; Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013; Turner and Almack, 2016) but this continued to prove challenging in this study. Interestingly, Homan (1992) argues that sometimes, the process of negotiating with participants could be likened to situations of conflict, where potential participants are gradually and systematically worn down. He argues that sometimes people who may have initially declined to participate are subtly convinced (maybe as a result of incentives or relationships with key workers) to participate.

After sending out multiple emails to ‘gatekeepers’ within relevant agencies during January 2017, I had not received any responses. I then decided that sending an email was too impersonal, and also, too easy to ignore. Instead, I focused on the main organisations working with young men in Northern Ireland and contacted them by telephone. The main organisations that I contacted were Brook (Sexual Health Charity), Family Planning Association, Start 360 (Youth Organisation) and the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) Forum. Upon contacting these organisations I was then able to set up meetings with youth workers within each of the organisations to discuss my research with them and to ask how they could potentially help in the recruitment process. I will now give examples of how I worked alongside these agencies in an attempt to recruit young men for this study.

**Brook** – In February 2017, I met with the Centre Manager of Brook, an organisation providing sexual health and wellbeing advice and services for under 25s. After this meeting, we agreed that it would be beneficial for me to meet with the young men’s

worker as he would have the most access to the young men I would be seeking to recruit. After meeting with the young men's worker he agreed to speak to all of the young men he worked with about my study and ask if they would be eligible and interested in taking part. Upon his advice, we agreed that he would ask the young men if he could pass their contact details onto myself and I would then contact them via text message or WhatsApp to arrange an interview. He advised that it would be unlikely that the young men would call or message me first, therefore, it would be best if I made the initial contact. I also left two hundred leaflets to be left in the waiting room. I kept in regular contact with the youth worker in Brook between March and August 2017. On two occasions in May 2017 I attended the Saturday clinic and sat in the waiting room. On this occasion, there were no young men who were eligible to participate in the study.

Through this avenue of recruitment I received the mobile numbers of three young men who said that they would be interested in participating in my research. I initially sent a text message to each of the young men inviting them to participate in the study and to arrange an interview time and place. Two of the young men did not reply. I sent a further text message one week later, however, I did not receive a reply. One of the young men arranged to meet me in a coffee shop in a shopping centre in Belfast. The young man did not turn up for the interview and when I tried to re arrange the interview he did not reply to my text message.

**Barnardo's** – In January 2017, I sent emails to two members of staff working in Barnardo's Leaving Care Service. I provided them with information on my study, information sheets and a link to the recruitment video. In February 2017, I met with a staff member from the Leaving Care Service and they agreed to approach young men

that would be eligible to participate in the study. They made contact with a young man who had previously lived in the service and was a young father. The young man agreed for his details to be passed on to myself and for contact to be made. I made a telephone call to this young man and I arranged to meet with him in a coffee shop in South Belfast. The young man did not show up for the interview and I sent him a message to re arrange the interview. The young man subsequently moved out of Belfast and I was unable to arrange another interview with him.

**Family Planning Association** – In January 2016, I contacted a counsellor in the Family Planning Association to arrange a meeting to discuss my research and potential avenues of recruitment. I met with the counsellor on three occasions between January 2016 and January 2017. When I began recruiting for this study the counsellor in the Family Planning Clinic agreed to speak to the young men they worked with about my research. It was agreed that if they were eligible and wanted to participate in my research they could leave their details for me. During the recruitment period only one young man agreed to participate in my study. I made contact with this young man and agreed a time and date for interview. This interview proceeded.

### **Offering Incentives**

Offering payment for research participation is often both practically necessary and ethically fraught (Gelninas et al., 2018). Relying on participant altruism alone may be insufficient to achieve recruitment goals. Yet, it is unclear why research participation should rely on altruism alone, when such self-sacrifice is not typically expected outside the research setting. It should be “no more worrisome to commodify a person’s labour

as a research subject than to commodify a person's labour in other contexts, which happens all the time" (Lynch, 2014: p.159).

To date, few studies have explored systematically what motivates people to participate in qualitative research (Clark, 2010; Islam and Tanasiuk, 2013). Some anecdotal evidence has shown that participants in qualitative research report that incentives are important in influencing participation due to the time commitment involved (Pescud et al., 2015). Studies conducted with children and adolescents have highlighted that at least some of the participants thought cash incentives were a preferred form of incentive (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2006; Ensign, 2006; Fernandez et al., 2009; Brawner et al., 2013). In a few studies the issue of 'how much is too much', in terms of cash incentives as a coercive factor, was explored with children and adolescents. In one study, some adolescents voiced concerns that disproportionately large amounts of cash could be coercive for homeless youth (Ensign, 2006). In another study, adolescents felt that cash was not coercive for older children who had a better understanding of the role of incentives (Vitiello et al., 2007).

Interestingly, most of the gatekeepers I worked with wanted to know what the young men stood to gain from the study, and one in particular told me categorically that access to their young people was not possible if there were no incentives, as 'young people never do anything for nothing'. They also felt that participants had a right to be reimbursed for their time. This gave the impression that the participants would only agree to be interviewed if there was a financial incentive although evidence has shown that this is not usually the case (Fry and Dwyer, 2001). However, Kelly et al. (2017)

conducted an experiment with a nationally representative sample to test the impact of different incentive types and amounts on willingness to participate in a hypothetical qualitative interview. They found that all three monetary incentives resulted in greater willingness to participate than no incentive or a nonmonetary incentive. Researchers continue to justify payment across many types of studies and have called for higher payment amounts in order to mitigate participant exploitation or to make research participation fairer (Gelinas et al., 2018; Lamkin and Elliot, 2018; Largent and Lynch, 2017).

This was a dilemma, as on the one hand, there was a genuine desire to compensate the young people for their time, but on the other hand, there was a perceived compulsion from the gatekeepers. Unfortunately, there are people who still see researchers as ‘users’ and some gatekeepers, whether due to prior experience with other researchers or just cynicism, are prone to assume that participants would not be willing to give their time for nothing. There is no consensus regarding paying young people for participation in research (Kellett and Ding, 2004) or what is appropriate (Gallagher, 2009; see Alderson and Morrow, 2011 for discussion). Offering incentives is problematic on a number of grounds, which include, the concern that offering incentives for participation in research may be damaging to the authenticity of the data, as participants may be only attracted to participate because of the incentives and not because they actually meet the criteria for the research (Bentley and Thacker, 2004; Lynch, Joffe and Thirumurthy, 2019).

Because of the difficulties experienced in the recruitment of participants and following the recommendation of those who worked with young men in organisations such as

Brook, Include Youth and Barnardo's the decision was made to offer a £25 high street voucher to participants. This was done with the support of the supervisory team and with ethical approval.

## Sample Composition

A total of ten young men participated in the study and they were recruited through a mix of public recruitment and recruitment through gatekeepers. Five of the young men had experienced an unintended pregnancy that ended in an abortion and five young men had gone on to become fathers. All of the young men identified as from a white, Christian, background. This means that the findings may not reflect the experiences of other ethnic groups, nor young people of different religions. The table below (Figure 2.1) provides an overview of the ten young men who participated in this study. Chapter 6 provides a more detailed narrative descriptions of each of the young men.

**Figure 2.1 Overview of participants**

	Age	Pregnancy Outcome	Religious Background	Social Class	Education Level
<b>Andrew</b>	24	Abortion	Catholic	Middle-class	University
<b>Ben</b>	18	Father	Catholic	Working-class	Left school at 16
<b>Caleb</b>	24	Father	Catholic	Middle-class	University
<b>Danny</b>	23	Father	Catholic	Working-class	Left school at 16

<b>Eric</b>	24	Father	Catholic	Middle-class	University
<b>Frankie</b>	20	Abortion	Catholic	Middle-class	University
<b>Gareth</b>	22	Abortion	Catholic	Middle-class	Vocational qualifications
<b>Harry</b>	22	Abortion	Catholic	Middle-class	University
<b>Mark</b>	23	Abortion	Protestant	Middle-class	University
<b>Paul</b>	20	Father	Catholic	Working-class	Left school at 16

## Data Collections Methods

Interviews are commonly used within qualitative research as they enable participants to provide their own detailed descriptions of events, perspectives, beliefs and understandings (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001; Taylor, 2005; King, Horrocks and Brooks, 2018). Broadly speaking, interviews are typically categorised into three broad types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Fontana and Frey, 2005; Denscombe, 2010). Structured interviews usually follow a rigid script and all the questions asked are agreed on/decided in advance. They also take the form of questionnaires and are normally used for collecting standardised information about the participants. These were considered unsuitable for this study, as the intention was to give participants the opportunity to tell their individual stories without being

constrained to a yes or no answer. Unstructured interviews on the other hand are mostly participant led, with the interviewer having a list of broad themes or topics to be explored. It is argued that even though this could be a way of getting interesting data, there is the danger that the findings may be irrelevant to the study (Britten, 1995; Berg, 2007). Due to the time constraints on the project, and bearing in mind the sensitive nature of the topic under consideration, it was important that the interviews had a degree of structure to ensure that the data could be linked to research questions. Therefore, unstructured interviews were considered inappropriate for this study.

Semi structured interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection because they focus on verbal accounts and social realities. It was the respondents' accounts which were being sought and were valued. Semi-structured interviews rely on the social interaction between interviewer and informant to elicit information, and I felt that my experience working with marginalised young people allowed me to develop and ask questions which gave 'credibility' in the eyes of the young men. As these two suggest (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2003) such interviews provide the opportunity to probe deeply, to open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate, and inclusive accounts from participants' that are based on personal experience. The interview had to be like a normal everyday conversation whilst at the same time I had to steer the conversation to the experiences and attitudes that were relevant to the research question (Corbetta, 2003; Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Berg, 2007).

As this study involved participants who were deemed 'hard to reach,' and because the subject of the research was deemed 'sensitive' I always had concerns that the sample would be difficult to obtain. It was therefore necessary to explore different data collection techniques which could potentially recruit more participants. On-line



interviewing was one approach that was considered. James and Busher (2009) suggest that interviews carried out using e-mail are asynchronous and semi-private, and therefore the young men could remain anonymous during the research. In addition, this visual anonymity afforded by this approach may have promoted participants self-disclosure. However, after the first face-to-face interviews, it was undeniable that the development of a rapport between the researcher and the participant was central to the quality and depth of the data, and this would have been lost in the impersonal methods of online interviews. On-line interviewing would also have missed out on important non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language between the researcher and the interviewee (Melenhorst and Bouwhuis, 2004; Opdenakker, 2006; Barratt, 2012), which would have made it very difficult to present the data using thick description. As a result, online interviews were not considered an appropriate data collection method for this study. Corbin and Morse (2003) argue that participating in a qualitative interview is unlikely to be any more distressing to participants than talking about sensitive issues to family or friends. They report that the majority of people react positively to being interviewed, indeed many participants are grateful for the opportunity to tell their stories. They suggest that qualitative interviews are the most appropriate method for conducting sensitive research as they enable participants to retain control over what they discuss.

## **The Interviews**

In total, eleven interviews were carried out with ten young men. One young man's girlfriend went on to have a second abortion, and he wished to engage in a second interview. Eight interviews took place in local coffee shops, with two young men being interviewed at Queen's University and one young man being interviewed at his local

youth club. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and the average length of the interviews was 70 minutes. While the shortest interview (Danny) was around 30 minutes, the longest one lasted over two 2 hours (Caleb). The interviews were recorded with consent. I stressed that there was no compulsion whatsoever to be recorded. I finished the interviews by asking the young men if they had something else to add, or if there was something they wanted to discuss that had not been brought up. They sometimes added a little finishing sentence. I thanked them for their time and switched off the digital recorder. None of the young men appeared upset, so there was no need to provide them with any support information, as stated in the ethics plan of the research in case of apparent distress.

The interviews were aimed at revealing the meanings and essences of the human life world of these young men who had experienced an unintended pregnancy in an accurate, comprehensive and vivid way, and to this end, I ensured that the questions were stated in simple, clear and concrete terms (Bell, 2014).

The interview guide consisted of 14 non-sequential questions and also includes the standardised demographic data that I collected including, age, religion and occupational status (see Appendix 5.11).

These questions sought to explore four main themes:

*What happened: The context of the unintended pregnancy, relationship status etc.*

*The Decision Making: What was the decision made, how that decision was reached, what was your role in the process.*

*Impact on relationship: How did it impact your relationship at the time and how has it impacted your relationship now.*

*Support from others: Did you seek support from friends/family/professionals.*

In directing the conversation, I attempted to ask questions in an open manner, and rather than ‘fire’ 14 questions at the participant in a form of directive interrogation, I approached the questions in a thematic fashion. Once recording had commenced I started each interview with the same question – ‘Could we chat about the unintended pregnancy and what happened?’ I found that this entry question worked well; the young men engaged with it effortlessly and talked about how the unintended pregnancy happened. However, for two of the young men Paul and Danny, I did notice that they struggled with the line of inquiry around the decision-making process. It was clear to me that they hadn’t really given much thought to the idea that there was a decision to be made, and I did have to work hard, probe and enter into explanatory dialogue in order that the conversation yielded relevant reflections from them.

### **The interview encounter – attending to issues of power**

The power dynamics within the research relationship are complex and multifaceted. Research participants are often represented as totally powerless (Morrow, 2009; Palaganas et al., 2017); however, I sought to utilise research methods that would maximise participants’ power. Participants had the power to choose whether to participate, to construct their own stories and to withdraw should they wish to, and this was repeatedly emphasised to them. However, I as the researcher potentially had more power over the interaction than the participants. I was concerned that the differences between us might mean that the participants would not feel comfortable speaking to me, especially since I was talking about intimate aspects of their lives. Whilst it is not possible to eliminate such power differences, I therefore tried to adopt strategies to

minimize them. However, I acknowledge that I do not know how I was viewed by the participants and cannot be sure to what degree these strategies were successful, nor whether the interview encounters would have been different had I not done these things. The first way in which I sought to flatten potential power differentials was in offering the young men the choice of where the interview was carried out. It was hoped that this would enable the young men to feel more comfortable. I sought to develop rapport with participants on their own terms, reduce social distance and make participants feel comfortable and competent to speak freely (McCosker, Barnard and Gerber, 2001; Elmir et al., 2011; O'Reilly and Dogra, 2017). When meeting participants I paid attention to seemingly small details, such as what I wore and how I spoke. I tended to 'dress down' for interviews so as not to appear too formal. I believe that my experience as a Social Worker, having worked with young people for over six years, assisted with relationship building as I am used to talking to young men, often about very sensitive issues. I avoided using complex, academic language during our conversations and was guided by the participant's own choice of words when referring to their relationships. I chatted casually with the young men before starting the interviews, asking them how they were. I found introducing myself and having brief, informal conversations helped established rapport and enabled me to present myself as a relaxed, interested person.

During the interviews participants were encouraged to be in control of what they told me and what was recorded. They were shown how to turn the recorder off, although in the event no-one did this. I also emphasised that they did not have to answer any questions I asked them, or they could choose not to speak about certain issues. When participant's views and understandings seemed to differ from my own I respected them

and did not challenge or enter into a discussion about our different perspectives as I felt that this would potentially damage the rapport between us.

I have outlined a number of ways in which I attempted to address the issue of power within the interviews. As stated previously, I cannot say how these strategies were received by participants or whether they were effective, however, this discussion highlights my own role within data generation and reaffirms the co-constructed nature of the interviews. Providing this level of detail is an attempt to remain transparent about the research processes utilised and enhance the trustworthiness and ethical integrity of the data.

## **Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” and has been widely used in health and wellbeing research (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79; Braun and Clarke, 2014). Braun and Clarke (2006, p.78) state that “through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data”.

When selecting an appropriate tool to analyse the data, I chose thematic analysis as it is theoretically neutral. This means that unlike many qualitative methodologies, it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective (King, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2013; Nowell et al., 2017). Moreover, this analytical approach (as opposed to, say, biographical analysis) allows for a large amount of data to be synthesised for analysis. Criticisms of thematic analysis have included that the

method is poorly defined (Drisko and Maschi, 2015), however, in their paper, Braun and Clarke (2006) outline steps to clarify the process of conducting thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach offers a clear and usable framework for conducting thematic analysis.

Following transcription of all audio-recorded interviews and removal of any identifying characteristics of specific individuals, the data was analysed using thematic analysis based on the six steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method of analysis was adopted with a view to locating the participants at the centre of the investigation, as it allowed the research to go beyond merely identifying themes, to actually getting an in-depth understanding of the rationale of the participants, thereby leading to more robust findings. Thematic analysis is a data driven process that provides knowledge about the world from the participants' viewpoint. It focuses on searching for, and examining, and recording patterns (or themes) within the data that represent a description of the phenomenon being explored, by paraphrasing common ideas shared by a group of people (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Ritchie, Spencer and O' Connor (2003) describe how qualitative data analysis should be seen as a process, moving from close to the data in the early stages to further away in later stages, as broad themes are sought, and higher-level interpretations generated.

The process of thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed as it lays out a logical step-by-step procedure that incorporates how to code data, and search for and review emerging themes. This framework provided a structure to adhere to when trying to understand and code the data, i.e., searching for topics, ideas, concepts, terms, phrases, keywords, emerging statement, relationships and

patterns (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). This progressed through three levels, from descriptive (describing events) and symbolic (meaning/metaphor) to conceptual (deeper meanings/reflections) understanding. It is important to note that although presented as a linear step-by-step process, thematic analysis is an iterative and reflexive process as one moves back and forth from data to theory (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Themes can be identified in one of two ways: either inductively (data-driven approach) or deductively (theory-driven approach) (Ryan and Bernard, 2003; Braun and Clarke, 2006). With inductive coding, the process does not follow the researcher's analytic preconceptions, as the researcher is not interested in having preconceptions about the theoretical concepts of the topic. A deductive approach requires the researcher to have a theoretical understanding about the research area. The theoretical understanding is important to create a pre-existing coding frame to be used during the coding process.

I opted to employ both inductive and deductive coding, as used by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). If I had only used inductive coding in my study about young men's experiences of unintended pregnancy, I would not have given much attention to the theory of critical studies of masculinities (CSM), when conducting my analysis. Likewise, an exclusively deductive approach tends to provide 'a less rich description of the data overall', as the analysis would be limited to the theoretical interests of preconceptions about this topic (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.84). With this approach, I managed to obtain themes derived from participants' points of view (inductive) as well as from my own understanding about the theoretical aspects of my study (deductive).

The analysis of data can be conducted manually or by computer using software packages such as Nvivo (Denscombe, 2010, p.278). Careful consideration was given to

both options and after experimenting with Nvivo I decided to analyse the data manually. While computer packages allow for precision and speed in locating coded data, the main concern was that too much distance between the data and the researcher would be created, jeopardising the interpretive process. While manual analysis is labour intensive, I felt that it allowed a 'closeness' to the richness of the data enabling effective interpretation and synthesis (Blair, 2015). I also found that manual analysis was more conducive to working in tandem with life time-lines during the analysis phase. Reading through the life stories, I identified themes and significant points that would contribute to the analysis and I made notes in the transcript margins (Gillham, 2005, p.130; Denscombe, 2010, p.283). There was a 'tangibility' to this manual process that was difficult to replicate when I employed software.

Thematic analysis involves several stages. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the **first** phase involves familiarisation with the data. There are many ways for the researcher to familiarise themselves with the data, including transcription and multiple readings (Fielding and Lee, 1991). Prior to commencing an in-depth reading of the transcripts, I listened to the audio-recorded interviews while reviewing my interview notes. In addition, as per the recommendation of Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), a copy of the research questions and aims of the study were constantly referred to. However, as advised by O'Dwyer (2004), the interview guides or research questions should not constrain the researcher, who should be open to new themes that emerge during the in-depth coding. I chose to transcribe the interview data myself in order to get a better sense of the data, which I believed assisted with reflexivity throughout the analysis and writing process. Indeed, self-transcribing helps the researcher get a 'feel' for the data, aiding in-depth analysis (Bailey, 2008). The **second** phase involves



generating initial codes. During the first in-depth reading of each interview transcript, I performed the 'pre-code' activities, as proposed by Layder (1998). This involved highlighting, underlining, marking and circling important quotations from participants. Whilst I read the raw data line by line, I noted thoughts of interest and the process of open coding began. I made annotations in the outside margins of the actual transcripts which aided in reducing the raw data into summary words or statements. According to Parahoo (2014), generating initial codes requires a first level of analysis which he describes as basic. The **third** phase involves searching for themes/categories. During this stage of data analysis I focused on the patterns in the young men's response when constantly comparing their accounts about how they relate to each other. According to Parahoo (2014), this stage is described as an 'intermediate level' of analysis in which the initial codes are further reduced and grouped together into sub-categories. At this stage, some codes and expressions may be relevant to and appear in more than one category. During the intermediate stage, the words and phrases from the data that originally served as initial codes, were organised into meaningful categorical chunks of data (sub-categories), and a brief verbal description was applied (Tuckett, 2005). My interpretation of the meanings, concepts and themes in the analysis emerged over time, with data familiarisation, as more young men's responses confirmed patterns and consistencies in their experiences, attitudes and beliefs. The **fourth** phase involves reviewing themes, moving into the 'higher' level of analysis, requiring consideration of the relationships between the categories (Parahoo, 2014). The conceptually related categories identified from steps one to three above, in this fourth stage of the thematic analysis process, were further categorised to form the main themes into which the young men's data were synthesised. This understanding of the patterns within the data was checked by repeated readings of the transcripts to ensure that data within these main

categories cohered meaningfully. The **fifth** phase involves refining themes. For each theme, all the included quotations were synthesised to bring out the main ideas (Rubel and Villalba, 2009). In this, I engaged in providing a short description to capture the contents of each theme and what was interesting about it. This stage also involved revising the names given to each theme and subtheme, depending on the descriptions that accompanied them (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## **Ethical Considerations**

This study complied with the Economic and Social Research Council's Framework for Research Ethics. I sought ethical approval for the study from Queen's University Belfast's Office of Research Ethics and the Queen's University Belfast's School of Nursing and Midwifery's Research Ethics Committee, who independently assessed its compliance with the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics. These committees scrutinised procedures, questions and proposed documentation for all participants. Specifically, this documentation included all interview information sheets, consent forms and topic guides. I initially sought ethical approval in October 2015, and after some revisions full ethical approval was granted in January 2016 (Appendix 5.12). QUB acted as the sponsor of the research and ensured that governance and indemnity procedures were in place. The principal investigator (ML) registered the project on the Human Subject Project database in QUB.

## **Informed Consent**

Studies have shown that the issue of informed consent has been considered as challenging because of unforeseen circumstances that could arise during the course of

the research (Aaltonen, 2016). Therefore, for this study, every potential participant was given comprehensive information on what the research was about and why it was being carried out, in order to make a decision as to whether or not to take part. Each young man was given an information sheet which had clear information on the researcher and the context in which the study was being carried out, and they were advised that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time (See Appendix 5.13 and 5.13 for information sheets and consent forms). Consent was regarded as an on-going, contextually situated process, and at no time was it assumed or taken for granted. In practice, this meant ensuring that participants were aware of the multi-dimensional nature of consent, and that they could choose not to consent to certain aspects of the study. For example, they could choose not to answer any of my questions, or they could opt out of recording the interview. Following each interview I revisited the issue of consent to confirm that, in the light of their experience, participants understood what they had agreed to and to address any specific concerns they might have had regarding the information they shared with me. They were reminded that they could withdraw their consent at any time following the interview.

Gaining ethical approval for young men to participate in research is often constrained by Research Ethics Committees who view those less than 18 years as not legally competent to provide consent (Tisdell, Davis and Gallagher, 2009). Parental consent was not sought on behalf of any 16–18 year olds in this study. In the literature from England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in legal terms, the competency or capacity of a legal minor (i.e. someone under the age of 18) to give consent is judged against a concept referred to as ‘Gillick competency’. The ‘Gillick competency’ is based on the assumption that a 16-year-old with ‘sufficient understanding’ can provide consent in

their own right, and that under such circumstances a parent has no right to override their child's wishes (Heath et al., 2009, p.27; Taylor et al., 2018).

## **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

During discussions with the participants the term confidentiality was used loosely, as confidentiality suggests that no one else will know the outcome of their involvement in the research (Gibson et al., 2012). However, in practice, anonymity is all that can be offered to participants, as the information provided will be disseminated in various forms beyond the interview (Wiles et al., 2006). This was explained to the young men and confidentiality was placed in the context that when their experiences and stories of unintended pregnancy were shared with others, their identity would be protected. All names and identifiable information have therefore been changed and pseudonyms have been used throughout to ensure a personalised approach that recognises participants' individuality. It was also explained to participants that this form of confidentiality was conditional and would be broken if they or someone else was believed to be at serious risk of harm. However, there is no consensus on what constitutes a harm that is serious enough to outweigh the obligation of confidentiality (Wiles, 2013).

The intentional breaking of confidentiality is an action which is frowned upon by the research community (Wiles et al., 2006). However, while in the process of submitting the ethics application for this study, a question arose as to what my responsibility was if a young man disclosed that a young woman had bought and taken abortion pills in Northern Ireland in order to terminate a pregnancy. In Northern Ireland it is illegal to take abortion pills, mifepristone and misoprostol. The maximum penalty for the crime of administering a drug to induce miscarriage under the Offences Against the Person

Act 1861 is life imprisonment. In 2013, a mother purchased mifepristone and misoprostol pills for her daughter and was subsequently charged with procuring a poison to induce a miscarriage and supplying the poison to her daughter. The mother later brought her daughter to her Doctor and told him that she had bought the abortion pills for her daughter and she had taken them. Two months later a doctor at the medical centre informed the police that the girl had taken the pills, leading to a decision by the Public Prosecution Service that it was in “the public interest to prosecute”.

Whilst considering potential ethical dilemmas and issues of confidentiality, the issue of whether I had to inform the police if I became aware of a woman who had induced a miscarriage in Northern Ireland was raised. To gain clarification on this issue I consulted an academic in Ulster University, who has conducted research into women’s experiences of abortion in Northern Ireland. I contacted her via email, and she confirmed that I did not need to inform the police if I was aware that a woman had taken abortion pills. (See Appendix 5.15 for email correspondence).

As a result this study regarded the following as circumstances in which confidentiality might be breached:

- If the researcher knows or suspects that the participant is harming themselves
- If the researcher knows or suspects that the participant might harm themselves in the future
- If the researcher knows or suspects that the participant is being exploited or abused by others
- If the researcher knows or suspects that the participant is harming others
- If the researcher knows or suspects that the participant might harm others in the future

Adapted from Wiles (2013: 43).

## **Managing the Data**

I securely stored transcripts, consent forms and all other paper data in a locked filing cabinet within my office in the School of Nursing and Midwifery. Steps were also taken to protect the identity of participants. The way the interviews were recorded assured anonymity and participant's information was carefully stored. Pseudonyms are used throughout the report for the participants and specific details that could make them easily identifiable were changed.

Audio-recorded data and field notes were transcribed verbatim on a password protected computer that was only accessible to me. This computer was located within a locked office in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Queen's University, Belfast. The raw audio data was kept in a locked filing cabinet in the same room and only the research team has access to this information. Transcription of data began immediately and ran concurrently with participant interviews which ensured I was immersed in the evidence (Parahoo, 2014).

## **Methodological Rigour**

Given the difficulties associated with well-established criteria for attaining scientific rigour in the case of qualitative interviewing, alternative criteria have been developed which are deemed more appropriate for qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced these original, widely accepted, and easily recognised criteria, which I have used in this study to demonstrate its trustworthiness. Figure 2.2 below, lists each of

these criteria, along with a description and suggestions for how they can be demonstrated.

**Figure 1.2 Lincoln and Guba’s criteria for trustworthy qualitative research (Drawn from Lincoln and Guba, 1985)**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Description of Criterion</b>	<b>Methods of Demonstration</b>
<b>Credibility</b>	The rigour of research and the communication of this rigour to its readers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged engagement</li> <li>• Persistent observation</li> <li>• Triangulation</li> <li>• Peer debriefs</li> <li>• Negative case analysis</li> <li>• Member checking</li> <li>• Researcher reflexivity</li> </ul>
<b>Dependability</b>	The consistency of the research and its ability to be repeated across time, researchers and analysis techniques.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making the process of finding explicit</li> <li>• Keeping a detailed audit trail</li> </ul>
<b>Transferability</b>	The extent to which research findings can be applied to other contexts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher provides sufficient information about themselves, the research context, processes, participants and research participants’ relationships. This gives the reader the ability to decide how the findings may transfer to other contexts.</li> </ul>
<b>Confirmability</b>	The extent to which the research is shaped by the participants and not researcher bias, motivation or interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Triangulation</li> <li>• Audit trails</li> <li>• Confirmability audits</li> <li>• Reflexivity</li> </ul> <p>Through such procedures, the reader will have the ability to confirm the adequacy of the findings.</p>

### **Credibility**

I have demonstrated credibility by deeply engaging with the topic and examining my own relationship with the data. I utilised my reflexivity to help me maintain perspective

and commitment to the main research question. This practice played an important role in this research, as it enabled me to acknowledge my potential influence on it (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Flick, 2007). Reflexivity is an important concept when conducting qualitative research. Northway (2000) discusses the importance of reflexivity in making a research report accessible and unambiguous. By laying open research decisions and completing a research diary an audit trail can be established; this allows the research to become convincing to the reader (Koch, 2004). In addition, I engaged in regular supervision, where various aspects of the research were discussed. Feedback from meetings with my supervisors offered valuable debriefing and confirmed the clarity of the analytic process.

### **Dependability**

According to Tobin and Begley (2004), researchers can achieve dependability by ensuring that the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented. Dependability in this study is demonstrated through adopting a clear methodology. In this chapter, I have clearly described all the steps that occurred during data collection and analysis and how these steps shaped the research process. It is also believed that this study has demonstrated dependability by offering a sufficiently detailed process to allow the research to be audited by another individual (Koch, 2004).

### **Transferability**

I have demonstrated the transferability of this research by presenting a detailed methodology, in which the research context, process and development were made explicit. I have also provided as much rich description as possible about each participant



in the findings chapters (Chapter 5 and 6). Furthermore, the reflexive analysis in Chapter One provides rich detail about my background, position and reasons for conducting this research. Providing such thick description will help those who seek to transfer the findings to their own site to judge transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

### **Confirmability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved. In this study, confirmability was demonstrated through similar methods to those mentioned in the above points. I strove to establish clear interpretations and findings that were derived from the data. I also openly demonstrated how I reached my choice of methodology, analysis, interpretations and conclusions through the research process (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Furthermore, the nature of the data in this research focuses on subjective accounts. This has helped this study to demonstrate high levels of confidence, as its findings are based on the participants' accounts and words rather than my assumptions. This suggests that the data produced are more accurate, truthful and trustworthy (Koch, 1994).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the research methods and design of the study, detailing how participants were recruited, how the interviews were conducted and how the data was analysed. The chapter concluded with a section outlining the trustworthiness of the research. This chapter forms the backbone of this thesis, in that it provides a defense of the why and how key decisions about the study process was made. In the next chapter

I discuss the findings from those young men who went on to become fathers and those young men whose partners had an abortion.

## **Chapter Six: Findings**

### **Young men's experiences and decision making in relation to an unintended pregnancy**

#### **Introduction**

As noted earlier in the literature review the young man's experience of unintended pregnancy decision-making including abortion is at present little studied. Some research reports attitudes towards the acceptability of abortion in general (Marsiglio and Shehan, 1993; Boggess and Brodner, 2000; Misra and Hohman, 2000; Rissel et al. 2003; Adaji et al. 2010; Altshuler, Gerns Storey and Prager, 2015). Other research investigates opinions of who should have the right to decide pregnancy outcomes (Frost, Lindberg and Finer, 2012; Embree, 1998; Rosenwarrer, Wright and Barber, 1987). However, far less research has been conducted in the area of young men's actual experiences of unintended pregnancy decision-making. This research begins to address this void.

Engaging in these ten young men's stories revealed that, regardless of their individual circumstances, experiencing an unintended pregnancy represented a significant 'crisis' point in each of these young men's lives. As each young man recounted his story, what appeared most striking was the variety of responses to the unintended pregnancy. Each young man attempted to define themselves and the unintended pregnancy within the contexts of multiple realities and influences. Consequently, the experiences of unintended pregnancy and decision making appeared to be determined by an interactional context of self-perception, partner relationships, parental and family influences and socio-cultural ideology. This

chapter will introduce the ten young men and situate the unintended pregnancy within the context of their wider world.

## **The Young Men and Their Stories**

### ***Ben***

Ben is eighteen years old. He is currently working as a tradesman. He lives in a rural area of Northern Ireland, with his mother and father, and he has two older sisters. Both of Ben's older sisters have children of their own. Ben identifies as a member of the Catholic community. Ben had broken up with his girlfriend the day before he found out that she was pregnant. Upon finding out, he and his girlfriend got back together and moved in together. At the time of interview, Ben was no longer in a relationship with his girlfriend and his child was about to turn one years old. Ben had been in a relationship with his girlfriend for two years, when he found out that she was pregnant. Ben's girlfriend, Ciara, was sixteen and in full time education when she became pregnant. Ben identifies as strongly anti-abortion.

### ***Caleb***

Caleb is twenty-four years old. He currently works in the IT sector after graduating from University. Caleb had been in a relationship with his girlfriend for eleven months when he found out that she was pregnant. Caleb's girlfriend, Natasha, was nineteen when she became pregnant. At the time of interview Caleb was living with his girlfriend and their daughter and they had just become engaged to be married. Caleb identifies as a member of the Catholic community. Caleb describes having a difficult relationship

with his family and discussed his father's gambling problems and his mother's mental health problems.

### *Danny*

Danny is twenty-three years old and he was nineteen when his girlfriend got pregnant. His son is now four years old. At the time of interview Danny was no longer in a relationship with his then girlfriend. She was nineteen when she became pregnant. At the time of the interview also, Danny was living in a homeless hostel and working in the hospitality industry. Danny left school at sixteen years old without any qualifications and enrolled in a catering training course. Danny identifies as a member of the Catholic community and describes having a close relationship with his mother and siblings. Danny's siblings also had their own children at a young age. Danny identifies as strongly anti-abortion.

### *Eric*

Eric is twenty-four years old. He is a university student. He had been with his girlfriend a year and a half when he found out that she was pregnant. Eric's girlfriend was twenty-three when she became pregnant. At the time of interview, his daughter was three months old. He lives with his girlfriend and daughter in a house they bought while his girlfriend was pregnant. He states that he does not have any religious beliefs, but that he was brought up in the Catholic religion, however, he describes his girlfriend as a practicing Catholic. Eric stated that he did not agree with abortion on moral grounds.

### *Paul*

Paul is twenty years old and works in the hospitality industry. He had been with his girlfriend for six months when he found out that she was pregnant. At the time of interview, his girlfriend, Rosie, was seven months pregnant. He lives in a rented house with his girlfriend. Paul moved to Northern Ireland with his family from the Czech Republic when he was fourteen. Paul describes having a close relationship with his parents and siblings. Two of Paul's older siblings have children of their own and at the time of interview his older sister was pregnant. Paul has strongly held anti-abortion views. Paul states that he was brought up in the Catholic religion but would not identify as a practicing Catholic.

### *Andrew*

Andrew is twenty-four years old. He is currently working as a doctor. He is from a middle-class family and reports that his mother and father are still married. Andrew identifies as Catholic but states that he is not a practicing Catholic. Andrew has experienced an unintended pregnancy three times, two that resulted in an abortion and the most recent one which ended in a miscarriage. The two that resulted in an abortion happened when he was at school, one he knew about and one he was not made aware of until after it happened. Andrew was not in a relationship with the most recent young woman when he discovered she was pregnant, and he states that he was never in an official relationship with her, instead describing how they had been on a few dates.

### *Gareth*

Gareth is twenty-two years old. He is currently working full time as a chef. Gareth had been in a relationship with his girlfriend for two months when he found out she was pregnant, however he said the relationship was serious. They are still currently in a relationship and have been for a year and a half. Gareth comes from a middle-class family, stating that his dad owns his own business. Gareth describes himself as Catholic but states that he is not a practicing Catholic. He lives with his parents and left school at 16. Gareth's girlfriend ordered abortion pills on the internet.

### *Frankie*

Frankie is twenty years old. He is in his second year of University and works part time as a waiter. He had been in a relationship with his girlfriend for over a year when he found out she was pregnant, and they are still currently in a relationship and have been together for two years. Frankie currently lives in student accommodation, but previously lived at home with his mother. His mother and father are divorced and have been since he was six years old. Frankie describes how he does not have the best relationship with his father and describes him as 'a bit of an alcoholic'. Frankie is an only child. Frankie's girlfriend ordered abortion pills on the internet.

### *Harry*

Harry is twenty-two years old. He graduated university last year and at the time of interview had just started a new job in the finance sector. Harry had been in a relationship with his then girlfriend for three months when he found out she was pregnant. He describes how they met on Tinder and says that the relationship was 'chilled out'. He is no longer in a relationship with his girlfriend, they broke up after the abortion. Harry lives at home with his father. His mother left his dad when he was young. At the time of interview Harry's father was currently unemployed. Harry is an only child. He states that he was brought up in the Catholic religion, but he no longer practices. Harry's girlfriend went to Liverpool to obtain an abortion.

### *Mark*

Mark is twenty-three years old. He went to university and graduated two years ago, and now works for the family business. He had only started dating his then girlfriend when he found out that she was pregnant. I interviewed Mark twice for this study. Six months after the first interview Mark contacted me again to say that his now ex-girlfriend had had another abortion and he wanted to do another interview. Mark lives on his own in a house he has recently purchased and would describe himself as middle-class. He was brought up in the Protestant religion and would describe himself as a Unionist. Unionism refers to the position you hold on the constitutional status of NI and represents a desire to stay in the union of NI and Great Britain. Mark's girlfriend ordered abortion pills on the internet.



## **The Unintended Pregnancy – What happened?**

All of the young men in this study were asked about how they found out about the unintended pregnancy and how they felt upon finding out. Their responses give an insight into those elements that affected how the young men reacted to the news, such as the nature of their relationship with the young woman. Various emotions were expressed by the young men relating to the announcement of the pregnancy. All of the young men were able to recall with clarity the time they were told about the unintended pregnancy. The initial emotions experienced by the young men, on learning of their partners' pregnancy, ranged from 'shock,' and also for some of the young men, on first hearing the news, real excitement and wonder about the prospect of fatherhood. The young men in this study used the word shock as a 'hold all' for a multiplicity of feelings attached to hearing unexpected news.

The young men's reactions to the news of the unintended pregnancy were examined across a spectrum of relationships. The participants' relationship with their partner varied in duration and in quality. For three of the young men, the announcement of the pregnancy came near the beginning of the relationship. Six of the young men had been in a relationship with their girlfriend for over six months when they found out about the unintended pregnancy. One of the young men, Andrew, stated that he was not in a relationship with the girl at the time of the unintended pregnancy. Three of the relationships were unstable while for the other seven young men, the relationship was stable, and the young men expressed satisfaction with their relationship.

Andrew, a twenty-four-year-old doctor, who had been casually dating a woman he met on Tinder, describes how he found out she was pregnant after nine weeks of dating whilst working a night shift in the hospital. When asked about the nature of his relationship with the young woman he states, 'we were never exclusive, there was none of that'. Andrew describes how he no longer has any contact with the young woman and is now in a different relationship with a girl who he is 'absolutely mad about' and 'can see a future' with her and 'the future makes sense'.

*The point is that it was the middle of the fucking night, it was really, really busy and she text me saying, 'I have something to tell you. I'm pregnant.' and I was like, no you're not and then she's like 'what do you mean no I'm not?'...then I was like nah, this must be bollocks... (Andrew)*

Andrew's initial reaction was one of denial, believing that the news was 'bollocks'. He was so shocked that he could not believe the news and he needed to see the test results for himself. However, all of this conversation was over the phone.

*She was like no, I'm sure, I have done like six tests and I was like bollocks and she showed me, she hoked the tests out of the bin and she sent me a photo of all of them and I was like I'm sorry. (Andrew)*

Andrew proceeded to describe how his initial reaction of denial turned into fear. This fear was exaggerated by the fact that the young woman had told her mother about the unintended pregnancy. It was the fact that the news of the unintended

pregnancy had been witnessed by her mother which made him feel that his life could be ruined.

*...she was like I've told my Mum, and whenever she said she had told her Mum, I was like are you fucking kidding me? I was like oh my god, I am fucked, and it was like two in the morning in the hospital and I was like, I'm fucked, cause like...it's really not the right time for me to have a child.*

(Andrew)

Harry, a twenty-two-year-old, finance worker had been with his then girlfriend for three months, described the relationship as 'really chilled and we just hung out'. Harry is no longer in a relationship the young woman, describing how they broke up after the abortion. His reaction to the unintended pregnancy was avoidance, he appeared to be unable to express any feelings.

*She phoned me and she just told me straight out that she was pregnant, but at the time I was playing games on the computer and I couldn't really think of what to say to her, so I told her I would phone her later. She obviously wanted to speak at that time but I didn't really want to talk about anything, and she got really angry and hung up the phone. I just didn't want to talk about anything because I was so shocked. (Harry)*

Harry's narrative focuses on how he perceived his then girlfriend wanted him to leave her alone.

*I tried to send her messages later on but she was really annoyed with me and ignored most of my texts. But I didn't really say much to her, I was still in shock...I did try to message her and call her but she just ignored me and didn't want to talk to me, she seemed really hostile towards me. (Harry)*

Harry uses words such as 'ignore' and 'hostile,' yet throughout his story he is unable to connect how his initial reaction to finding out about the pregnancy could have resulted in his then girlfriend's feelings of hostility towards him. Harry talks about how he knew immediately that he wanted his girlfriend to have an abortion, without considering her wishes or feelings.

*I didn't really think about her or talk to her about anything but she was so angry which made it hard to talk to her.... I didn't ask about her or consider any of the other options, but I knew that what I wanted was an abortion. (Harry)*

Mark, a twenty-three-year-old, professional, had just begun dating a girl he had met on a night out when he found out that she was pregnant. He explains how they had been on a 'couple of dates' and had sex 'about five or six times'. Mark describes how he is now in a relationship with this girl and they have been together for over six months. Similar to the previous young men's stories, Mark describes receiving a text message asking him could he meet up and talk. Mark's reaction was similar to the two previous young men, he expressed fear and shock. However, on finding out the news Mark went straight over to the young woman's house.

*So, I called her and she just said to call over to her house after work, she was like really quiet on the phone and said something bad had happened. I knew straightaway that she was pregnant.*

*I said, 'are you p?', I said the word p and she said yes and started crying, I got out of work and went straight over to her house and when I saw her I just broke down crying, just standing in the middle of her kitchen. (Mark)*

During this study, I carried out a second interview with Mark, he describes how he is no longer in a relationship with his girlfriend, after she had another abortion, which he did not agree with. In his previous interview Mark had said that if his then girlfriend ever got pregnant again they had decided that they would go ahead with the pregnancy. He describes how his then girlfriend said that she wanted to talk to him after work, he thought she may have wanted to 'nag' him 'about cleaning or something'. Mark describes coming home from work to find his girlfriend crying in the living room and how he had a 'sinking feeling in the pit' of his stomach, telling him that she was pregnant.

*She turned around and said to me she was pregnant. I just thought no, you can't be. So, she went and got the pregnancy tests from the bathroom, there was two of them, it was those clear blue ones and they said plus three weeks and I knew they weren't those rubbish ones from pound land, so I knew they were accurate and she was telling the truth. (Mark, Interview 2)*

Upon hearing the news, Mark's reaction was to question how the pregnancy happened, as he believed that he had taken every precaution to avoid another unintended pregnancy.

*I was just like what the hell, how can this happen? Like I said to her that she had told me she had been taking her pill and I had been using a condom most of the time, just in-case...I just couldn't understand, I was so confused and angry towards her, like was she not taking the pills right, or was she lying to me, she was obviously doing something wrong. (Mark, Interview 2)*

Frankie, a twenty-year-old student who had been in a relationship with his girlfriend for over a year describes finding out his girlfriend was pregnant whilst in the middle of a shift in work.

*I phoned her during one of my breaks and she told me during my break so she did. She just came out with it, she just said 'I'm pregnant'... [I] was just pure shocked. I didn't really want it to happen to be honest. All I could think was I don't want a child at this age in my life. It just didn't fit with my plans, I had a holiday booked for August with my mates to a festival and I want to do a placement year abroad for my course and if I was a dad I couldn't be doing those things. I know this sounds really selfish but I am just being honest. (Frankie)*

Gareth a twenty-two-year-old chef who had been in a relationship with his girlfriend two months describes how he and his girlfriend were together when she did the

pregnancy test. He describes how she wasn't just a 'one night stand', differentiating between the reaction he had and the reaction he may have had if he had not been in a relationship with the young woman.

*She just burst out crying, my mind just blanked, I hugged her, and kept telling her it will all be ok, but inside I felt like I was falling apart, I didn't think it was going to be ok, it was the worst thing that could have happened. I wanted to just go and hide and not deal with it. I was 22, working six days a week as a chef, living with my Mum and Dad, it was not an ideal situation...What I said to her was just that I would support her no matter what and we would get through it but really, I just wanted to scream get an abortion but she wasn't just like a one night stand. (Gareth)*

Paul describes his response to the news that his girlfriend's pregnancy test was positive. He describes how his girlfriend had phoned him at work to tell him she was having 'really bad cramps' and that her period was a week late. They both went to Tesco when he got home from work and bought two pregnancy tests, 'one was a normal one and one was the one that said how many weeks'.

*I just thought holy shit, what the fuck, I was shocked and scared, like I know we had lots of unprotected sex but I never thought it would happen to me. For the first week or so, I was just in shock, none of it seemed real. (Paul)*

Caleb had been in a relationship with his girlfriend, Natasha, who was 19 at the time, for 11 months when they found out that she was pregnant. At the time they were both living with their parents. Caleb describes how his girlfriend had been to A & E as she suffers from an illness, 'kind of like stomach pain, womb lining and that kind of thing':

*She was having a lot of crippling pains and she thought it must have been a flare up of the illness. She was being sick which was obviously morning sickness but she thought that was all tied into the illness. She went up to the hospital with her Dad and like her Dad he didn't find out. Obviously, they pulled her aside and said we tested your urine and things like that and it turns out you are actually pregnant. She pretty much just burst into tears and rang me in tears.*

(Caleb)

Ben experienced the news as a shock, describing how a 'million' thoughts ran through his head. Ben describes how he and his girlfriend had separated, 'literally, less than twenty four hours' before he discovered that she was pregnant. Ben and his girlfriend had been in a relationship for two years, since Ben was 17 years old. When asked about the reason for the break-up, Ben talked about how 'boys were partying every weekend' and he couldn't do that when he 'had a woman'. Ben describes how he just wanted to 'party' and to 'go a bit crazy'.

*I was lying in bed, woke up, well I woke up early, like normal so I did and I looked at my phone and there's a message from my partner's sister... "I've got the pleasure to let you know you're going to be a Daddy" and sure obviously*



*that moment I just didn't know what to think. A million things went through my head. Do I get a rope? Do I book my flights to England? I just didn't know what to do. So, I was like what will I do? (Ben)*

Eric describes how he was aware that his girlfriend had not had her period, but he knew that she was 'irregular' so didn't feel worried. At the time, he found out he was staying with his girlfriend as her family was on holiday. Eric talks about how his girlfriend was convinced she was getting her period as she was having stomach cramps, so he said that day he went to work and felt 'chilled out'. However, when he came home she told him that she thought that they should buy a pregnancy test. They went to the local supermarket and Eric describes how they were convinced that she was not pregnant, and they bought sprite and gin along with the two pregnancy tests, as they wanted to 'celebrate afterwards'.

*We did the pregnancy test and it was positive and I was like what, it's crazy. So yeah, it was just madness and then I didn't believe it, I was like no, it can't be so I was looking it up online, what does the plus mean, had to google it loads and then we did another one and then later we did another one, like a proper one and it was like two to three weeks...I am quite pragmatic I guess so I was just like we will be fine, I tried to calm her down and fuck it was just weird, it was just disbelief really. I was overwhelmed by it all. It was kind of nice in a way, you are kind of isolated in your own wee bubble, you are the only people that know, and it's kind of like the calm before the storm. (Eric)*

One of the young men, Danny, responded with happiness as well as shock. Danny had been in a relationship with his girlfriend for a year when he found out that she was pregnant and, they were living together at the time. He recalls being in the house when his girlfriend did the pregnancy test but that he ‘had no idea that she thought she could be pregnant’. In the following extract, Danny remembers the circumstances and his feelings and emotions when his girlfriend told him that he was ‘going to be a Daddy’:

*I was like Jesus, wow, I just don't know? I was shocked, obviously like but I got on with things and got things sorted out. You know what I mean? I was shocked that I was going to be a Da like, do you know what I mean. It was that moment, like wow, she said she was pregnant, and it was just a shock, this is actually happening. I am actually going to be a Dad. I just hugged her and I was really excited as well and so was she. (Danny)*

## **The impact of an unintended pregnancy on a young man's life**

All of the young men interviewed discussed the impact that the unintended pregnancy had on their life, with similarities and differences emerging between those young men who went on to become a father and those young men whose partners had an abortion.

### **Finances, Freedom and Fatherhood**

Five young men in this study had partners who had an abortion. The impact of the unintended pregnancy in their lives was at times viewed more as a ‘potential’ impact if

they and their partner had decided to proceed with the pregnancy. For the young men whose partners had an abortion standing up for that decision entailed a view of the right to abortion as the opportunity to correct a mistake, to prioritise personal freedom and to delay fatherhood until later in life. The ability to financially provide for a child or the financial penalty of having a child was also a concern. Three of the young men interviewed whose partners had an abortion provided self-evaluations of their relative abilities to financially support a child or family in describing their own deliberations leading up to the abortion. In doing so, the men drew heavily on cultural expectations of competent masculinity as requiring men to be good providers.

*All I could think about was what was going to happen like uni, money and working, would I have to drop out of uni and go work full time...I want to get a good job, not be stuck as a waiter my whole life. (Frankie)*

*I was only 21 and I had no job and I lived at home with my Dad. [My Dad] had just recently been laid off and he didn't have a job...there's not many family members around and I know he was stressed and worrying about money. And I quit my job in December, so I had no money either. (Harry)*

*I just knew I couldn't have a baby, mentally and financially I couldn't have coped with it. In my head, I wouldn't be able to move forward with my life. (Mark)*

Mark's description of himself as not being financially able to cope with a baby, is in contrast to his words further on in the interview. The following quote from Mark shows that it is not all deduced to financial decisions.

*Like I am twenty-three now. I have my own house and a good job so like I could raise a child, but I just don't feel that I am ready to do it. (Mark)*

During Mark's second interview he reflects on how he felt that he was financially able to have a child, and that finances were not enough of a reason to have an abortion. Mark draws on those discourses of competent masculinity of being a provider, by discussing how he has a 'decent job' and his 'own house,' therefore in his opinion there was no reason why he should not be a Father.

*I decided, after she told me, I thought like you know what, having a baby is possible, like even when I look back on the first time, you know what we are old enough, we both have decent jobs and I have my own house, there's no reason why we should have an abortion again. (Mark, Interview 2)*

The financial impact of an unintended pregnancy was also evident for three of the young men who went on to become fathers. However, this impact was real and not a potential impact as these young men proceeded with the pregnancy. As may be seen below these young men worried about their financial situation and their ability to provide for their family by providing a home and security.

*Got my own wee house, although money isn't great at the minute (Paul)*

*I think for some people who have unintended pregnancies the logistics are probably of more concern than actually having the baby...practical things, you worry a lot about those things, money and time (Eric)*

*The stress was enormous...I was trying to get mortgage applications...if I hadn't had got a mortgage and just been stuck in a rut, it would be kind of like I failed in trying to look after my family (Caleb)*

For four of the young men whose partners went on to have an abortion prioritising personal freedom was expressed as part of the rationale for the decision to have an abortion. A positive outcome was the freedom to live a young life without the responsibilities of fatherhood. The external motives for not having a child included not having finished education, getting a full-time job and the restrictions on future travel plans.

*I just didn't want a child and I just wasn't in the right situation, I had no job, I don't have my own house, like I have no way of providing for a child. I'm too young and I still like going out partying and stuff. (Frankie)*

*...her best friend had a baby when she was doing her GCSEs and she said she didn't want that life; she was just getting going with her business and we had talked about going to Florida in the summer. (Gareth)*

*...having a baby does not fit with her plans or mine. None of her friends have a baby or neither of us know anyone who is a young parent, it's just not what*

*you do. I am sure you could have a kid and still go to uni but it's just not what either of us wanted. We had talked about doing Camp America or something like that so silly things like that I kept thinking about, everything that I wouldn't be able to do if I had a baby. (Frankie)*

*I have career aspirations and goals and I know where I want to be in ten years' time. I want to be married with children, but the children don't come first...I would have to change my career aspirations, ultimately, I wouldn't be happy in my life. (Andrew)*

Three of the young men who went on to become fathers talked about how their lives have changed since deciding to become a father and how they may not be as free to live the life they had once imagined.

*...I always wanted to go and work in America...Like it definitely holds you back from some things. (Ben)*

*It's not that I don't want to do the stuff I did before, of course you do, but, I just had to mature very quickly, there was a lot of acceptance that people, maybe some friends, aren't going to be that forthcoming with their promises, you're not necessarily going to change that, you're mates will go out, they will have a drink, they might invite you the odd time, but you just have to say no. (Caleb)*

*And then there are certain times when people invite me out and stuff and I do still want to go out and I still do enjoy it but like they get pissy when you have*

*to say no, not pissy but you know what I mean like. I don't think people really understand that it's not quite that simple anymore. You have to be a lot better with your time management, because I don't have any time anymore to do work in the evenings which is what I used to do but now I have to be so just on it.*

(Eric)

Revealed in the young men's discourses is the way that their reproductive decisions are heavily embedded in cultural definitions of hetero-sexual middle-class fatherhood. The young men who planned to eventually become fathers hoped to be good ones and to mirror their own upbringing. One of the young men, Frankie, whose partner had an abortion described his desire to avoid his own father's mistakes, who he describes as 'a bit of an alcoholic'. In pointing to the ways his own father failed, Frankie had constructed an idealised notion of the kind of father he hopes to be.

*Another reason I don't want to have a kid at this age is because I want to be the best Dad I possibly can be when I choose to have kids and want to be able to spend as much time and do so much stuff with them, and not let them down like my Dad did, I love my Dad but I can't rely on him or go to him for help or support and I don't want to be that Dad. It's not fair on the kid either, I knew I would try my best if I was to be a Dad at this age, but it just wouldn't be ideal. (Frankie)*

Andrew reflects on his own upbringing and how he feels at this time in his life he wouldn't be able to provide the kind of life he had as a child. Andrew was brought

up in a middle – class two parent family and his parents are still together; he went on to study medicine at University and is now working as a Doctor.

*...at this moment in my life I am not able to devote be this selfish or not, the time that a child needs on top of my career aspirations, and where I want to go, it's just not right for me and I would far rather bring a child into a stable relationship and I think that that makes much more sense and my standpoint on abortion is very much along those lines, is that, there are far too many children that are dependent on services, that are sent into services, that don't get the upbringing they need and I compare it to the upbringing that I got...I would like to think that I would make a good father if given the choice someday. (Andrew)*

### **The emotional impact**

A theme that also cut across all of the young men was the emotional impact that the unintended pregnancy had on them. Emotions intricately affect social interaction, and the ability to deal with difficult emotion is an important skill for young men to master. Hochschild (1979, 1983) provides a way of understanding emotions as social expressions of the emotional state of the individual and as part of the presentation of self. According to Hochschild (1979, 1990), individuals follow 'feeling rules', socially shared norms regarding what emotions are appropriate to 'show' and when. Within the young men's stories, we can see how they have internalised these 'feeling rules' in the context of their masculinity. Traditional masculinity usually refers to such attributes as toughness, anti-femininity and little emotional expression (Burn and Ward, 2005). However, the young men's stories



reveal a tension between this traditional ideal of the tough, silent man and the modern alternative of ‘inclusive’ masculinity, (i.e., embracing a variety of behaviours, previously coded as ‘feminine’”) (Anderson, 2009).

Gareth, Paul and Caleb portray the tensions between showing emotion in front of their partners and also hiding how they feel in order to be ‘strong’ for her.

*She just burst out crying, my mind just blanked, I just hugged her, and kept telling her it will be all ok, but inside I felt like I was falling apart, I didn't think it was going to be ok, it was the worst thing that could have happened...That afternoon we both cried, we were just really scared, the night before we had been planning where to go for lunch and what to see in the cinema, now we were trying to find out how to get an abortion. (Gareth)*

*Looking back on it now I don't think I really dealt with it that well, I think I just buried everything and never talked about what I felt, I just kept telling my girlfriend I was ok, I didn't want her to think I was struggling or depressed, I kept thinking that I needed to be strong for her. I kind of felt guilty, I blamed myself for this happening and that she was going to have to go through this horrible thing because of me. (Gareth)*

*I just give her a hug and she didn't really say anything, she was just crying, I knew that she wanted kids like, we had talked about it a few times, so I think she was just crying because it was a huge shock. I told her that everything was going to be great and we were going to be a wee family, like*

*if I started crying or like if she thought I was freaking out it would have her feel worse, so I wanted to be like the strong one. Then she made a joke about hoping the baby didn't have my nose...and I knew then that things were going to be ok. (Paul)*

*She pretty much just burst into tears and rang me in tears, and I was like what's wrong you may as well tell me. She said she was pregnant and I was like that's all right, it's not the end of the world. Deep down, I was bricking it, but I kind of had to be like over the phone it's not the end of the world. (Caleb)*

Caleb spoke about his experience of feeling alone and trying to come to terms with the unintended pregnancy without support. Caleb describes how, during the pregnancy, his feelings of stress led him to sitting in the dark and crying, as he felt unable to be honest with his girlfriend regarding his feelings. He spoke of needing to provide his girlfriend with emotional support, and how she 'relied a lot' on him, resulting in him feeling unable to confide in her his own feelings.

*It sounds depressing but there was one of two nights, very few, but there were one or two nights I would just sit in my room for fifteen minutes in the complete dark and eventually just cry, like I needed to cry, that sort of thing. But with all the stuff going on with Natasha, I couldn't let her see, I couldn't let anyone see. The stress was enormous, like Natasha, probably with hormones, the pregnancy, the fact I said, she did rely a lot on me... I couldn't*

*talk to Natasha about it because she was the one going through a lot of shit and it's a personal choice also that I didn't want to talk about it. (Caleb)*

Gareth's initial openness with his emotions, allowing himself to cry with his girlfriend gives credence to Anderson's (2011) inclusive masculinities theory, which found a 'softening' or diminishing of hegemonic masculinity. Denham (2004) asserts the feminising of men and the social contemporary acceptance of this emasculation, such as the increased popularity of 'sensitive new age guys' and metrosexuals, has diminished the subordination of feminised men in modern society. Increasingly, feminine or non-masculine activities are being promoted rather than deplored. During Mark's second interview he describes how he usually does not 'show emotion', or 'cry', a traditional masculine stance, however, he goes onto explain how this traditional masculine stance was too difficult to keep up, particularly in relation to his parents.

*I don't cry often or really show much emotion, but they were down having tea one night and they could tell something was wrong, I just burst out crying. I was just a mess, I just told them, and I just told them that she was pregnant. (Mark, Interview 2)*

Harry's story highlights how discourses supporting more inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2009) are beginning to develop regarding young men and their emotions. However, Harry's account of his experience of unintended pregnancy highlights the tension between his desire to have his emotions acknowledged and his ability to express these emotions to his girlfriend. Harry's initial reaction to the

news of the unintended pregnancy portrays a more traditional masculine stance. He recalls how he didn't know what to say to his girlfriend at the time so said he would phone her later, resulting in her hanging up the phone. Yet, there is a tension between his avoidance of the situation initially to his later anger and annoyance at his feelings not being recognised by his girlfriend.

*She told me that she went for counselling as well and she said that helped her come to terms with it and I just felt that she was ignoring me and not considering that it was affecting me as well.*

*Through it I didn't have anyone to talk to, I was really upset but just felt completely alone. I just kind of haven't really spoken about it to anybody.*

*I just remember like she talked about how it affected her like before she had done it...I was trying to explain to her how it affected me. Like I was looking things up online about like how abortions affected men, the male side of it, but she just didn't really seem to care. (Harry)*

Andrew was the only young man in this study who did not explicitly talk about his emotions and how the unintended pregnancy impacted him emotionally. Upon finding out about the unintended pregnancy, he kept the news to himself, and after work went out and got 'steaming'.

*I went out and got steaming, I actually drank, I had a few drinks after work, like in the morning, because it was my night shift...but I had like a couple of*

*drinks most mornings, like the next four or five mornings and then she lost the baby and I was like right. (Andrew)*

There is a growing concern about the deteriorating mental health in adolescent men and women worldwide (Eckersley, 2011; Jerden et al., 2011, WHO, 2012). Harry's description of feeling alone and having no-one to talk and Gareth Caleb and Paul's feelings that they had to mask their emotions in order to be 'strong' for their girlfriends and Andrew going out and getting 'steaming' is consistent with the health discourse that often positions men as emotionally repressed, highlighting that gender and health are closely interrelated (Evans et al., 2011; O'Neil, 2013). Young men are pressured to be tough and silent, which may have implications for their health and well-being (De Visser, Smith and McDonnell, 2009). Research on gender and masculinities highlights how young men are socialised into outward displays of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1996) demanding displays of power and strength while often just beneath the surface lie unease and anxiety in dealing with everyday challenges (Mac an Ghail, 1994; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Kilmartin, 2007).

### **Shame, guilt and relief**

Unique to four of the young men whose partners had an abortion were the feelings of shame and guilt apparent in their stories. Though long ago rejected, the dominant discursive framework's concerning abortion into which young people had been socialised from an early age, continued to influence and structure the young men's thinking on the issue.

*I know this sounds stupid but all I kept remembering was religion class in school where the teacher told us abortion was a sin and we would go to hell and that kind of thing and I'm not even religious, but something just felt wrong.*

*Researcher: Did you talk to your girlfriend about how you felt about whether or not you were making the right decision?*

*...I didn't want her to think I was trying to change her mind because I knew it was the right decision for us, it was just the Catholic guilt getting to me  
(Gareth)*

*So, I decided to start going back to Church and have been going for a couple of weeks now. I'm hoping that it will help me understand things better and find a way to live with it. I know that abortion is wrong, and I think it is a Sin, I know that having an abortion the first time might have been the right decision at the time but that still doesn't make it right. (Mark, Interview 2)*

Four of the young men whose partners had an abortion tended to feel shame with regard to how their parents and family, might view them if they had known. All of the young men whose partners had an abortion did not tell their parents about the abortion.

*I am very close to my Aunt...but I choose not to talk to her about it because I have heard her views on abortion before and she is totally against it, she*

*had a baby that died when it was only a few days old so she is really against it, and she thinks it is murder so I didn't want her thinking bad of me or anything because I am so close to her, so I could never tell her what I've done. (Frankie)*

The language Frankie use's here to describe his Aunt's view on abortion as 'murder' could suggest that he sees himself as living in a society where some members take an extreme view of abortion. This may suggest that he believes that people around him see issues of abortion not as a rights or value-based issue over which people can agree or disagree, rather as an issue that should carry a criminal sanction. During Mark's second interview, while describing how his girlfriend took abortion pills when he wanted her to go ahead with the pregnancy, he talks of how she 'was going to kill my baby'.

*There was no chance I would ever tell my parents, as I said my parents would be disappointed for me, but they are both very against abortion, they are very religious, and it would just not be an option for them. (Gareth)*

*She [mother] is quite conservative. She isn't comfortable with sex outside marriage, she doesn't let my girlfriend stay over. She just wants me to go to uni and graduate and get a good job and all and actually settle down with someone and get married before I had a kid. (Frankie)*

Gareth's description of his parents as 'very religious' and 'very against abortion' is reflective of the commonly held views on the subject in Northern Ireland as well as

the legal position of abortion in NI as detailed in the introduction. The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey conducted in 2016, asked the question; ‘do you think abortion should be legal or illegal in the following circumstances: A woman wants an abortion because she has become pregnant and does not want children. In answering this question, 50% of Catholics said 45% of Protestants surveyed said abortion should definitely be illegal compared with 24% of those with no religion (Northern Ireland LIFE & TIMES, 2016).

*...my parents are older; they are in their 60's and what I did would be wrong in their eyes. And like if I told them now, it has been done already, I think they would resent the fact that I didn't tell them. (Mark)*

Mark's description of his parents as ‘older’ and therefore disapproving of abortion does not mirror the commonly held views on the subject of abortion in Northern Ireland. Instead, in Northern Ireland, people's views on abortion are fairly consistent across age groups. To the question asked above in the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 41% of 18-24-year old's and 40% of 54-64-year olds agreed that abortion should definitely be illegal. Mark may be as likely to find the views of his parents are also held by those of his peers.

All of the five young men whose partners had an abortion spoke about the relief they experienced both after the decision-making stage and after the actual abortion.

*We just wanted to get it over and done with, and I know this sounds harsh but just get on with our lives as if it never happened (Gareth).*



*Both of us just felt relieved. I didn't really want to think about what we had done cause even though I did want her to have an abortion, I still don't think it is the right thing to do...After it happened we were both just like that is it, it is done, no point dwelling on it, it was kind of like I had a second chance*  
(Frankie)

*If I could go back, I would try to be more understanding and be more sensitive about it, but I was just so scared and shocked about it and I just wanted to get it sorted out, to get rid of it.* (Harry)

Andrew describes how this was the third unintended pregnancy he had experienced and his relief at the fact that the previous two had ended in abortion, was marred by the fact that was the 'bad one that was going to carry through'. The woman had a miscarriage at nine weeks.

*I was just going to ride it out. I was hoping she would lose the baby; I know it sounds awful. I was like nah, it will be fine. I didn't want the baby it wasn't the right time, this is very, very selfish, but that is just the truth.* (Andrew)

### **The young men's presentations of reproductive responsibility**

Within the ten narratives an array of reactions was present as to whether the young men believed they had both the right and responsibility to be involved in the pregnancy decision-making process and also whether they believed they had any responsibility to avoid the unintended pregnancy. The decision-making process provides a window into

how these young men negotiated the conflicting expectations of hegemonic masculinity manifested by an unintended pregnancy.

### **Contraception**

The young men's stories about 'how it happened' is an important part of the bigger story of their experiences and decision making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives. The narratives of the young men describe how they mostly silently assigned responsibility for but did not speak about contraception with their partners. This was illustrated in the ways that eight of the young men described that they knew they were having sex without birth control and chose to do so.

*We didn't have sex that often, but we didn't use condoms when we did... Well like you never really think about it, you never think it is going to happen to you. You have scares and stuff, but the girl's period always comes. Even though you know it might happen, you never think it will actually happen. She was on the pill and I had seen her taking it in my house, but we never had sex that often we usually did other stuff, but I did come in her a few times. (Harry)*

*She had been on the pill, but we didn't use condoms at all. There had been a few nights where we had been out drinking and I think she must have been sick the next day or something and that made her pill not work, looking back we really should have been more careful but you just never think that this is going to happen to you. (Gareth)*

*I knew that she was on the pill and sorry if this is rude, but I always pulled out, I never came inside her, well maybe a few times when we had been drinking, I wasn't so careful. I don't know how it happened, I suppose she could have maybe forgot to take the pill one day or something. (Frankie)*

*She wasn't on the pill and I'm not a dinosaur like, I'm a doctor, I know how these things work, but we were careful in the sense that I always pulled out, whatever, anyway, theoretically there is still always the possibility because those wee fuckers can lie in those tubes for a very long time. (Andrew)*

Andrew's seemingly blasé attitude to contraception in the above quote is in contrast to his response later in the interview when asked, 'Do you ask girls if they are on contraception?'

*Oh yeah, absolutely all over it...it's like when they say to women you should think about condoms too, it's the same, it should be reciprocated. A man should take an interest and know what sort of contraceptive method she is using. (Andrew)*

In the extract below, Paul displays a blasé attitude to contraception, relying on the fact his girlfriend 'had never got pregnant before' as an apparent means of contraception. Pregnancy was not something Paul had considered until there was a real consequence.

*She was on the pill but I don't think she was like taking it properly, but like we had never got pregnant before so didn't think we would...when we moved into*

*our own house we were having sex all the time and I didn't really care or think about protection or anything. (Paul)*

Danny goes on to describe how when he started 'going steady' with his girlfriend he didn't 'worry too much about using condoms'. He describes how he had used condoms at the beginning of the relationship but when they moved in together, he stopped. Danny describes how his girlfriend was not on any form of contraception at the time and states that they never really talked 'about anything like that'.

In the quote below, Mark reveals his view that, although mistakes happen future unintended pregnancies with his current girlfriend should be carried to term. Mark had a second unintended pregnancy with his then girlfriend, where he largely placed the blame on her for the pregnancy as he believed he had done all he could in relation to contraception.

*If she got pregnant again, even though we have only been together six months, like we are now officially together, I would ask her to marry me and we would have the child. (Mark)*

*I just couldn't understand, I was so confused and angry towards her, like was she not taking the pills right, or was she lying to me, she was obviously doing something wrong. (Mark, Interview 2)*

Only two of the young men's stories show that some men do take reproductive responsibility quite seriously and are willing to share their responsibility and share the

consequences. Eric discusses how 'you would imagine someone who was going to have an unintended pregnancy would be fast and loose with their procreation, but we took things really slowly'. Eric describes how he and his girlfriend dated for six or seven months before they had sex. He describes how he suggested to his partner that she should use a form of 'female based protection', as well as condoms, however she 'wasn't keen on it', and they continued to use condoms. Eric describes how after a night of drinking he and his partner had unprotected sex, but, the next day she went and bought the morning after pill.

*We went out to a gig and got absolutely smashed up...it was like four in the morning and I was destroyed and I went up to bed and she came up with me and I think for a few times it was alright and then one time in the morning I forgot to put a condom on and then we woke up and she was like oh my god we are taking loads of risks, and I was like what are you talking about taking loads of risks. And she was like you didn't have one on and I was like yes, I did, in my head I did, but then I looked down and I was like oh god I didn't. She was like what are we going to do, but we were both too drunk at this point to comprehend anything, she had to go to work, we both had to go to work...then we were talking about it and we had already said in the morning maybe we should get the morning after pill and she was like well it's kind of late in the cycle sort of thing, so do we need to do that? I was like yeah, I think we do just in case and then she was like yeah, you are absolutely right. (Eric)*

Caleb describes how his girlfriend was no longer taking the pill because according to her 'she was getting too fat', but that he always used condoms. He believes that there is nothing more he could have done to have prevented the pregnancy.

*She has just come off the pill because she was getting too fat but in saying that I still always wore stuff so I don't blame anybody. It was just one of those things. People say to you would you do anything different, I just kind of say...you say yes, but no. Because you were doing the stuff to try to stop the scenario happening. So, people say is there anything you would do differently, there was nothing I could have done, when you grow up and you get older you just have to accept that. (Caleb)*

The themes expressed here by the young men about contraception and reproductive decision-making illustrate how structural factors like social norms shape young men's perceptions of appropriate sexual behaviours. These social norms set up double standards that allow men more sexual freedom than women (Wingood and DiClemente, 2000). This sexual freedom can be seen through eight of the young men's blasé attitudes to contraception, leaving the responsibility of contraception and reproductive decision-making up to their female partners.

### **A partner's right to choose?**

The data here offers new insights into this gender relational power dynamic around this decision-making from male perspectives. As this data unfolds it will be observed that at times young men can exercise patriarchal power over women's bodies in terms of the

outcomes of pregnancies and at times, they can feel disempowered by a woman's right to choose.

All of the young men in this study apart from Mark agreed with their partner's decision to continue with the pregnancy or to have an abortion. Eight of the young men in this study when they first heard about the unintended pregnancy showed that they wanted to remain involved and active partners, the exceptions being Harry and Andrew, who either distanced themselves from the situation or tried to ignore that it was happening. Six of the young men held firm views themselves that they either wanted the pregnancy to continue or for their partner to have an abortion. These young men described how there was no decision to be made, and that the only decision was that the pregnancy would go ahead, or an abortion would occur.

Paul had no doubts that the unplanned pregnancy he had fathered would just proceed. He describes how he had already spoken to his partner about his views on abortion, telling her that 'if she ever did get pregnant in the future, she would be having the baby'. During the interview there was a sense that this was not an imposed view on Paul's girlfriend and that she held the same views. When asked what his girlfriend's opinion on abortion was and had they ever discussed it, Paul replied:

*It has been in the news a few times and I have just said like it is murder and I remember saying to her if she ever did get pregnant in the future, we would be having the child no matter what. Like even if we were poor, living in a fucking hedge we would still be having the child, like I can't justify why anyone would have an abortion. (Paul)*

Like Paul, Danny also revealed that he had not even discussed alternatives with his girlfriend continuing with the pregnancy. Danny had been a part of discovering the pregnancy from the beginning as he and his girlfriend had 'done' the pregnancy test when he was in the house. Danny talked of how he was excited and shocked at being a 'da', recalling how his girlfriend broke the news of the positive pregnancy test to him by telling him he was going to be a 'Daddy'.

*Like when we found out she was pregnant that was it I was going to be a Da.*

*There was nothing to talk about, we were having a baby. (Danny)*

Harry talks about how he knew immediately that he wanted his girlfriend to have an abortion, without considering her wishes or feelings.

*I didn't really think about her or talk to her about anything but she was so angry which made it hard to talk to her...I didn't ask about her or consider any of the other options, but I knew that what I wanted was an abortion... We met up a few days after and we were just talking and stuff and she was obviously really upset about it. I just told her like, we were going to have an abortion. There was no other option...she kind of agreed with me but I think because I didn't really give her an option, I just said that's what I wanted, she seemed ok with that too, she said she didn't want a child either. (Harry)*

Ben had very strong opinions that the unintended pregnancy would proceed, and it would appear that his partner's sister also shared this view as she sent him a text message stating 'You're going to be a Dad'. Ben comes from a Catholic, working-class



background; his father is a construction worker and his mother was a stay at home mother. Ben left school at sixteen to start work in a factory. He talks about how abortion ‘was never an option’ for him and that the unintended pregnancy would proceed:

*I was always brought up that if you get a girl pregnant you stick by her and you do the right thing. (Ben)*

Ben’s idea of doing ‘the right thing’ includes ‘getting a house sorted’, an idea of working-class, but also arguably middle-class, masculinity which elevates provision and financial responsibility for the welfare of one’s family – the ‘family man’ archetype (Dolan, 2011; Ingram and Waller, 2014). However, despite Ben’s feelings and wishes that abortion was not an option for him, his girlfriend was on the brink of choosing an abortion. His girlfriend had ‘thought about it and she looked up’ about it. He describes how his girlfriend didn’t want her family thinking she ‘was this and that’ for having a baby at a young age. However, Ben repeatedly made it very clear to his girlfriend that if she did choose to have an abortion, he would not support that decision:

*I told her I would pay half of it [abortion] but you will never ever hear of me again. I just said, if you go on to do this, no bother, it’s your body...I said you will be paying half of it [abortion], but you will be going on your own and you will never hear of me again. (Ben)*

Ben’s girlfriend decided against having an abortion, which Ben attributes to her school teacher’s influence. His girlfriend, Ciara, was 16 years old at the time of the unintended pregnancy and attended a Catholic school in the Republic of Ireland. She told one of

her teachers that she was pregnant before she told her father. Ciara lived with her father as her parents were divorced. Ciara stayed off school the day after she told her teacher that she was pregnant, and her school contacted her father to come in for a meeting and they informed him of Ciara's pregnancy.

*She only lived with her Daddy, her ma and da are separated. I wanted to go up and tell him, but she wouldn't let me. So, the school called him in, and she stays off this day in school and they told him, so he landed back to the house and Ciara was in. He was roaring and shouting and kicked her out of the house. (Ben)*

Ben discusses how one of Ciara's teachers subsequently spoke with her about her options if she was to continue with the pregnancy in relation to her education, continuing in school and completing her exams:

*I know the teacher sat her down and said to her likes there's so many other ways around it [other than abortion]. You can still go and have the child; you can still have all your Leaving Cert [equivalent to A Level] done and she was happy enough and what not. (Ben)*

The theme of gender relational power within the couple and broader family was prominent in Ben's account of the pregnancy decision-making. Ben stated his wishes that the pregnancy should proceed as soon as he was told about the pregnancy. He drew on his beliefs that abortion was morally wrong and that a man should always do the 'right thing,' which in his opinion, is standing by a woman and being a father. In the

above quote, Ben attributes his girlfriend's decision not to have an abortion to the advice and guidance she got from her teacher. He does not reflect on the impact that his strong anti-abortion stance, his 'threat' of the withdrawal of his relationship and her father's aggression towards his daughter on hearing the news and 'throwing her out of the house', had on her decision not to have an abortion and the power this may have had over his girlfriend's decision. In many ways hearing the story from Ben's views here cuts through to the importance of research on men's perspectives of pregnancy outcome decision-making. While men's voices have so often been excluded from research on this topic, Ben's story shows the power of these voices 'behind the scenes' and that actually if we are to better understand a 'woman's right to choose' we need to better understand men's roles in such decisions.

In contrast to Ben's powerfulness in the decision – making process, the theme of powerlessness and at times helplessness in the reproductive decision-making process was prominent in four of the young men's accounts, all of these young men's partners went on to have an abortion. Three of the young men felt that they had absolutely no power in the decision – making process and were completely excluded by their partners. Kero and Lalos (2004) suggest that, 'the position of men in relation to pregnancy is one of exclusion' and point to the lack of any term to describe men involved in pregnancy as evidence of this.

One of the young men, Andrew, who had experienced three unintended pregnancies, describes how his role was limited as he only learned about the unintended pregnancy — and subsequent abortion-after it occurred.

*We broke up and I heard down the line from a very, very reliable source...and it made sense because she had gone across the water really randomly for like a shopping trip to Liverpool and I remember it being really strange. I was only 18 at the time and then I heard about that one and I was like I don't know how I really feel about it, I wouldn't have had the baby either, but I would have liked to have known. So yeah, it's a woman's body and stuff but I definitely think that the man has a right to know, maybe not influence decisions, but at least to know. (Andrew)*

Although four of the young men in this study agreed with the decision to have an abortion, some felt disconnected from the process of deciding. Illustrating this, Harry recalled the chilly reception his efforts to support his girlfriend in any outcome received. Harry's girlfriend phoned him to tell him that she was pregnant, but at the time he was playing games on the computer. He recalls that he couldn't think of what to say so he told her he would phone her later. He described how she was 'really angry and hung up the phone'.

These young men thus felt excluded from decision-making either because they were not told about the pregnancy until after it was terminated or because they perceived their input was not welcome. As such, their efforts to behave in ways they believed would demonstrate responsibility were thwarted.

*I wanted to go like to support her and that's what I told her, but she said she didn't want me to be there. She just said that she felt that I couldn't support*

*her because I was so distraught about it as well and she wanted to have someone who was outside of it a little bit. (Harry)*

*She was a bit scared at the start, she was unsure about it but then she just said she would deal with it herself and just blocked me out of her life and then she told me she had a date organised to fly over to Liverpool and her friend was going to come. (Harry)*

Overall there was recognition that the young men's rights were determined by how much the woman was willing to give them.

*But like I know she would have listened to me, but like I know loads of guys aren't in that situation and the girl just doesn't listen to what he wants and goes and does whatever she wants. Like obviously she did have the final say in it, but she did listen to what I had to say. (Mark)*

*At the end of the day it is her having the baby, not me, so if she wanted to have it, it's not my place to say no or to try and stop her from having it. There is nothing you can do, really nothing. (Frankie)*

Mark's quote describes how he is aware of other girls who do whatever they want without taking into account the man's thoughts and wishes. Mark describes during his second interview how his then girlfriend, after experiencing a second unintended pregnancy, decided to have an abortion and ordered abortion pills on the internet. Mark did not want her to have an abortion, instead he wanted to keep the baby,

having previously discussed with his girlfriend what they would do if they were to have another unintended pregnancy.

*I just couldn't understand it all, my initial reaction was shock and I was scared but then like we had discussed after the last time that if it ever happened again we would keep the baby, but she went against her word and just decided this on her own, I was just so pissed off. Like it was half of me as well as her. Like when I said I wanted to keep it, she just didn't listen to what I had to say. She just kept saying no, she had ordered the pills and then after that she was just quiet the rest of the night, I think she just wanted me to feel sorry for her. I didn't feel sorry for her at all, like she just shut me out, it was so disrespectful, and it just made me feel so sad and I felt like I didn't even know who she was anymore.*

(Mark, Interview 2)

Throughout Mark's second interview, he talks about how he was completely powerless in the situation, resulting in feelings of sadness and anger. His relationship ended as a result of his girlfriend going ahead with the abortion.

*There was no way around it really, I tried to talk to her about keeping the baby and I thought maybe she was just scared in case like I left her and didn't support her and the baby, but she just kept saying she didn't want it and nothing I would say to her was going to change her mind. (Mark, Interview 2)*

*So yeah, she phoned me and told me the pills had arrived, mid-argument with her screaming down the phone at me, she said it in like a fuck you way. As if ha the pills are here, so fuck you, I can do whatever I want now. That was just fucking awful, I was trying to get her to calm down and talk to me, but she hung up the phone. I was physically sick after talking to her, I knew that that was it, she was going to take the pills and she was going to kill my baby. She text me two minutes after she hung up the phone and said 'done'. She meant she had taken the first pill, I tried to think about it, I was thinking yeah we are having a hard time at the minute, but she knows me and she knows I don't want this, I thought she had just said it to piss me off, I really didn't think that she had taken the pills. (Mark, Interview 2)*

Mark being the only young man in this study who did not agree with his partner's decision and he strongly questioned his right to be involved in the decision-making process.

*I am all for woman having choices, but this wasn't just a woman's choice, this was our choice. It was half me, half my baby. Like she shouldn't have taken the choice away from me. If the child was born, you know I would have had to step up and take half the responsibility. So just because it is in her, like it is still half me, so say I left whenever the child was born, then she would want me, she would need me then. She would be wanting me to take responsibility too and to provide for the baby. So why nine months before can I not have any choices. (Mark, Interview 2)*

Frankie felt that the medical services also added to his sense of powerlessness and helplessness, he describes accompanying his girlfriend to the Family Planning Clinic.

*I wasn't allowed in, they just brought her into the room...but I wasn't allowed in I think it was in case I was like trying to make her do something she didn't want which I wasn't, I just wanted to be there for her so she didn't have to go through it all on her own. Looking back, it was a bit unfair cause like my head was all over the place as well...I didn't really feel that I had any input into the decision. I was annoyed that my feelings and stuff weren't taken into consideration. (Frankie)*

The medical services seemed to treat men as powerful, i.e., having undue power over woman while also not in need of any support. Frankie's views this as reflective of broader social processes within society whereby the issue of abortion is monopolised by the women's movement and women's groups.

*All those feminists screaming in your face on a Saturday in town are like saying you can only have an opinion on this or like join their marches and stuff if you're a woman, but people like me, who know exactly what a wee girl has to go through, could help them with trying to make it legal. (Frankie)*

Masculinity does not afford direct privileges to all men, in all contexts. The role and identities of the young men involved in an unintended pregnancy locate them in a unique position of both empowerment and powerlessness as can be seen through Frankie's feelings of being left out on the side-lines as a result of the potential



‘gendered power’ he holds over his girlfriend as a result of being a man. If men are excluded by the agencies which provide abortion services such as counselling (Kero and Lalos, 2004; Lipp, 2008), could it be that this is because of a concern that any creep in the development of male involvement would herald the ‘slippery slope’ to a place where the women’s right to choose is eroded? This type of systematic inequality in power between genders underpins Connell’s (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity, in which masculinities are viewed as configurations of practice, structurally embedded within society and operating to ensure the dominance of men and the subordination of women.

### **Perception of relationship**

That young men’s perception of their relationship with the young women influences their role in the decision-making is interesting because it shows gender similarity and synchrony with how women consider and make pregnancy decisions. As with previous studies conducted with young women (Henshaw and Kost, 1992; Ralph et al., 2014; Frederico et al., 2018), the relationship with the potential father was an important factor in the pregnancy decision-making.

Six of the young men were in what they described as serious relationships, ranging from two to eighteen months. Two of the young men had met their partners on Tinder and would describe their relationship as dating or casual. One of the young men had just broken up with his girlfriend of eighteen months the day before he was told about the unintended pregnancy. One of the young men had only begun dating their girlfriend at

the time of the unintended pregnancy, however they had known each other for over four years.

One of the factors that influenced young men's decision to proceed with the pregnancy was that as a couple, no matter how short the relationship was, the young men had conveyed that they had a sense of a future together. While the relationships themselves were of differing durations, all of the couples were on 'good terms' with one another at the time the pregnancy was discovered. The one exception to this, was Ben, who had broken up with his girlfriend twenty-four hours before finding out that she was pregnant, and, as described earlier, was texted by his girlfriend's sister to be told that he was 'going to be a Dad'. This fact appears to have facilitated the couple's discussions about the pregnancy, what to do next and how to break the news to parents and involved others. Four of the young men who went on to become fathers spoke about the process of pregnancy decision-making with their girlfriend as relatively straight forward without much conflict involved. The relatively smooth decision-making process was in tune with the reaction that most young men had to the news of the pregnancy, which even though it may have involved feelings of apprehension and shock, it was relatively well received, and it was not rejected outright.

Eric describes how he may have felt differently about the unintended pregnancy if it had been with a girl, he was just 'filling time with'. Instead, he describes how they both spent time getting to know each other and describes her as a 'decent person':

*I think if it had had been different, if I had just been seeing her as like someone to see you know, someone to fill the time with, you know, I would have been like*

*really worried about this. I would have been like, I don't want to be trapped here, I would have reacted a lot differently but because she is essentially a decent person and I actually really like her. So, I think my perception would have changed definitely, or if we hadn't have spent as much time at the start, getting to know each other, building up to it. We both had a lot going on in our lives as well, whereas if we hadn't I think I would have felt different, but I felt a lot more certain if you know what I mean. If I hadn't have done all that and it had been much earlier on, if it happened in month one, or something like that, Jesus my whole viewpoint would have been completely different I think. Definitely, completely different. I think, I probably would have wanted an abortion, or I probably wouldn't because it goes against my principles, but I don't know if I would have wanted to stay with her. (Eric)*

Caleb goes onto describe how the unintended pregnancy forced him and his partner to think about their future together. Caleb met his girlfriend in a 'friendly capacity'. He recalls that they were friends for around two months before they became a couple. They were together eleven months when they found out that Natasha was pregnant.

*It was kind of that moment when me and Natasha had to decide we are happy in our relationship and want a future together, do we want to buy a house, I decided to just buy a house because we both don't have the support from our families...I feel my life had about five years of action rolled into three months. I feel that the way we reacted we both matured very quickly. (Caleb)*

Gareth, whose partner went on to have an abortion describes how his girlfriend wasn't just a 'one night stand', differentiating between the reaction he had and the reaction he may have had and subsequent involvement in the decision-making process if he had not been in a relationship with the young woman. Gareth describes how if this had been a one-night stand, he may have been more vocal and forthright about his desire for the women to have an abortion.

*What I said to her was just that I would support her no matter what and we would get through it but really, I just wanted to scream get an abortion, but she wasn't just like a one-night stand. (Gareth)*

Gareth's story portrays a much more gender equal account of the decision – making process, one that is deferential to the young woman's feelings and choices. The stories of the young men in this study show how their first reactions to the news of the pregnancy and their involvement in the decision – making process was in their terms related to their level of emotional attachment to the woman, as can be seen in Gareth's use of the words 'she wasn't just like a one night stand'.

However, Gareth's story is in contrast to that of Harry and Andrew's. Harry and Andrew were both in what they would describe as casual relationships, both who had met their partners on Tinder. Harry describes how he did not see or speak to his girlfriend until a 'few days' after he found out and his subsequent involvement in the decision – making process was limited.

*I just told her, obviously we were going to have an abortion. There was no other option. It was going to ruin my life so obviously I didn't want to have a child. I was only 21 and I had no job and I lived at home with my Dad and we had only known each other for a few months which was really not ok...I didn't really give her an option, I just said that's what I wanted, she seemed ok with that too, she said she didn't want a child either. I just wanted it to be over. I had no money, so she paid for the whole process herself, like flights and hotel and she said she wanted to bring her friend instead of me. (Harry)*

Andrew described how he had a woman on Tinder and had a few dates but that it was 'nothing serious' and he did not see any future her. She decided to continue with the pregnancy, however, she miscarried at nine weeks. Andrew did not have any involvement in the decision – making process and describes what happened when he tried to suggest the possibility of an abortion to the woman:

*No, basically it was like this is the way it is. And then when I said are you sure having the baby is the best option for you, for us, and most importantly for the unborn baby, she was like you can fuck off if you are even suggesting that. You're not having nothing to do with it kind of thing. 'You are fucked big lad, you are fucked.' (Andrew)*

For the young men whose partners went on to have an abortion, in general the longer the young men were involved with the woman the more they wanted and expected a role in the decision-making process, seen through the stories of Gareth and Frankie. There are however nuances within the data in my study. One of the young men, Mark,

was casually dating the young woman at the time of the unintended pregnancy, yet despite the casual nature of their relationship he expressed a great desire to support the young woman, 'not wanting to leave her alone' to go through an abortion on her own.

*So, I called her, and she just said to call over to her house after work, she was like really quiet on the phone and said something bad had happened. I knew straightaway that she was pregnant...I said, 'are you p?', I said the word p and she said yes and started crying, I got out of work and went straight over to her house and when I saw her I just broke down crying, just standing in the middle of her kitchen...So honestly I cried for about another hour. I just didn't know what to say, it was actually my worst nightmare. Once I had calmed down we started talking about it properly and we both agreed that we just couldn't have a child, it was just too soon, even though we had known each other for years, and we knew like we could do it, but then she started talking about abortion as an option and she told me lots of people actually do it, but you just don't hear about it loads. (Mark)*

During the course of this thesis, I interviewed this young man for a second time, after his girlfriend had a second abortion, which he did not agree with. He ended the relationship and she moved out of the home and he has not had any further contact with her. It appeared that Mark was only willing to provide this emotional support if his partner agreed with what he decided. Mark's reaction to the second pregnancy is in stark contrast to his reaction to the prior unintended pregnancy, he describes how it

'pissed him off' that his then girlfriend didn't tell him that she missed her period. He blamed her for the pregnancy, questioning had she taken her contraception correctly.

### **The role of others**

All of the young men were asked about discussions they have may have had with friends, family members or others about the unintended pregnancy. The young men discussed the roles that other people played at different stages in decision-making regarding the unintended pregnancy. This ranged from family and close friends to teachers.

All of the young men talked about the role or lack of role that their friends had through their experience. Two of the young men whose partners had an abortion chose not to confide in their friends about the unintended pregnancy, two told one friend and one of the young men Mark, only confided in his friend about the abortion which he did not agree with. All of the young men who went on to become fathers confided in their friends about the unintended pregnancy and all with the exception of Eric found that their friends gave valuable support and were there to talk to. For some, the role of friends was in ratifying and acknowledging the decision.

*Yeah, I told all my friends, I put it on Facebook last week after the 12-week scan.*

*All my friends in work were so happy for me, most of them have their own kids as well. (Paul)*

*Aye, I told everybody like. I told my friends right away. I went up and had a drink with my friends and they were like brilliant. They all congratulated me as you do. (Danny)*

For others, it was helping those young men overcome the shock and inadvertently or advertently 'having a say' in the decision. Ben's experiences mirrored those of Paul and Danny, describing how he could rely on his friend in work for support.

*I was working in a factory at the time, so I'd gone in and I worked away and one of the boys came in, who I'd been great with and he knew there was something funny with me. He knew there was something, but I wouldn't tell him, but he eventually backed me into a corner and he wouldn't let me go till I told him and I turned around, I could't tell him, I took the phone out showed him the message and he just turned around and he give me a hug and said everything is going to be all right and then I felt a wee bit better after that and obviously it was still a big massive shock. (Ben)*

Eric describes how he had mixed reactions from his friends, and therefore at times he found that one of his friends was not supportive. Eric described how one of his friends was very negative about the pregnancy, calling him an 'idiot' and telling him he had 'ruined his life'.

*I told my friend first and he was the only person who said to me, he said you have spoken about abortion, and he was like yeah but it is an option man and he sort of tried to bring me round to it a little bit and not in like a negative way,*



*he thought it was awesome but if you want to do that you shouldn't just completely disregard it and I was like nah I'm not going to do that. (Eric)*

*I told my friends before I told my family, I told my best friend, two boys, they both have very sensible heads on them, and one was very positive and the other was very negative. He was like you are an idiot, what have you done, you have ruined your life. You know, but he had already told me before I needed to take it slow and we are very young and don't rush into anything. He was always going to have that opinion, I'm not quite sure how helpful that was. (Eric)*

Eric is the only young man whose friends mentioned abortion as an option. The other young men's friends assumed that the pregnancy was going to go ahead. This assumption that the pregnancy was going to go ahead was largely dependent on the context of how the news was delivered. Paul put the twelve-week scan on Facebook, therefore announcing that the pregnancy was going ahead, and he was going to be a Dad. Danny, also announced to his friends that he was going to be a Dad, resulting in words of encouragement and congratulations.

Andrew, whose partner had a miscarriage and Harry and Frankie whose partner(s) had an abortion discussed how they told their friends about the unintended pregnancy and the support their friends offered varied.

*I told one of my friends about it that night, but they didn't really know what to say to me. He just said that it was kind of shit but that it would be fine. (Harry)*

*Through it I didn't have anyone to talk to, like I was really upset but just felt completely alone. Like my friends hadn't been through anything like it and I did speak to a few of my friends about it but like they didn't really know about it and didn't know what to say so they didn't really want to talk about it. (Harry)*

*I told, who did I tell, I told my friend Chloe, who was like, oh pet you're fucked. She's like my bessie but hates me because she has to help me through loads, and, who else did I tell, I think I told one mate, but like not straight away, like three weeks. (Andrew)*

*Yeah I spoke to my best mate about it just for another person to talk to. He has been my best mate from primary one like, so he is like a brother. I told him after I told my cousin, which was like a couple of days after I found out... He called me all the names under the sun. He said how stupid I was, and I should have been more careful and all. Like making me more worried about stuff like uni, it didn't help at all, so it didn't, it just made the situation worse. He said if it happened to him he would want the girl to have an abortion, like he just said what I was thinking, that it's not the right time and I'm not ready. (Frankie)*

Mark describes how he chose not to confide in his friends about his partners first unintended pregnancy, which ended in abortion, however, he did tell his best friend about the second unintended pregnancy, where he did not agree with his partner's decision to have an abortion:

*I told my best friend like what had happened, and he thought it was fucking awful what she did. He did really like her before, he just said he doesn't understand how anybody could do that, it is just awful. I didn't tell him about the first time it happened. So that's the end of it, I don't have anything to do with her and don't want to, I have deleted her number...To be honest I didn't want to talk to him about it last time because I know he is against abortion and I am still against it and I do feel that way and I don't really agree with it. This time I was just so confused and angry I just needed someone to talk to. The more I thought about it the more I just couldn't understand how she could just cut me out and I just needed to talk to someone about it. I just felt like something was being taken away from me and I just feel more comfortable now talking to my best friend. (Mark)*

Mark was the only young man whose partner had an abortion to tell his parents about the unintended pregnancy. He discusses how he did not tell them about the first unintended pregnancy but felt that he needed to confide in them about the second unintended pregnancy, which ended in abortion and also ended his relationship.

*The week after she told me, my Mum and Dad called round to my house. So, when my and Dad were down at my house, I don't cry often or really show much emotion, but they were down having tea one night and they could tell something was wrong, I just burst out crying. I was just a mess, I just told them, and I just told them that she was pregnant. Then I said was or is pregnant, I don't know. They asked me what you mean you don't know. I said that she was going to get*

*rid of it, and my Mum was just completely shocked. She didn't know about the time before; she didn't know anything about this. She just started to cry, and my Dad didn't know what to say. My Mum got really angry that like she did this and just went home and didn't talk to me about it. Like my Mum was saying that it was her grandchild and it was my son or daughter. Against my will, well she didn't even tell me, she went down to my girlfriend's mum's house and told her Mum what was happening and just spoke to her, she didn't have an argument or anything but she thought maybe if her Mum knew it would help her think it all through properly. I think my Mum thought maybe she was in shock and just needed some support, but little did she know that she was just being a selfish bitch because she had done it before. (Mark)*

In comparison to the young men whose partners had an abortion, all of the young men whose partners had decided to continue with the pregnancy as part of their stories described the reactions of their parents and the subsequent levels of support that followed the news of the pregnancy. Once the young fathers had learned about the pregnancy, one of the next common steps was to tell their parents. For most of the young men it can be said that the announcement of the pregnancy to their own families was not presented by the young men as creating a great deal of conflict, even in the case of Ben and Ciara where her own father's reaction had been extremely negative. The reaction of the young men's parents was similar to that of the young men themselves: shock followed by acceptance. None of the young men reported a long-term negative reaction by their family to the news of the pregnancy.

Eric and his partner had already decided that they were going to proceed with the pregnancy before telling their families. Eric describes how ‘from the beginning we always said we were going to keep it, there was never a question’.

*I told my Mum over the phone. I had to tell everybody on the phone. So ah, I told her, and she was like oh, that expedites things slightly doesn't it? Because, I think she always expected me to stay with Michelle, but like she was like this expedites things, but she expected us to stay together anyway but I think she was a bit worried because, like she really likes Michelle, she really does, but she knows we are different and also I am over here and I don't think she ever expected me to stay here forever...She wasn't upset at all, she was really happy but she was just a bit like “oh God what are you going to do?”, but she didn't really dwell on it at the time. She was like it will be alright, just standard, how did it happen, it will be fine and then that was it. But, apparently, when I stopped talking to her then she cried. (Eric)*

Two of the young men, Paul and Danny received positive responses from their family when they told them the news of the pregnancy. Both young men told their families almost immediately after finding out about the unintended pregnancy. Paul and Danny both discussed how there was never any decision to be made regarding the unintended pregnancy; instead they both stated that as soon as they found out about the unintended pregnancy that meant that they were going to be a Dad. Both of these young men discussed how their girlfriends also had a pro-life stance and would never have considered an abortion.

*My ma lives across the street from my girlfriend and my brother lives next door. He has three kids and then my other brother he has a wee child on the way. This will be his third one. But, aye, everyone was pure delighted like, was over the moon for me. (Danny)*

*I told all my family three days after we found out. My little sister is 17, she just found she is pregnant, and so there will be two babies soon. I used to live with all my family, and we are really close. I have two older brothers and they have their own kids. I am surrounded by a large family and lots of kids...After, I told all my family and everyone was so happy, I was pure buzzing about it. I thought it was unreal, going to have my own wee family. (Paul)*

Ben and his partner Ciara had already come to the decision that they were going to proceed with the pregnancy before they told Ben's parents. Ben discusses how he was living with his parents when he found out that Ciara was pregnant. Ben is the youngest of three children, and his two older sisters have moved out of the family home. Ben describes picking Ciara up from her house on a Saturday night and going over to his house to tell his parents. Ciara was still living with her father at this time and he had not been told about the pregnancy.

*So, then it came to telling Mummy. The two of us went over together. She was sitting down to the soaps and I went over and turned the TV off. She went mad, "why are you turning the TV off?" I said I need to sit down with you mummy, I need to talk to you. She said what's wrong son? I said sit down till I talk with ya. She sat down, the two of us sat down and the two of us told her she was*

*pregnant. First thing, mummy went to the corner cupboard and got the bottle of vodka and had a vodka and coke and started crying and came over and gave us a bit of a hug. She was just roaring and crying, “the two of you are too young, the two of you are too young” and then she took it in, and she was happy enough and awk she was over the moon at the same time. (Ben)*

During the interview, Ben had discussed how he had a closer relationship with his Mum than his Dad and as a result felt more nervous about telling his Dad about the pregnancy.

*Now telling me Da that was the hardest bit...so one evening he was going to the pub and I said come on I will run you over sure, sitting outside the bar, I said, Da, he said what,? “You’re going to be a Granda”, he looked at me, “shut the fuck up ya bollix ya” and got out of the car and left. So it was that evening he got back home and he asked mummy was it true and she says yeah so he rang me and I was with Ciara at the time and he said come down the road I want to talk to you and take her with you too, that’s what he said to me, so the two of us took off, back to the house and well he gave Ciara a big hug and turned round and said don’t worry about anything, you won’t be stuck for nothing, he says the child will get reared. (Ben)*

Ben goes onto discuss how his initial feelings of fear and shock about Ciara’s pregnancy, especially when he first found out, changed to be a positive experience as time went on because of the support he received from his family:

*It was great when they knew, because like if they knew I was in bad form they knew why, and they knew what to say to me to cheer me up because my Ma and Da were really excited about a new grandchild. It lifted my mood up if I ever felt down. (Ben)*

But parental and family support was not always forthcoming for the men in this study, and also, in some cases, came with anger as can be seen in Eric's description of his brother's reaction to the news.

*Then my brother was the worst one he was like "you've ruined your life, you've fucking ruined your life", but he is completely different to me, like less focused on relationships, like he has had lots of different girlfriends, like morally he has a different viewpoint to me and again he was like "you don't want to stay there. You don't want to do this, like it's a complete waste of time, what are you doing, why have you done this, you're so irresponsible", and all this kind of stuff. But yeah, so he was the worst one and then I didn't tell anyone [else] for ages. (Eric)*

The young men in this study had different relationships with their girlfriend's parents and certainly for some it proved to be a significant source of conflict and exclusion as can be seen in Caleb's description of his girlfriend's mother's reaction to the unintended pregnancy. Natasha's mother advised her to have an abortion, demonstrating the potential role that the maternal family can play in decisions made during an unintended pregnancy:



*Her mum and dad didn't really receive it well and they were trying to push her down the termination route and she wasn't really accepting that...she told her parents and then there was a whole kick off and she went to the appointment in Marie Stopes [the only abortion provider in NI, which has since closed]. She was given a wee photo and she was like I just can't do this. I am keeping this baby. She was kind of like if you say you support me and you do, I want to keep this baby and I said that's fine. Then she went home [to her parents] the exact same day and said look I went to the clinic and I've seen the baby and I want to keep it and the reaction her Mum had was "you stupid little girl, you stupid little bitch, because you have gone there and people have filled your head with nonsense," that type of thing. Her mum said, "Well I don't agree with that decision, if you are going to do that you have two weeks to get your stuff and move out". Her mum was thinking that if she got pregnant she would lose her body and become a single mum type thing. She said you can't rely, she had this kind of thing like you can't rely on Caleb, or a man. (Caleb)*

Natasha's mother's views invoked popular discourses that young fathers are frequently considered to be absent, and no use, and are often stigmatised (Berger and Langton, 2011; Johansson and Hammaren, 2014). In this study we have two parents, one a father, one a mother, who at least both threatened to 'throw their daughters out' of the family home as a result of the unintended pregnancy. Caleb describes how Natasha's mother 'was thinking if she got pregnant, she would lose her body and become a single mum'. Ben describes how Ciara's dad 'blamed' the unintended pregnancy on him because he was the one 'who got her pregnant'. He describes Ciara's family as 'very posh', stating 'they wouldn't like their daughter running around with a child at seventeen'. Through

Ben's story it appears that Ciara's family 'blamed' him for 'ruining' their daughter's life.

Seven of the young men indicated that more formal support in the community could have helped mediate the feelings of isolation they felt at the time. These young men expressed the need to speak to others about their experiences, however, a number of factors seemed to hinder these young men from doing this, including their perceived reactions of friends and family and tendencies to block out their feelings instead of talking about them. Furthermore, these young men seemed at a loss to know who to talk to because they tended to want to speak to someone with the aim of gaining advice rather than talking about their feelings. This also caused them some difficulties because they felt excluded from services and also perceived some of their friends as too young or immature to ask for advice. It is clear from the following quotes that the young men's need to seek social support combined with not knowing from who to seek it, often led to strong feelings of isolation.

*Like look at me, no one knows apart from one person that I have been through this at all and that's hard because you can't tell your best friends, well I can't, cause like I know what they think about abortion. (Mark)*

*Through it I didn't have anyone to talk to, I was really upset but just felt completely alone...I did speak to a few of my friends about it but like they didn't really know about it and didn't know what to say so they didn't really want to talk about it...Like I tried to google things, but it wasn't very personal, you could write on forums and stuff but it doesn't really feel real,*

*you can read anything online. It would be better if you could talk to someone on the phone or face to face about the situation because every situation is different. (Harry)*

*All the talks and information and stuff were given to her and not me. People are always saying the boys are the ones who don't care and don't support girls but I was there and wanting to know what was going on but I wasn't allowed to go in with her. (Frankie)*

This being a retrospective investigation, it is interesting to note that that the majority of the young men would at least consider it a possibility that they would take up counselling or support services if they knew they existed or they had been offered to them:

*If I was really struggling with it and always thinking about it then yeah, I would go to counselling (Mark)*

*She spoke to a councillor and they told her that your partner could come along as well but like she didn't want me to go so I couldn't, but I wanted to speak to someone. (Harry)*

*Researcher: Do you think if you had been offered counselling, would you have gone?*

*Yeah cause my head was all over the place. I think it would have put my mind at ease and maybe helped me get through it easier...Being so young...I wasn't confident enough to go out and actually ask for help. But if it had been offered to me I would have took it but it wasn't. (Frankie)*

## **Abortion as contested**

Hegemonic masculinity differs in different contexts depending on intersectionality factors such as class and religion. In my theory chapter I discussed how hegemonic masculinity is not the same for every man and especially for men everywhere. This was evident in the interviews as the young men's hegemonic masculinity was not only expressed in class terms but also in religious terms, i.e. being a member of the Catholic religion. As noted in my introduction, objection to abortion in NI is not uniquely held by members of the Catholic religion but is shared across Catholic and Protestant religions. Nonetheless, while globally, the Catholic religion speaks out against abortion, in NI public discourse of opposition to abortion is as likely to come from protestant as Catholic voices and is likely to have been part of the religious milieu of the young men growing up.

There was no section in the semi-structured interview relating to morality per se because it was of interest whether the young men spontaneously raised 'moral issues' in their accounts of their experiences. Nine young men when questioned whether an abortion had been considered spoke about the 'moral issues' of abortion. Five of the young men spoke strongly against abortion and four made it clear that it was not an option they would consider. One young man, Mark, although speaking strongly against abortion, felt that it was 'ok' for him and his views will be further explored. Such views were

also expressed as part of the process of deciding what to do in relation to the unintended pregnancy. When talking about abortion, or 'getting rid of the baby', the primary reason against this decision was not believing or agreeing with abortion, mainly on moral grounds, either personally or 'in their family'.

*Abortion is fucking awful, she was definitely having the baby, so in that sense there was nothing to talk about. I would never allow her to have an abortion, it's my baby. My family are very religious, and I have been brought up with the understanding that a child is a child from pregnancy, so abortion is murdering your child. There's no option, unless nature decides to take it away and something goes wrong. You're having the baby. I don't give a shit what anyone says, it is wrong. (Paul)*

*Fuck, no way. That's just evil having an abortion, I think it's murdering your baby. My family would never speak to me again if I did something like that. A baby is always a good thing, like. If you get pregnant you have the baby, that's it. I just can't understand why anyone would have an abortion, like how do they live with themselves. Like, when we found out she was pregnant that was it. I was going to be a Da. There was nothing to talk about, we were having a baby. (Danny)*

Some of these young men also had siblings or friends who were young parents. In this sense, the fact that those around them did not choose an abortion may indicate both an acceptance of young parenthood, and, to an extent, a rejection of abortion in their

broader social milieu. Ben draws on his experiences growing up witnessing his sister proceeding with an unintended pregnancy.

*It was never an option with me because like my sister, she was left when she was younger with a child and the father told her to jump on a plane and get hoovered. So, he left, and I learnt from a young age to always stick by. So, she thought about it and she looked up. She just didn't want her family thinking she was this and that and the other because she fell pregnant young and it was the teacher, thank God, in school talked her round it. (Ben)*

Eric describes how the decision to go ahead with the pregnancy was his girlfriend's choice, but that that was also his choice and he did not agree with abortion on moral grounds.

*We always from the beginning said we were going to keep it, there was never a question. Well, I knew with her she was going to keep it anyway, so there was never a question of what I wanted, because she is very religious, so she would never have done it. She is a staunch Catholic and you just don't do that. But I wouldn't have wanted to do that regardless, I wouldn't want to do it. I have never been pro-abortion, pro-choice and pro-contraception but not pro-abortion. I think if it's there, it's there, if you know what I mean. It's like, I don't know, it's like an eraser for life, you shouldn't have the opportunities to do that, in certain situations yes you should, if you are a kid or you have been raped,*

*something like that, but in general you can't just be like "ah nah, not quite right," I will just roll the dice again, shake the etch a sketch. (Eric)*

In a statement that contains a number of contradictions, Mark explains that his strongly held political and social views mean that he is still anti-abortion despite agreeing with his partner's decision to have an abortion.

*Before this happened, I was very against it, one of my friend's girlfriends has had an abortion and I tried to be there for him because he was one of my close friends, but I really felt that what he was doing was wrong and he should just have had the baby. All I was thinking was that it was disgusting, and you can't kill a child. I see it as a child but whenever it actually happened to me, I just knew I couldn't have a baby. (Mark)*

*This has been so hard for me, I go out and canvas for a political party that believes abortion should never be legal in Northern Ireland, and I have really struggled because I feel guilty that I have been so judgmental of other people in this situation but now it has happened to me and those views I have weren't so strong after all. In the past, I have protested against the choice to have an abortion. But to be honest, deep down I still don't agree with abortion, but I knew it had to be done. (Mark)*

*If I am being honest, I am still against it. I know this isn't right, but I think it is ok in some cases, it was ok for me, but I don't think it is right for some people and I wouldn't do it again. So, I wouldn't want anyone else to have*

*the opportunity to do it and even though I don't regret it, I am still against it. Sorry if I don't really make sense. (Mark)*

The anti-abortion stance of the young men in this study is representative of the socio-cultural context of abortion in Northern Ireland. Studies on abortion in Northern Ireland have identified that the anti-abortion view is dominant in NI's political institutions (Smyth, 2006; Thomson, 2016). However, recent opinion polls conducted by Amnesty International show that 66% of adults in NI agree that abortion should not be a crime, and 66% believe that in the absence of a devolved government, Westminster should reform the law (Amnesty International, 2018).

Four of the young men expressed their opinions on the morality per se of abortion, however, these were not strongly held views. One of the young men Frankie, a university student, discussed how he and his girlfriend never questioned the decision they made to have an abortion. Frankie wanted his partner to have an abortion, however, he describes how he felt that that it was not the 'right thing' to do:

*We were both adamant that it just wasn't right for us at that stage of our life. I think it helped that we both thought the same, it made it easier...both of us just felt relieved. I didn't really want to think about what we had done cause even though I did want her to have an abortion, I still don't think it is the right thing to do...after it happened we were both like that is it, it is done, no point dwelling on it. (Frankie)*



One of the young men, Gareth reflects on how he questioned whether he was making the right choice whilst driving to the Post Office to collect the abortion pills for his partner. Gareth's narrative recalling learning about abortion at school in religion class, portrays how in most schools in Northern Ireland, abortion is seen as a moral rather than a sexual health issue.

*Honestly there was a moment where I thought to myself was I doing the right thing. I know this sounds stupid but all I kept remembering was religion class in school where the teacher told us abortion was a sin and we would go to hell and that kind of thing and I'm not even religious, but something just felt wrong.*

(Gareth)

Only one of the young men Caleb, who went on to become a father considered abortion as an option. Despite this initial consideration by Caleb, and perceived pressure from friends or family, the idea of an abortion was dismissed as a viable option, although he did not rule it out on moral grounds.

Andrew was the only young man who debated abortion on medical grounds. He is of the belief that a pregnancy is not a 'child' until twenty-four weeks and takes a medical view on the issue.

*I am very much of the medical mind, that it is not a child until it is 24 weeks and it is not a human being until it is delivered, so until it is 24 weeks it is not a patient, ok, that will annoy loads of other people, but that is my standpoint. (Andrew)*

Three of the young men who went on to become fathers were from working class backgrounds and two were from a middle-class background and had attended university. All of the young men who went on to become fathers were from a Catholic background. On an individual basis, four of the young men who went on to become fathers felt that abortion was something 'wrong'. Added to this, there was the idea that they should take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Therefore, it appears the young men who went on to become fathers made use of two discourses in order to reject abortion and to explain why they decided to pursue fatherhood: first, discourses about the moral undesirability of abortion and secondly, discourses related to masculinity and fatherhood. Subsequently, the young men's rejection of abortion may be based on certain masculine ideals and social discourses that equate responsibility and becoming a father with a heightened sense of manhood.

All of the young men in this study who proceeded with an abortion shunned early fatherhood as an acceptable life choice for them. All of the five young men came from middle-class backgrounds and four of them attended university. The decision to have an abortion for these young men was driven by a view that abortion allowed them to delay fatherhood until later in life, therefore prioritising personal freedom. The young men were more concerned with getting their own future organised in a broader sense, such as advancing their careers, owning their own home and being married before they became a father. For the young men in this study who chose an abortion, postponing fatherhood was, however, not merely about waiting until certain egotistical life goals were met. The decision to have an abortion was also made to avoid bringing a child into an unstable relationship or situation.

Four of the young men whose partners had an abortion choose not to tell their family about the unintended pregnancy and the abortion, with one young man choosing to confide in his cousin. This reluctance to confide in their family about the abortion may be linked to the socio-cultural environment in which they are living, where abortion is illegal, and the influence of Christian institutions and doctrine is still very important (See Chapter 1 and Chapter 3). With abortion being such a sensitive and contested issue, a culture of silence surrounding abortion meant that the young men found it difficult to talk to anyone about the abortion and what they were going through.

## **Conclusion**

Presented in this chapter was an interpretation of ten young men's experiences and decision – making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives. The data contained in this chapter illustrates the complex and often contradictory emotions, actions and views held by these young men. This chapter explores the journey in which these young men embarked upon finding out about the unintended pregnancy, including the decision – making process surrounding the unintended pregnancy and then deciding if and when to tell their family and friends and to coping with the decision made afterwards. I have also shown the salience of the concepts of CSM by showing how hegemonic masculinities impacted on how the young men struggled with the need to both show and hide emotional turmoil and the ways gender was actually constructed, challenged and cemented in their narratives. Mostly the narratives show complexity and contrasts in the young men's narratives as well as the similarities and differences in the decision-making processes of those young men who went on to become fathers and those whose partners had an abortion.

The picture that emerges of the experiences of the young men in this study from the themes discussed above points to both problems and positives with young men being involved in reproductive and unintended pregnancy decision – making. An apparent issue is the lack of involvement of these young men in the prevention of the unintended pregnancy. All but two of the young men relied on their partners to use contraception, and these young men consistently engaged in risky sexual behaviour, with one of the young men already having been involved in two previous unintended pregnancies. Interestingly, two men exercised both patriarchal control over their girlfriend's decision, as well as feeling utter powerlessness and excluded from a decision that clearly impacted their lives.

The young men's stories in this chapter cut through to the importance of research on men's experiences and perspectives on pregnancy outcome decision – making. All of the young men partners at the time informed them of the pregnancy and all were involved in varying degrees in the decision – making process. Arguably, men's voices have so often been excluded from research on this topic, and these stories show the power that young men's voices can have both in terms of the support men offer to women and at the same time 'behind the scenes' on a 'woman's right to choose'. In essence, this study explores a relational understanding of unintended pregnancy outcomes and decision – making from young men's perspective in a small but important way, given the general paucity of research on this topic.

I will discuss the findings in this chapter in more detail in the following chapter with reference to existing evidence on the research area of young men, unintended pregnancy

and decision – making, earlier collated in the introduction, integrative review and theory chapter.

## **Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This thesis makes a significant contribution, in that it is one of the few studies that explores young men's *actual* experiences and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their life, and to have sought access to these men independent of their female partners. This is the first and the last study conducted in Northern Ireland to explore young men's actual experiences of abortion decision making whilst abortion was illegal in Northern Ireland. Abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2019.

In this chapter I discuss what this study adds with reference to extant research, and theoretical insights, as reviewed in the earlier part of the thesis, then posit explanations for my findings, in the context of this existing research. This chapter then looks at the contribution to knowledge that the study has provided regarding the methodological insights of recruiting young men for sensitive research. Finally, I outline the policy, practice and educational implications of this study, and suggest potential directions for further research in this and related areas.

### **Recent Changes to Abortion Law in Northern Ireland**

At the time of conducting this study, abortion was illegal in Northern Ireland. Abortion in virtually all circumstances, as well as the purchase of abortion pills and performing

an abortion, were criminal offences and carried a maximum sentence of life imprisonment (House of Commons, 2019).

On July 24, 2019, a bill was signed into law in the U.K. parliament on maintaining public services in Northern Ireland, as it currently does not have a functioning government. Two amendments were tabled to the bill by Labour M.P.s Conor McGinn and Stella Creasy, one to legalise same-sex marriage and the other to liberalise abortion laws. In the weeks leading up to the bill's passage, M.Ps argued that it was Westminster's responsibility to intervene to protect the rights of women and pregnant people in Northern Ireland given the absence of a functioning government in the region.

The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 enacted on 24 July 2019, extended the deadline for the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive to 21 October 2019. If an Executive was not restored by that date the Act would repeal section 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and require that no investigation may be carried out, and no criminal proceeding may be brought or continued, in respect of an offence under those sections under the law of Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019).

The Executive was not restored by the 21 October 2019 and on the 22 October abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland. The UK Government will put in place a new framework for abortion in Northern Ireland for free, safe, legal and local abortion services. The Northern Ireland Office has issued guidance for healthcare professionals to cover the interim period between 22 October and 31 March 2020. This states that

there are no plans for additional NHS services to be routinely available before 31 March 2020. In circumstances of fatal or serious foetal anomaly, however, healthcare professionals may choose to provide treatment. In addition, whilst there is no expectation that GPs will prescribe early medical abortion pills, they may do so in line with their professional competence and guidance from their professional body. If someone needs an abortion in any other circumstance, the procedure, travel and accommodation to England will be paid for by the Government. Previously, travel and accommodation was means tested, but now Government will cover these expenses for everyone. This interim guidance replaces previous guidance issued by the Department of Health in March 2016 (Amnesty, 2019).

## **Content Analysis: Key Findings**

The content analysis of Northern Irish print media in Chapter Three provides an insight into the cultural and legal backdrop of abortion services and public attitudes to abortion in Northern Ireland allowing us to interpret the young men's stories. I examined the public debate and media reporting on the repeal of the Eighth Amendment in Ireland as it took place in mainstream media represented by three Northern Irish newspapers.

Understanding the social and cultural dynamics of public attitudes to abortion is particularly important in the many regions of the world where abortion legislation remains a matter of active contention, one such jurisdiction is Ireland and Northern Ireland. Until 2018, Ireland maintained one of the most restrictive abortion regimes in Europe. As any change to the Irish Constitution requires majority approval by the



population, a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment was called for 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018. The repeal proposition was supported by all major political parties and most civil society organisations and, after a heated public debate, passed with 66.4% of the vote (voter turn-out was 64.5%, the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest ever in an Irish referendum). Legislation to permit abortion up to 12 gestational weeks, and in select circumstances, thereafter, was approved in 2018 (O'Connor, Maher and Kadianaki, 2019).

The findings showed that various types of actors were included in the debate and these included, political, religious, civil society and citizen. The themes identified in the analysis of the print media are varied with both pro-life and pro-choice represented. Mostly, the debate on abortion in Northern Ireland can be divided into two understandings: moral on the side against repeal and of any liberalisation to Northern Ireland's abortion law and somewhat feminist in favour of repeal. Letters to the editor highlighted the strong feeling amongst some in Northern Ireland that abortion is murder. In this frame, abortion is compared to the Nazi era eugenics programme. Letters to the editor from a pro-choice viewpoint frame abortion as a women's fundamental right, including her right to health care. Arguments are made that the lack of abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality and rape or incest goes against women's rights. The frame is gendered and reflects the feminist understanding in that abortion concern's women's rights.

From the news stories what we learned is that there is support for Westminster to reform Northern Ireland's abortion law across UK and Northern Irish political parties, amongst the Northern Irish public and from human rights, medical and legal bodies and this

support has been reignited following the repeal of the Eighth Amendment in Ireland. Opinion pieces highlight how pro-life organisations in Northern Ireland such as Both Lives Matter are advocating for both the unborn and for a women's right to proceed with a crisis pregnancy, calling for funding to help women to be able to continue with a crisis pregnancy. Both Lives Matter have spoken in the print media about how the 'feminist' narrative of "my body, my choice" in their opinion hurts women and stems from a patriarchal structured world.

A key finding from this content analysis is that the voice of men as people who might be going through an abortion experience alongside their female partners was completely absent from the news stories, letters to the editor or opinion pieces. Of course, men were well represented as supporters of change to legislation as well as opposers of change but not as those who experience an abortion in their lives.

## **Overview of the Study**

This study gathered data from young men throughout Northern Ireland between the ages of 16-24 who have experienced an unintended pregnancy, whatever the outcome of that pregnancy. The data were gathered from one to one interviews with ten young men, five of whom who had gone on to become fathers and five whose partner had an abortion. The participants' social environment as well as their demographic characteristics, such as age, social class and religion have been used to contextualise their experiences of an unintended pregnancy. The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences and decision-making processes of young men who had

experienced an unintended pregnancy in the specific context of Northern Ireland. The aim was to capture the phenomena of unintended pregnancy decision-making for young men, with all its messiness and within this very specific local context, but with enough breadth, so that representational generalisations could be made.

Qualitative methods were employed to explore the experiences of the young men and to analyse similarities and differences in their experiences in relation to social class, education and religion. The study used various forms of recruitment including the use of gate-keepers, public recruitment through university and sports clubs and online recruitment through social media. The analysis of the young men's stories are interwoven with the concepts identified in Critical Studies of Masculinities (CSM). CSM arose from a number of academic critiques — primarily from feminism, but also from gay and queer scholarship, and from men's responses, particularly, men's pro feminist responses to feminism and debates on gender relations (see Hearn and Morgan, 1990; Hearn, 2004; Kimmel and Mahalik, 2005).

### **Young men's experiences and decision making in relation to an unintended pregnancy: Key Findings**

The main findings in this study represent new knowledge on the impact of an unintended pregnancy on a young man's life; gendered and social-class informed notions of reproductive responsibility and fatherhood; gender relational power in the decision making process and the influence of others on the decision making process.

This chapter will now locate these findings with reference to existing theoretical and empirical research.

An unintended pregnancy had an impact on a young man's life both positively and negatively, in line with findings from the work of others (Buston, 2010; Chatchawet, 2010; Deslauriers, 2011; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Weber, 2012; Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2012; Chili and Maharaj, 2015; Mann, Cardona and Gomez, 2015; Sriyasak, 2016; Madiba and Nsiki, 2017) and their experience was largely influenced by social and gender norms.

There were distinct differences in how young men experienced an unintended pregnancy and how they viewed the impact it had on their life, with one of the most important variables being whether they went on to become a father or if their partner had an abortion. The reason why a particular decision was made was of particular interest. The young men whose partner had an abortion focused on the 'potential impact' that the unintended pregnancy would have on their life if it was to proceed. All these young men were from middle- class backgrounds, and they drew heavily on cultural expectations of competent masculinity, such as the idea of men as 'good providers'. They reflected on the achievement of certain life goals around education and career and how an unintended pregnancy would impact these. The young men expressed a commitment to a reproductive desire that puts completing ones education before having children, with an implied assumption that student and parent status are irreconcilable. Similar findings have been found in multiple studies, with research suggesting that the consequences of an unintended pregnancy are often understood with reference to potential trade-offs, personal sacrifices and future restrictions (Deslauriers,

2011; Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2012; Lohan et al., 2011; Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2015).

However, findings from a study of college men regarding their views on pregnancy resolution and marriage in the event of an unplanned pregnancy reported that 86.5% of young men felt an obligation to raise the child and maintain involvement in their lives (Olmstead et al., 2013) despite this being in opposition to their educational and personal goals. The findings Olmstead et al. (2013) were obtained from the responses to hypothetical scenarios however, and not young men's actual experiences. Further, in my study, two young men, both middle-class and university educated went on to become fathers, reflected on ideas of responsibility in relation to their desire to proceed with the pregnancy, despite this interrupting their ideal life course.

In accord with previous research (Wilkes et al., 2011), the findings of my study suggest that an unintended pregnancy made young men reflect on the type of parenting, and particularly fathering, they had received. For one of the young men, one of the main issues was growing up with a father who was an alcoholic. Such reflections gave this young man the impetus to want to be a better father to his child than his father had been to him and it was important that he felt financially and emotionally ready to become a father. In general terms, the findings in this study echo previous research that has shown young fathers' desire to be better fathers than their absent fathers had been (Cater and Coleman, 2006; Reeves, 2006). This study found that the young men whose partners had an abortion reflected on their desire to become fathers in the future but only when other career and personal goals were met, with the implication being that this course

would allow them to be better fathers. For some, there seemed a desire to recreate the conditions of their own middle-class upbringing. These young men see abortion as less problematic than that which would be captured in some of the narratives of reproductive rights in Northern Ireland. They display a preferred future for the self and (in a reversed manner) for any future children who by not being born at this time would avoid disadvantage and a poor start in life. This 'right time and place' view of parenthood and the desire for a rather rigid sequencing of one's life course has been described in other studies (Condon et al., 2006; Tan and Quinlivan, 2006; Olmstead et al., 2013; Neale and Davies, 2015), suggesting that Northern Ireland is similar to others, despite the complex and contested discourses surrounding reproductive rights.

This study also adds to knowledge about those young men who went on to become fathers and how they experience an unintended pregnancy. In the first instance, it confirms others (see Buston, 2010; Deslauriers, 2011; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2012; Weber, 2012; Daugherty, 2014; Wachira et al., 2016) which suggest that some young men view an unintended pregnancy as a positive life event. In this study, those young men whose partners chose to proceed with the pregnancy were more willing to prioritise potential positives of the unintended pregnancy, while those whose partners had an abortion were more concerned about the negative consequences to themselves and/or the child of continuing with the pregnancy. This is concordant with data from studies of economically disadvantaged adolescent men, (Marsiglio, 1993; Deslauriers, 2011; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011) who may view paternity as a source of self-esteem, as well as studies conducted with working-class women, in which childbearing may be regarded as not only appealing, but transformative (Edin and Kafalas, 2005). These findings reflect those reported by

Daugherty (2014) who found that African American and Puerto Rican young men from economically disadvantaged backgrounds believed that having children would make them more mature. Indeed, in this study three of the young men who went on to become fathers were from working-class backgrounds and on an individual basis they felt that abortion was something ‘wrong’ and that they should take responsibility for their actions. Similarly, a study of low-income men in the US who experienced an unintended pregnancy explored how participants viewed continuing with the pregnancy as a way to atone for the sexual behaviour that led to the pregnancy (Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011).

In my study, the working-class young men who went on to become fathers discussed how every pregnancy, even an unintended one, was a positive event. This finding is in agreement with that of Rajapaska-Hewageegna (2014) and Frost Lindberg and Finer (2012) who also demonstrated how some young men believed that every pregnancy was a blessing. However, findings from this study contrast with findings from studies with older adult men, who almost uniformly describe unintended pregnancies in negative terms (Johnson and Williams, 2005; Reich and Brindis, 2006).

Three of the young men in my study who went on to become fathers spoke about how abortion had been raised as an issue during the initial phases of the decision-making process, either through friends and families suggesting it as an option, or from their partner’s consideration of it. Despite this initial consideration, the idea of an abortion was discarded as a possible outcome of the unintended pregnancy. On an individual basis, the young men felt that abortion was ‘wrong’. Alongside this moral rejection of

abortion there were emotional feelings or the idea that the pregnancy was 'fate'. Westwood (1996:26) describes fatherhood "as one of the major signifiers of masculinity". When it comes to unintended pregnancy and abortion it may be argued that the issue of masculinity is not related to the conception of the pregnancy, but rather to the aspects of fatherhood that entail taking responsibility. Added to this was the thought that 'being a man' meant taking responsibility for your actions. This is in accord with previous research by Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) who found that young men did not see the conception alone as signifying their passage to 'manhood'. Indeed, as they explain "biological paternity was not seen as an emblem for masculinity...the bigger challenge is to assume responsibility for their children and families" (Marsiglio and Hutchinson, 2002:205). Therefore, the young men's rejection of abortion may be based on certain masculinity ideals and social discourses that equate the taking of responsibility for one's children with a heightened sense of manhood. This idea that having the baby is a responsible resolution to the pregnancy has been found by other researchers (Tabberer et al., 2000; Lee et al., 2004; Greene 2006; Olmstead et al, 2013) and Greene (2006) found that a sense of responsibility for pregnancy and for contraceptive behaviour led to a decision to reject abortion. This can be seen in one of the young men's stories when he expresses how he sees abortion as an 'eraser for life' and how 'you shouldn't have opportunities to do that'.

There is a contrast between the strong anti-abortion views of some of the young men who went on to become fathers and the views of the university educated and middle class young men whose partners had abortions. It is possible that for these young men from middle class backgrounds there is a greater stigma attached to unintended pregnancy, as they are expected by their friends and family to finish university and find



a well-paid, stable job before having a family. In research conducted in the UK with 52 young women under eighteen who had continued with their unintended pregnancies, and 51 who had had abortions, the young women who continued with the pregnancy often had more materially insecure lives, whereas, the young women who were invested in continuing education and saw employment as an important part of their future lives were more likely to opt for abortion (Lee et al., 2004). Research has shown that class and education can impact the ways in which men construct their role as fathers (Bianchi et al., 2000). The findings in this study show similarities with Weber's (2012) study which found that young men continue to negotiate and construct their own understanding of fatherhood based on their social position, their access to employment and their relationship with their partners. It could be the case that as the middle – class young men in this study move through educational, social and professional hierarchies, the desire to draw on 'fatherhood' as a signifier of 'responsibility', maleness and masculinity becomes less important. It is clear that the pool of signifiers for communicating achieved masculinity expands for those young men from middle -class backgrounds with a third level education.

Social class has been widely acknowledged as a major influence on the formation of masculinities (O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000). In his seminal text, Willis (1997) described how working-class boys became men by imitating the toughness, solidarity and physicality, associated with their fathers. All of the young men in this study who went on to become fathers were from a working-class background. However, the relationship between class and masculinity has become more complex in recent times, with the decline of clear occupational titles and careers for life, the decline of the male breadwinner and increased mobility across classes. All of the young men in this study

who went on to become fathers viewed this opportunity as a chance to become a man and felt that their role as a man was to provide for their partner practically, such as ‘sorting out a house’.

This research raises questions around the extent to which the decision and option to have an abortion or to proceed with an unintended pregnancy is informed by the ‘life course’ expectations of that different social class. At first glance, the stories of unplanned pregnancy, and the decision-making process surrounding such a life event, can appear to be highly individualised accounts that reflect personal attitudes. However, by moving continuously backwards and forwards between the empirical data and the sociological literature, we can see that these accounts are being informed and structured by a complex mix of socio-structural realities, socialisation and powerful normative and cultural forces. As Bourdieu (1990: p.4) argues, the reproduction of class and class domination comes about in part because of the class-based socialisation (Swartz, 1997) of an unconscious disposition (*habitus*) that informs our assumptions about the social world and our role within it (Hughes, 2015: p.45). This *habitus* sets the boundaries around what we can reasonably expect in a given context because “agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not for us” (Bourdieu, 1990: p.64). In general, the middle class inculcate in their young people a *habitus* whereby they come to see themselves as ‘belonging’ in any given field of social, educational or professional life and development (Bourdieu 1984: p.66), and in capitalist societies, resources and networks are concentrated in such a way as to make middle-class aspirations realisable. In contrast, in many cases “subordinate groups internalize a world view of limited possibilities, and consciously and unconsciously comply with dominant discourses because there seems to be no

alternative” (Hughes, 2015: p.45), thus “reproducing the conditions of oppression” (Bourdieu, 2001: p.217). We can see this in the Northern Ireland case, where amongst working class young men, formal education is not valued, there is a “collective sense of loss” and a perception that their cultural identities are undervalued by wider society (McAlister et al, 2009: p.70). At the same time, local employment opportunities are declining without being replaced by alternatives (McAlister et al, 2009: p.70), and the region has gross inequalities in educational outcomes (Nolan, 2014).

For the working class young men in my study, being able to afford an abortion, to travel to Liverpool or London and to take time off work, would have been a financial impossibility. During the interviews with these young men, when questions about abortion were asked, they were immediately shut down with responses such as ‘that’s murder’, and ‘you don’t kill your own child’. The discussion never entered into the territory of issues of access or affordability. However, research conducted in Northern Ireland in 2017, concerning abortion as a workplace issue in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, raised the issue of class and affordability (Bloomer et al., 2017). A number of the participants raised the issue of resources as an issue, highlighting how those with access to resources could not only readily access abortion and did not have to reveal they were seeking an abortion in order to access funds/resources. Participants highlighted how for those who had access to funds and resources they could travel for an abortion without anybody asking any questions, and could therefore avoid embarrassment or public stigma. However, in contrast, people who are in low paid jobs or are unemployed may have to turn to friends, family or money lenders to fund an abortion. This stigma and embarrassment is something that the middle-class, university educated, young men in my study, had the privilege of being able to avoid. All of these

young men had access to funds to pay for the abortion, or else the young woman paid for it herself. These young men, in co-operation with their partners, had the resources, social status and power to decide not to have a baby that they did not want.

One of the key findings of this research is that for the working class young men fatherhood became a way of realising their masculinity. The wider research has shown that lower socio – economic status and/or lower educational backgrounds of parents is associated with higher incident of teenage pregnancy and more favourable attitudes towards pregnancy (Buston, 2010; Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Rossier et al., 2013; Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana, 2010; Wong et al., 2014; Crosby et al., 2015; Kagesten et al., 2015). The theorisation in this study of the relationship between social class and unintended pregnancy decision-making, builds on existing studies of the relationship between marginalised masculinities and social exclusionary processes for young men (Hyde et al., 2009). The recognition that social and economic inequalities affect the performance of masculinities, by effectively blocking deprived and working class young men from some of the key signifiers of hegemonic masculinities, including wealth and status, has been demonstrated in a number of empirical studies (Mchunu, 2012; Wong et al., 2014) and was succinctly captured by Mac an Ghaill's (2012) summary of working class masculinities as "fighting, fucking and football". Lohan et al. (2012) and others note a developing area of research findings suggesting that the event of impregnating a female partner may be considered a confirmation of masculinity by some adolescent males (Pleck, Sonenstein and Ku, 1993; Marsiglio, 1993; Kegler et al., 2001; Broen et al., 2005).

Though changing understandings of masculinity within the working class communities of Northern Ireland's ethno-sectarian blocs was not the focus of this research, it is important to acknowledge that large structural forces and changes may be at play in shaping these young men's narratives of pregnancy decision-making, fatherhood and maleness. The complexity of the cultural constitution of masculinities means what constitutes normative or hegemonic masculinities is constantly shifting and open to reconfiguration through social change. With the erosion of traditional sources of male identification, in the wake of de-industrialisation and the end of overt political conflict in Northern Ireland, young men in working class areas have sought new ways to express their masculinity (Shirlow and McGovern, 1997). All of the young men in this study from working class backgrounds left school at 16 and were either employed in the service industry or in manual labour jobs. Unlike in the 1970s, in the UK and Northern Ireland there is now a direct correlation between low qualifications and joblessness and being trapped in low paid and unskilled work (McKnight et al., 2016). Of further concern are the pressures and contradictions many young men from working class areas in Northern Ireland experience as they attempt to live up to unrealistic and unattainable and anachronistic stereotypical expectations of men and masculinity. Harland and McCready (2012:p.14) highlight how four decades of social unrest, sectarianism, paramilitary influence and violence has had a profound effect upon the construction of masculine identities in Northern Ireland. This effect is seen most clearly in working class areas with disproportionate levels of social disadvantage. For example, McAlister, Scraton and Haydon found that:

*“For working class young men with an unambiguous, strong cultural and community identity, there was a collective sense of loss – formal education was*

*not valued, local work opportunities were declining with few alternatives, and their cultural identities were felt to be undervalued” (2009: p.70).*

The findings of this study in relation to young working-class men in NI are similar to those of studies conducted in economically deprived areas such as low-income neighbourhoods in New York and South Africa (Jackson, Karasz and Gold, 2011; Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana, 2010). The young men in the above studies do not possess the social capital or resources to be a husband or a provider, and may find securing employment difficult, reflective of the precarious employment status of the working – class young men in this study. Therefore, becoming a father and the responsibility it brings may be the only way to assert their masculinity. Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana (2010) explored why young men in South Africa decided to become young fathers. Amongst the prominent reasons were to keep a partner, followed by their social and peer context and these reasons are driven, in some form, by poverty and a drive for an alternative pathway to exert their ‘maleness’.

In contrast to the findings in this study, which have found social class to have an influence on young men’s experiences and decision – making in relation to an unintended pregnancy, Lohan et al. (2011) found class to have no significance in predicting adolescent men’s choices, and they noted that this was surprising. They described how their findings are consistent with broader research on ‘equalisation’, suggesting that social class demonstrates an ambiguous relationship with health behaviours such as sexual risk taking (Henderson et al., 2002). Adolescence has been described as a period of increased risk – taking and it is possible that lifestyle changes

during this time cut across social differences with the effect of flattening inequalities (West, 2007; West and Sweeting, 2004; Chen et al., 2006). However, the hypothetical nature of their data does not permit the drawing of any conclusions about young men's actual experiences or the negotiated process of pregnancy decision – making.

A key finding from this study that cut across all of the young men was the emotional impact that the unintended pregnancy had on them. The social construction of gender throughout pregnancy decision-making infers the repression of emotions by young men (Prentice and Carranza, 2002; Schwab et al., 2016; Addis and Hoffman, 2017). The young men in this study described a range of emotions regarding unintended pregnancy, including distress, anger, guilt, happiness and excitement. This is in line with the findings of other studies (Buston, 2010; Sathiparsad, 2010; Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2012; Chili and Maharaj, 2015; Madiba and Nsiki, 2017). In this regard the findings differ from Tanner et al's (2013) study of focus groups with teenagers examining their views on adolescent pregnancy and their finding that the impact of an unintended pregnancy was more limited to discussion of financial concerns rather any emotional impact.

Theoretical insights describe how boys and men learn the importance and value of concealing certain emotions viewed as socially feminine, and displaying emotions viewed as socially masculine, in an effort to uphold their masculine status (Connell, 1995, 2000; Flood, 2008; Budgeon, 2015). Two young men in this study used symbolism to give gendered meaning to emotionality, using phrases such as 'being strong for her', and 'you're the man in this, you're meant to be the strongest one', to

describe the repression of their emotions. Being tough or strong was associated with masculinity and at times, all of the young men believed the ability to suppress emotions was a strength. Similarly, a small study in Sweden (Holmberg and Wahlberg, 2000) proposed that men's main concern was giving emotional support to their partner.

At times the young men struggled with concealing their emotions and two of the young men allowed themselves to be vulnerable in front of their partners, allowing themselves to cry. This non-conformance to the hegemonic ideal gives credence to Anderson's (2011) inclusive masculinity theory, which found a 'softening' or diminishing of hegemonic masculinity. These narratives offer an insight into these young men's emotionally open personalities. By expressing their feelings to their partners and sometimes their family members, they are offering a softer gender performance than permitted in the previously homohysterical era of the 1980s (Mac an Ghail, 1994). Their narratives are also evidence of the wider cultural transformation of masculinities reflected in UK society, whereby softer presentations of masculinity are evident (Ingrim and Waller, 2014). Academics have discussed how young men today eschew the homophobia and hyper-masculinity of their fathers, they are physically and emotionally closer to each other, taking pride in their softer version of self (McCormack, 2013). This softer version of self is evident in two of the young men's narratives through their discussions with their friends regarding their shock and fear about the unintended pregnancy and those friends' supportive reactions. By contrast the inability to articulate emotions was present in two of the young men's stories. Discourses from within CSM advance the idea that men struggle to express and communicate their emotions, not that they have an inability to develop emotions (DeBoise and Hearn, 2017). This inability



to articulate emotions is present in two of the young men's stories resulting in them feeling isolated and alone.

This study adds to current understandings about young men's perceptions of their relationship and how this influences their involvement in the decision – making process of an unintended pregnancy. As with previous studies conducted with young women (Henshaw and Kost, 1992; Ralph et al., 2014; Frederico et al., 2018), the relationship with the potential father was an important factor in the pregnancy decision-making. In this study one of the factors that influenced young men's decision to proceed with the pregnancy was that as a couple the young men conveyed that they had a sense of a future together. This is similar to other studies which found in general, the men wanted more involvement in the decision – making process and with the woman (and potential child) as the length of the relationship increased (Ryan and Dunn, 1983; Holmberg and Wahlberg, 2000; Kero and Lalos, 2004; Jones et al., 2011; Sharp, Richter and Rutherford, 2014).

Findings in this study highlight how the young men differentiate between the reaction they had to the news of the unintended pregnancy and the reaction they may have had if the woman was a 'one night stand'. Two young men in this study who went on to become fathers reflected on how their decision to proceed with the pregnancy may have been different if their relationship status was different, for example if the pregnancy was as a result of a 'one night stand', describing how they may have been more likely to have wanted an abortion. This is in line with findings from a study conducted in the Netherlands with women who had experienced an unintended pregnancy (Brauer et al.,

2018). They found that if the women was in an unstable or new relationship, she often felt unsupported or even pressured toward abortion by the male.

These findings are in contrast to those of Jackson, Karasz and Gold (2011) who found that when men perceived themselves able to meet the financial obligations of fatherhood, they received the news of an unintended pregnancy positively. This was the case whether pregnancies were conceived with casual sexual partners or in committed relationships. In this study the two young men were from middle – class backgrounds and both at the time of interview were in long term co-habiting relationships with their partners. It could be argued that in contrast to the young men from working class backgrounds, they may have “more to lose” and less to gain by an unintended pregnancy outside of a relationship, as found in other studies (Manlove, 1998; Graefe and Lichter, 2002; Olmstead et al., 2013).

Findings in this study add to current understandings and knowledge on men’s gendered notions of reproductive responsibility in relation to their responsibility to avoid the unintended pregnancy. This research, similar to Brown (2015), suggests that responsibility for contraception use among young people is strongly gendered and based on hegemonic masculine and feminine roles. In line with findings from other research young men in this study describe how they mostly silently assigned responsibility for but did not speak about contraception with their partners (Buston, 2010; Jackson, Karasz and Gold; Smith et al., 2011; Weber, 2012; Tanner et al., 2013, Rossier, 2013). Smith et al., (2011) highlight a contradiction between participants’ desire to avoid pregnancy and the level of personal responsibility taken to achieve this.

This study adds to current understandings and knowledge on men's gendered notions of reproductive responsibility in relation to unintended pregnancy decision making. In relation to gender power relations what I found in this study was that for three of the young men, despite asserting their wishes for their partner to have an abortion or to continue with the pregnancy, ultimately felt that they had no control over when or whether or not they had children. Power is central to these narratives, and its perceived importance influences how the young men in this study negotiate their masculine identity. The unintended pregnancy decision-making process and experience confronts men's power in multiple ways – from the inability to provide for a child, which may contribute to women's decisions to have an abortion, to being relegated to the waiting room of the family planning association, to having a child they didn't want with a particular sexual partner. With the young men's ability to fulfil a hegemonic ideal and "be a man" compromised, some young men felt marginalised. These findings are in line with those found by Olmstead et al., (2013) who stated that if the woman did not involve the man in the decision - making process this left him feeling powerless. This is in contrast to other studies (Buston, 2010; Deslauriers, 2011) where some young men believe that they do not have the right to be involved in the decision – making process. Buston (2010) highlights that pregnancies tended to be seen as belonging to the female partner, reflecting both the power of the male partner to be able to leave the consequences of sex and reproduction largely to the woman.

However, for some of the young men in my study the restructuring of power in the abortion context revealed a reformed masculinity predicted on partnership and the provision of support for their partner. This echoes other studies that describe how despite perceptions that men are largely unsympathetic toward their partners or that

they pressure them to terminate their pregnancies, men actually perceive their primary role to be one of support for their partners (Ferguson and Hogan, 2007; Chatchawet et al., 2010). The emergence of these masculinities in settings where men's gendered status has shifted is consistent with observations in other reproductive health contexts including pregnancy confirmation (Draper, 2002), attendance during childbirth (Dolan and Coe, 2011), experience of a child in neo-natal intensive care (Deeney et al., 2012) and in the treatment of erectile dysfunction and male infertility (Inhorn and Wentzell, 2011).

Not all of the young men in this study were able to negotiate their hegemonic expectations with their role in the abortion setting and thus articulated marginalised masculinity. One of the young men reflected on their experience with confusion, anger, and disappointment, particularly when their partner had greater power in decision-making and the logistics of the abortion process. This young man expressed notions of feeling helpless and at times victimised. Helplessness and victimisation are generally not part of hegemonic men's lexicon and, as such, are often not communicated even when present (Chaplin and Cole, 2005; Keenan and Hipwell, 2005; Zahn-Waxler, Shirtcliff and Marceau, 2008). In other words, this young man may have felt helplessness was a barrier to achieved masculinity. One of the young men in this study expressed anger and resentment towards his partner when she proceeded with an abortion that he was not in agreement with. These findings echo those of Holmes (2004) whose case study research highlighted the effects of abortion on a young man who learned that his partner had obtained an abortion nearly six months after the abortion occurred. Holmes described the effects of worthlessness, emasculation and the threat to the young man's belief system as a result of the abortion. Findings from the content

analysis in Chapter Three of pro-choice letters to the editor frame abortion as a women's fundamental right, including her right to healthcare. The frame is gendered and reflects the feminist understanding in that abortion concern's women's rights. There is not one article contained within the content analysis concerning how men experience an abortion in their lives. It is clear that young men are not considered within the public debate on abortion in Northern Ireland and as seen in the context above, are not always considered within the private debate.

In my study, one of the young men challenged gender power relations in which they perceived they were being "side-lined" by medical professionals and unable to have a say on a woman's right to an abortion. This young man described having to wait in the waiting room while his girlfriend attended the family planning clinic and being unable to go into the appointment with her. He felt that the medical professionals viewed him as having the potential "to make her do something she didn't want", when all he wanted was "to be there for her". This young man's views reflect the broader social processes within Northern Ireland society whereby the issue of abortion is synonymous with the women's movement and women's groups. The content analysis of Northern Irish print media (Chapter 3) reflects these views and provides an insight into the cultural backdrop of family planning services in Northern Ireland. Letters to the editors expressed the view that no-one can understand or fully comprehend what a woman goes through when deciding to have an abortion unless they have also experienced it.

Findings from this study add to current understandings on how the role of others influence young men's decision making in relation to an unintended pregnancy. All of

the young men in this study discussed the roles that other people played at different stages in the decision-making regarding the unintended pregnancy. Inter-personal relationships were very important for two of the young men during decision making potentially influencing the decision made about the unintended pregnancy. Ben described how Ciara's Dad 'kicked' her out of the house upon being told about the pregnancy and Caleb describes how Natasha's mother scheduled an appointment for her at the Marie Stopes Clinic to arrange an abortion. This echoes findings from other studies conducted with young women that have revealed the main influencers in the unintended pregnancy decision making process to be parents and family members (Tabberer et al., 2000; Hoggart, 2012; Engelbert et al., 2019). In some cases, pressure brought to bear by parents and other family members was successful in influencing the decision making process (Hoggart, 2012). In my study, this was not the case, with both Ben and Caleb's partners continuing with the pregnancy despite their parent's disapproval.

In comparison to the young men whose partners had an abortion, all of the young men whose partners had decided to continue with the pregnancy as part of their stories described the reactions of their parents and the subsequent levels of support that followed the news of the pregnancy. For most of the young men it can be said that the announcement of the pregnancy to their own families was not presented by the young men as creating a great deal of conflict, even in the case of Ben and Ciara where her own father's reaction had been extremely negative. The reaction of the young men's parents was similar to that of the young men themselves: shock followed by acceptance. None of the young men reported a long-term negative reaction by their family to the news of the pregnancy. These findings are in accord with research conducted by Lohan

et al., (2010) which found that adolescent men who perceived that their mothers would be positive to keeping the baby were six times more likely to choose to continue the pregnancy compared to adolescent men who perceived their mothers were not positive. The comforting discourse on the reactions of family and friends to future fatherhood does not offer an alternative narrative for young men whose partners have had an abortion. A review on abortion stigma with women indicates that they perceive stigma from friends, family, community and society as a result of their decision to have an abortion (Hanschmidt et al. 2016). As a consequence, women keep their abortion secret from friends and family, which causes psychological distress, loneliness and suppression of emotions (Hanschmidt et al., 2016). This echoes the findings in my study as all of the young men whose partners had an abortion described how they choose not to seek support or advice from their parents or family and instead they kept the abortion a secret.

The young men whose partners had an abortion were from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds. While the authority of the Roman Catholic Church has been in considerable decline in the Irish Republic in recent decades (Inglis, 1998), a view outwardly confirmed by the referendum results on same sex marriage and abortion, the decline of the Church and its Protestant counterparts in Northern Ireland is perhaps less apparent. Religious identification remains extensive in NI with the 2015 election study indicating that only 4.5% of the population was brought up with no religion (Tonge and Evans, 2018). Three of the young men whose partners had an abortion, spoke about how their parents were 'very religious' and as a result they felt that they had to keep the abortion a secret from them. It is this societal and religious stigma which appears to be the biggest driver in stopping these young men telling those closest to them about the

unintended pregnancy and abortion. This stigma is apparent in the content analysis conducted of Northern Irish print media in relation to the Eighth Amendment Referendum in the Republic of Ireland (Chapter 3). Newspapers reported a consensus of opposition across Christian religions to the repeal of the Eighth Amendment. These religious beliefs are reflected in the views of those pro-life letters who use the words ‘immoral’ and ‘sinful’ and who describe abortion as the ‘murder’ of ‘innocent babies’. It is not surprising that the young men in this study are not willing to confide in others about their involvement in abortion if this is the cultural landscape within which they are living.

In this thesis I discuss the reported experiences and decision-making of ten young men who have experienced an unintended pregnancy. From these stories it is clear that the decision making and choice to proceed with an unintended pregnancy or to have an abortion is a complex and multi-layered process that depends on interactions with partners, friends, parents and the wider community. While the data reveals the ways that young men engage in a traditionally feminised sphere, such as offering emotional support to their partners, there is room for progress in gender relations. This research has identified a gendered division of contraceptive labour such that the young men left contraceptive decisions largely up to the young woman. This study adds to understandings about how adherence to masculine norms shape young men’s behaviours in relation to unintended pregnancy decision making. The result from this study highlights the competing expectations that many young men struggle balancing, that of appearing ‘tough’ but also being emotional (Aumann et al., 2011; Davis and Greenstein, 2009).



Consistent with Connell's (1995) thesis that masculinity is best understood as a 'configuration of practices', these young men's accounts also demonstrate how the formation of their role in the unintended pregnancy decision making process was constructed within the social context in which these men found themselves. It was clear, for example, that aspects of hegemonic masculinity strongly influenced some of the young men's philosophical resolve not to show or discuss the emotional impact of the unintended pregnancy, which they equated with gendered expectations about how men are supposed to behave in such situations. Whilst the young men framed their silence in terms of the lack of an 'emotional script', which precluded the young men from explaining how they truly felt about the unintended pregnancy, the young men's suppression of emotion and the shielding of the young women from their insecurities and sense of powerlessness can also be linked to how men restore threatened gender identities (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009).

The young men at times worked to transform their practices in the interests of their partners, which demonstrate that masculine identities are not static. For example, the young men sought to incorporate an increased sense of sensitivity and willingness to support and care for their partners through the decision making process and subsequent pregnancy or abortion. Unintended pregnancy, therefore, appeared to usher in new and possibly less restricted thinking regarding their roles as men, which could also challenge hegemonic norms; namely they adopted attitudes and behaviours ordinarily considered to be feminine (Connell, 2012).

## **Methodological Contributions**

The methodology used in this research produced rich, textured and vibrant data through processes that enabled young men to articulate their feelings and experiences and ensured that these were recorded and analysed. To this degree the methodology was successful. This section will explore what has been learned from adopting this methodology, reflecting on processes that worked, but also on processes that added little to the recruitment process. Finally, the section will also reflect on what might be usefully added to any future study.

In summary, perhaps the contribution of the thesis to methodological debates is modest and can be summarised as the methodological challenges to recruiting young men who have experienced an unintended pregnancy and the potential solutions, the use of an audio-visual element to the recruitment process and the lack of success of social media as a recruitment strategy and the considerations as to why.

Accessing young men for this research was a problem but not an insurmountable one. Moreover, the research is important because the extant research on young men and pregnancy decision-making tends to focus on those young men who identify as fathers and who have accessed services under this identity (Quinton, Pollock and Golding, 2002; Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana, 2010; Deslauriers, 2011; Sipsma et al., 2012; Weber, 2012; Hadley, 2014; Lewin et al., 2014; Chili and Maharaj, 2015; Salami and Ayegboyin, 2015; Sriyasak et al., 2016).

In this study, recruitment was very challenging, I was looking for a more hidden group of young men, men who may have had an 'unintended pregnancy'. Difficulties were encountered such as participant's failure to attend agreed interview timeslots on multiple occasions and reluctance to participate in a research interview. Reluctance to participate could be due to perceptions of social stigma for being involved in an unintended pregnancy or for being a young parent (Craig and Stanley, 2006), unwillingness to discuss emotional experiences (O'Brien, Hunt and Hart, 2005) or hesitancy in discussing such experiences with a female researcher (Gailey and Prohaska, 2011).

This study aimed to recruit young men aged 16 – 24 who had experienced an unintended pregnancy, whatever the outcome was. Accessing young men for this study proved to be a challenge in spite of multiple sources of recruitment being contacted including public recruitment, social media and gatekeepers. Despite a sustained and energetic effort to promote the study on social media, I did not recruit any of the study participants through social media. Given the sensitive and controversial nature of the study, given that abortion was illegal in Northern Ireland at the time of the study, it is perhaps not surprising that young men did not make contact with an unknown researcher. The use of a recruitment video proved more useful when making contact with gatekeepers in youth organisations than as a tool for recruiting participants. Feedback from gatekeepers was that the video provided them with a quick introduction to the study and made it easier for them to talk to their young people about the research. Some of the youth workers I spoke to said that they showed the video to the young people that they were working with in order to tell them about the study.

Researchers have described how a successful recruitment strategy must be flexible and involve plans that are able to be adapted to meet the needs of the target population (Roulston and Martinez, 2015). This means that stringently sticking to a rigid recruitment plan is less important than a recruitment plan that will ensure sufficient numbers of participants can be secured. Research suggests that direct approaches by researchers to young people are less likely to result in positive responses than those approaches made through a gate-keeper, who the young person knows and trusts (Ward and Henderson, 2003; Aaltonen, 2017; Sanders and Munford, 2017; Vangeepuram et al., 2016). Therefore, I have found that investing time and effort in building genuine, positive relationships and maintaining contact with key gatekeepers working with young people throughout the research process was critical to the success of this study.

Working closely with gatekeepers allowed me to receive feedback from them on how the young men they approached about the study felt about being involved. Gatekeepers in multiple youth organisations informed me that the young men asked, ‘what did they get’ for being involved. Youth workers told me that they found it difficult to ‘sell’ the benefits of being involved in the research without there being a monetary value to the young men. This information allowed me to go back to the Ethics Committee and apply for an amendment to be allowed to offer the young men a £20 high street voucher for being involved in the study. It is not possible to identify what success that incentive had on the recruitment process. From conversations with youth workers it appeared that they felt more confident and were more likely to approach the young men they worked with about the study knowing that they could offer the young men a voucher for taking part.

In summary, the lessons I have learnt from the recruitment process of this study is that social media did not work for this particular study. What worked for this study was building upon existing relationships with gatekeepers and fostering new relationships. Instead of sending emails to youth workers and key contacts I called them and arranged to meet with them to discuss my research. I kept in close contact with these gatekeepers and updated them the recruitment process. This study's successes were based on networking and relationship building, with both gatekeepers and young people. Some of the young men interviewed in this study had never told their story before. It was a privilege that these young men felt comfortable and confident enough to entrust me with their personal stories. For young men to feel confident to participate in this study a post shared on Facebook or a tweet on Twitter was not enough. These young men were able to meet with me before the interview; their youth workers were able to tell them that they had already met with me, therefore there was a level of trust in existence that is not apparent on social media.

As I go forward and build on this research I will be able to use some of the recruitment strategies utilised by researchers in other environments where abortion was legal, such as the U.K. If I was to repeat this research in the future, I would apply to the Health Care Trusts for ethical approval to recruit from abortion clinic waiting rooms in Northern Ireland, as this was not possible during this study.

If I was to repeat this research it would be beneficial to establish an advisory group of experts who could advise the research team throughout the research process from its inception to its completion. An advisory group could involve health practitioners

involved in abortion services in Northern Ireland and from Family Planning Organisations. By establishing an advisory group this would ensure continued input from youth and sexual health services throughout the project. The use of an advisory group could also ensure a more focused social media presence advertising the research.

## **Study Implications for Education**

The findings of this study have a number of implications for current or future educators and programme developers of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). These are outlined below.

Relationship and sexuality education (RSE) is compulsory in Northern Ireland, however in practice there is variable provision in schools (Bailey et al., 2015). Northern Ireland's previous restrictive laws on abortion and the conservative, faith-based approach in many schools can make it difficult for young people to openly discuss issues around sex, relationships, contraception and abortion. Programme developers of RSE should be aware of the specific needs of young men, and to develop interventions to address these specific needs. These specific needs include reproductive responsibility, reproductive choices, fatherhood, contraceptive methods and male/female communication and emotions.

Findings from this study highlight how young men largely leave contraception up to the young woman. Future RSE could consider introducing gender specific interventions to prompt young men to think more about their roles and responsibilities in avoiding unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections – and reproduction and

parenting. Specific interventions for young men could focus on relationships as a way to get young men to think about their social “connectedness” and the impact their behaviours and the choices they make – not only have on their own health and well-being but on that of their partners, families and society at large. There is also a need for a more gender-relational approach to sexual health promotion that seems to empower young men to engage better with their partners to look after each other’s sexual health together.

Findings from this study show that young men value guidance on where they can receive further information, support, or services. Consequently, programme developers should seek to establish inter-professional co-operation and information-sharing which facilitates their use by teenage men, and educators should familiarise themselves with local services and be prepared to signpost young men towards these.

## **Study Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study have a number of implications for practice. These are outlined below.

It is apparent from the findings of this study and to researchers, practitioners, parents and others who work with young men that targeting young men is an important, yet neglected, part of addressing unintended teenage pregnancy (Guttmacher Institute, 2002; Swann et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2005; Marsiglio et al., 2006; Lindberg et al., 2008; Lohan et al., 2010).

In light of the recent changes to abortion law in Northern Ireland findings from this study suggest that when developing abortion services, the views of young men, when appropriate, should be included. Findings from this study highlight how young men feel side-lined by services when trying to support their partners and when trying to access support for themselves. Services should support an initial investment to make services more ‘young men friendly’. This could involve developing a regional approach to working with young men and supporting an initial investment to make services more inclusive of young men. This could involve developing resources for young men, training programmes and capacity building with staff.

In relation to young fathers services should seek to support father’s well-being. Fathers’ well-being should be made a priority in times of key transition such as becoming a father. Services working with young parents should develop a strategy for engaging with young fathers, and ensure that their staff have the necessary skills, capacity and confidence to work with young fathers.

In relation to all young men’s services steps should be taken to de-stigmatise help seeking actions by young men who experience difficulties. This could involve awareness raising campaigns for professionals and the general public on the importance of male mental health.

## **Study Implications for Policy**

The findings of this study have a number of implications for policy. These are outlined below.



One of the most important policy implications arising from this thesis is the need to consider young men in future policies on reproductive health. Public health policy needs to acknowledge the complex factors involved in young men's reproductive decision making as identified in this study.

Findings from this study highlight how understanding the impact of masculine constructions is crucial to understanding how best to develop practice and policy in relation to the role of young men in reproduction. Future policies in Northern Ireland should seek to challenge harmful societal definitions of men's roles and identities within a relationship.

In light of the recent changes to abortion law in Northern Ireland the findings from this study could help inform future abortion guidelines in relation to the inclusion of men. It is vital that it remains a woman's decision whether to continue with or end a pregnancy. Any erosion of this fundamental principle would be disastrous for women's reproductive freedom. That said, the findings of this study show that men have a significant role to play in unintended pregnancy and abortion decision making. Men are often involved in the process of abortion decision making and they can provide vital support to women undergoing abortion. As abortion services in Northern Ireland evolve, the supporting role of men will undoubtedly increase. Abortion providers must recognise this and find ways to facilitate the meaningful involvement of men where that is what the woman wants.

## Limitations of the study

This study is limited primarily because of its small sample size which included ten young men. I would have wished to include a larger sample size however because of difficulties with access and recruitment and because of time and resource restrictions this was not possible. However, the interview method proved to be an effective form of data collection as the young men were able to talk at length about their experiences of an unintended pregnancy, from first hearing the news to the decision-making process and to the present day. I consider the data rich in the sense that the young men described in depth the complex situation and also their feelings at the time. However, qualitative interviews are not without difficulties and one of them is the issue around self-presentation during the interview. A criticism that could be made in relation to the reliability of their stories is that the young men were presenting the best possible versions of themselves. However, there are two reasons why I believe that the young men's stories narratives were reasonably close to their lived reality. First, they provided a depth of detail on issues such as their initial reactions to the news of the unintended pregnancy and the subsequent disclosure of the pregnancy to their friends and family. Secondly, and most importantly, they did not always show themselves as supportive partners, but rather showed their arrogance and coldness as well as their vulnerability, their insecurities and their inability to cope with the situation at times.

This study is based on single qualitative interviews, one of the limitations is that it offers a snapshot of the lives of young men at that particular time and moment in their lives. Small, non-random samples and questionable generalisability tend to be raised as a limitation against qualitative studies (Onweugbuzie and Leech, 2010). Nevertheless,

generalisability remains an important attribute of social research (Payne and Williams, 2005). In my view, the findings of this study are likely to have some level of transferability across, white, heterosexual men who have experienced an unintended pregnancy, especially in societies where availability of abortion services and abortion is contested. However, concurring with the recommendations of Payne and Williams (2005), I would stress that a reader exercises caution when judging for him or herself whether, or how well, the findings transfer to any men beyond this sample. The sample in this study is reflective of socio-cultural perspective of Northern Ireland and did not include any men of non-white minority backgrounds.

Related to the limitations associated with qualitative methods, there are limitations to the method of analysis used in the project. While every effort has been made to involve all researchers throughout the project, thematic analysis does present the possibility that findings might be influenced by the researchers' interpretations. In order to ensure that themes determined by thematic analysis were accurate, I verified these with the supervisory team, who read a sample of transcripts and participated in the continuous checking and streamlining of emerging themes.

The focus of this study is on young men, and I, the researcher who collected all data, am female. This could have impacted what the young men spoke to me about, as well as how they spoke about certain issues. An example of this was that only a few of the young men talked about the sexual relationship with their partner. Only one of the young men mentioned how the sexual relationship had changed since their partner had become pregnant. This topic may have been raised if I had been male, or, if I myself,

had probed it more. At the end of each interview I asked the young men would they have responded differently if I were male. They all stated that it did not make any difference to them, with three of the young men stating that it was easier to talk to me as I was a stranger who they would not see again.

## **Future Research Agenda**

There are a number of areas that could be explored in future research by building on the findings of this thesis. Some of these would address the limitations of this study. I have outlined the most important directions for future research below.

Few studies explore how men feel about “their” unintended pregnancy and abortion, or how they construct meaning around it. These studies often draw on data collected in interviews or surveys of non-randomly sampled men, largely from abortion clinic waiting rooms (Shostak, 1987; Shostak et al., 1990; Holmberg and Wahlberg, 2000) or a men’s counselling group that met during the partners’ abortion procedure (Gordon and Kilpatrick, 1977). Because of such sampling, these studies inevitably over represent the perspectives of those most engaged in their relationships and do not reflect the majority of abortions. One recent study found that only 22–25% of women came or left the abortion procedure with the man by whom they became pregnant (Beenhakker et al., 2004). Thus, not enough is known of the men who do not accompany partners, including those informed of the pregnancy only after its termination. This reflects the fact that the bulk of existing research only describes women’s experiences with abortion while ignoring the “other half” of the responsible party. There are relatively few studies

which describe men's experience of abortion and very little is known about what men feel they need in order to deal with an abortion experience and support a partner through an abortion and future research on this would be very welcome.

It is widely held as a legal and social prescription that it remains the woman's decision whether to continue with or end a pregnancy and this is not contested in this thesis. That said, men have a significant role to play in pregnancy decision-making and abortion decision-making. They are often involved in the process of abortion decision making and they can provide vital support to women undergoing abortion. There is still a gendered blind spot in the vast research on adolescent pregnancy in relation to young men's experiences of unintended pregnancy and pregnancy decision-making. There is a need for further research to be conducted with larger samples of young men who have experienced an unintended pregnancy.

Future research should include more in-depth research such as mixed methods and qualitative studies with young men on their experiences and decision making in relation to unintended pregnancy decision – making. Further research should seek to recruit couples in order to explore the relational and contextual nature of adolescent pregnancy. This research sought to recruit young men independent from their female partners, and future research should continue to use novel methods of recruitment to address the over representation of those young men who are most invested in their relationship or who are recruited through health services. Finally, there is a need for international comparative research studies which could inform how structural constraints on decision-making, such as the availability of abortion services, access to counselling

services, and socio-cultural norms around reproduction in society, affect how adolescents view adolescent pregnancy and make pregnancy outcome decisions.

In light of the recent changes to abortion law in Northern Ireland it would be of interest to repeat this research with a larger sample size. Future research could explore how the legalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland has impacted upon what decisions young men make about unintended pregnancy and the reasons why they make these decisions.

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis I conducted primary research with young men aged 16 – 24, resident in Northern Ireland, who had experienced an unintended pregnancy, whatever the outcome. This was the first and the last study to take place in Northern Ireland, exploring young men's experiences of unintended pregnancy, while abortion was illegal. Abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2019. Although all of the young men experienced an unintended pregnancy in their lives, the way they perceived the event differed based on contextual, situational and personal characteristics. The findings reveal important insights into young men's decision making processes and considerations following the news of an unintended pregnancy. Through exploration of personal narratives of young men who have experienced an unintended pregnancy, we have new insights into the ways that social factors, attitudes towards abortion, visions of the future and the role of others intersect to impact decision making about the abortion of an unintended pregnancy or proceeding with the pregnancy.

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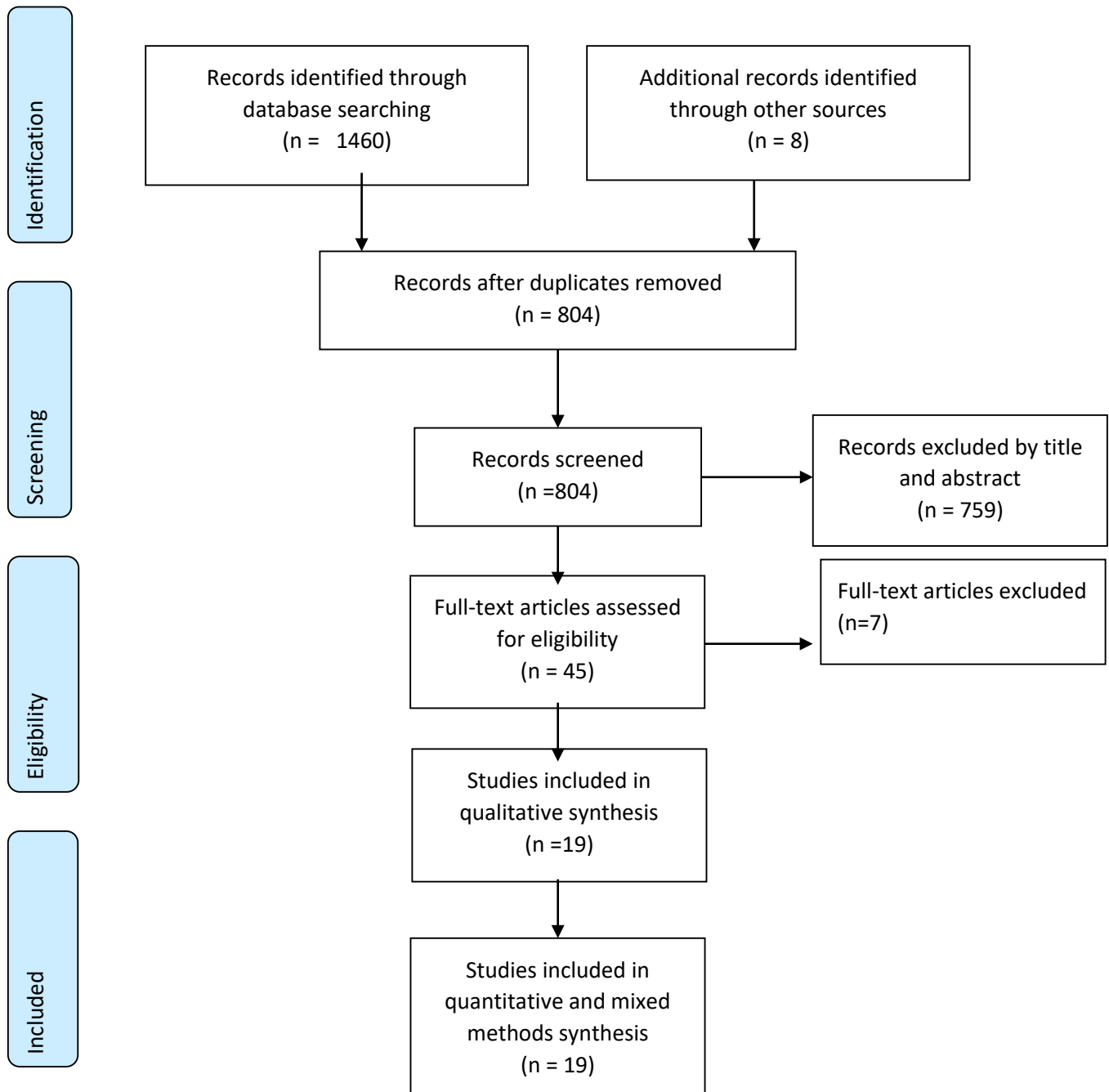
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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 2.1: Search Strategy



**APPENDIX 2.2: Table of Included Studies**

Title	Study Design	Participants	Relevant Results	Limitations	MMAT Score
Qualitative Studies					
<p><b>Support from Thai Male Partners When an Unintended Pregnancy is Terminated.</b></p> <p><b>Chatchawet, W., Sripichyakan, K., Kantaruksa, K. Nilmanat, K, and O'Brien, B.A. (2010)</b></p>	<p>Narrative Design</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Snowball sampling</p> <p>Data Collection: In depth semi structured interviews</p>	<p>N = 11</p> <p>Median Age = 23.4 years</p>	<p>Men demonstrated having accepted some responsibility for pregnancy termination. During pregnancy termination, the men assisted their partners: in searching for information about termination, accompanying them to appointments; and, staying with them during the termination procedure. In Thai society, there is a masculine norm that men</p>	<p>The findings from this study are applicable only to individuals actively involved in a pregnancy termination process that results in complications.</p>	<p>*****</p>

			are considered head of the family, requiring the man to earn money to support the family. The cost of termination is no exception. As a result of the pregnancy termination process some of the men made a conscious decision to share the responsibility for birth control with their partners.		
<b>Struggling with motherhood and coping with fatherhood – A grounded theory</b>	Exploratory design using grounded theory methodology. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Interviews were	N=50  Teenage Fathers N = 25  Co-habiting couples under 20	Unintended parenthood – Most of the teenage parents to be described unreadiness to be parents. Religious reasons called ‘bap’ caused them to fear the future consequences of abortion.	This study recruited couples from a rural area in Thailand with one of the highest teenage birth rates in the country. This reduces the	****

<p><b>study among Thai teenagers</b></p> <p><b>Sriyasak, A., Almqvist, A.L., Sridawruang, W., Haggstrom-Nordin, E. (2016)</b></p>	<p>performed on two different occasions: once during the second trimester of pregnancy and once again when the infant was 5-6 years old.</p>	<p>years of age and expecting their first child.</p>		<p>generalisability of the results to other parts of the country. Most of the teenage parents interviewed lived in extended families, reducing variation in families. The authors note that the construction of the emerging model might have looked different if they had interviewed teenage parents living in other contexts (e.g. an urban area with low teenage parenting rates).</p>	
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<p><b>How Young Men at High Risk of Fathering an Unintended Birth Talk About Their Procreative Identities</b></p> <p><b>Daugherty, J. (2016)</b></p>	<p>Focus Groups</p>	<p>Four focus groups conducted. Each focus group contained between 8 and 12 members.</p>	<p>Analyses demonstrate that men often have a very active sense of procreative consciousness and a lagging sense of procreative responsibility.</p>	<p>This study used convenience methods to gather their sample of young men and thus cannot ensure the representativeness of the participants' experiences and opinions.</p> <p>This study recruited only African American and Puerto Rican young men from Hartford and Philadelphia. Due to this comparisons to other populations could not be made.</p>	<p>****</p>
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<p><b>Becoming a Young Father: A Decision or an “Accident?”</b></p> <p><b>Deslauriers, J.M. (2011)</b></p>	<p>Qualitative Interviews</p>	<p>N = 30</p> <p>Median Age of Father at announcement of pregnancy = 19.4</p>	<p>The interviews with the young fathers revealed that they did not play a vital role in the decision to bring the pregnancy to term. Almost all of the participants reported that they let their partner make the final decision.</p>	<p>This study ended when the fathers’ children were only a year old; therefore, it is impossible to verify if the intention of young men to stay involved with their child was in fact acted upon in the longer term.</p>	<p>****</p>
<p><b>Family Formation in the Inner-City: Low-income men’s perception of their role in unplanned conception and</b></p>	<p>Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling of low income, inner-city men</p> <p>Data collection; Semi-structured in-depth interviews</p>	<p>N=20</p> <p>Average age at first pregnancy = 20</p>	<p>Responsibility framed men’s understanding of their reproductive and parenting roles. Uniformly, men equated being responsible with providing financially for their families. As men got older</p>	<p>This study used purposive sampling to recruit participants therefore limiting the generalizability of their data to other groups. The majority of the participants in</p>	<p>****</p>

<p><b>pregnancy prevention.</b></p> <p><b>Jackson, E., Karasz, A. and Gold, M. (2011)</b></p>			<p>their idea of being responsible evolved, influencing their perceived role in planning or preventing pregnancy and consideration of abortion for unplanned pregnancy. The desire to take responsibility for children they fathered was limited by the structural realities of their lives, which were often characterised by poverty, unemployment, violence and crime.</p>	<p>this study were Hispanic with a few Black participants, and none from other groups.</p>	
<p><b>‘Pregnancy Has Its Advantages’: The Voices of Street Connected Children</b></p>	<p>Qualitative Study</p>	<p>N = 65 69.2% were male</p>	<p>Male SCCY expressed dominance over their female counterparts.</p>	<p>The authors of this study note that the youth who agreed to participate may have</p>	<p>*****</p>



<p><b>and Youth in Eldoret, Kenya</b></p> <p><b>Wachira, J., Kamanda, A., Embleton, L., Naanyu, V., Ayuku, D., Braitstein, P. (2016)</b></p>	<p>Purposive Sampling from three referral points.</p> <p>In-depth interviews and focus group discussion were audio-recorded, transcribed and translated into English.</p>		<p>In the event of lack of partner support, abortion is a common option.</p>	<p>been systematically different than those who did not participate in the study.</p>	
<p><b>Beyond the discourse of reproductive choice: narratives of pregnancy resolution among Latina/o teenage parents.</b></p>	<p>The data reported is drawn from a larger study of Latina/o teenagers' sexual and reproductive health and rights conducted in 2011-2013.</p>	<p>N = 8</p>	<p>For many of the participants' neoliberal values such as personal responsibility and acceptance of the consequences of their actions coupled with a belief in the sanctity of life</p>	<p>Small sample size</p> <p>Selective criteria was used to recruit participants, therefore results cannot be generalised beyond this population.</p>	<p>****</p>

<p><b>Mann, E.S., Cardona, V., &amp; Gomez, C.A. (2015)</b></p>	<p>Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling method and were selected according to age (14-18) and ethnic identity (Latina/o).</p> <p>Trained bilingual research assistants conducted the individual, face-to-face, semi structured interviews, which lasted an average of 75 minutes.</p>		<p>informed their decision to continue the pregnancy and parent the child.</p>		
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<p><b>Teen fathers’ perceptions and experiences of fatherhood: A qualitative exploration with in-school teen fathers in a rural district in South Africa.</b></p> <p><b>Madiba,S., Nsiki,C. (2017)</b></p>	<p>Qualitative</p> <p>In-depth interviews.</p> <p>Teenagers were selected using purposive sampling from two high schools in a rural district in Limpopo Province, South Africa.</p>	<p>N = 25 aged 16- 19</p>	<p>Four themes emerged from the data; (a) reacting to being a teen father, (b) transition to becoming a father, (c) perception of self as a father, and (d) involvement with the child. Fatherhood came as a surprise to teen fathers who reacted with shock, denial and fear. Their perceptions of a good father were limited to a financial provider for the child.</p>	<p>This study used a small sample size which was limited to two schools in a rural setting. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised across all teen fathers in South Africa.</p>	<p>****</p>
<p><b>‘Becoming a father’: perspectives and experiences of young</b></p>	<p>Qualitative</p> <p>In-depth interviews</p>	<p>N = 7</p>	<p>The in-depth interviews with young fathers revealed that all the young fathers in this study had not intended or planned to</p>	<p>The sample size in this study was small with only 7 young fathers being interviewed.</p>	<p>****</p>

<p><b>men in Durban, South Africa</b></p> <p><b>Chili, S. &amp; Maharaj, P. (2015)</b></p>	<p>Non-probability sampling techniques were used to identify young men who were willing to participate and talk about this intimate aspect of their lives.</p>		<p>have children, and were therefore not ready to become fathers. Young fathers in this study wanted to assume financial responsibility for their children but they were finding it difficult because they were faced with numerous obstacles.</p>		
<p><b>Young males' perspectives on pregnancy, fatherhood and condom use: Where does responsibility for birth control lie?</b></p> <p><b>Smith et al., (2011)</b></p>	<p>Sampling strategy: Targeted recruitment at a university campus and sexual health clinic, print advertising and snowball sampling.</p>	<p>N=42</p> <p>Age - 18-25</p>	<p>Clear discrepancy between young males' desire to prevent pregnancy and the level of control they assumed over this. Despite pregnancy emerging as the overriding concern for participants. This failed to motivate continued use of</p>	<p>The findings from this study are based on the accounts of young males in third level education.</p> <p>The perspectives described in this study are based on males'</p>	<p>****</p>

	Data collection: Semi-structured interviews		condoms when STI risk was perceived as low and a partner was using birth control. Reliance on a partner's use of hormonal contraceptives and in several cases, beliefs of low personal responsibility for pregnancy prevention reduced young males' participation in fertility control.	retrospective accounts of past experiences and events which could have been altered over time.	
<b>College Men, Unplanned Pregnancy, and Marriage: What do they expect?</b>	Written responses to research questions  Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling	N = 148  Median age = 19.5	86.5% of men expected that they would keep and raise the child. However, they diverged with regard to their expectations to marry. Most men, who intended to raise the child,	Due to the non-random used findings are not generalisable to all college men at the University. The content analytic nature of the study prevented	****

<p><b>Olmstead et al., (2013)</b></p>			<p>expected they would marry the child’s mother. Fewer men who intended to keep the child had a story line that pregnancy was not a “good enough” reason to marry. Some men did not expect to raise the child. Most often they gravitated toward abortion as a means of pregnancy resolution. An interesting group that emerged from the data (although) few in number included those who expected to defer the choice of pregnancy resolution and marriage to their sexual partners.</p>	<p>follow up questions being asked to clarify responses.</p>	
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<p><b>Premarital sexuality, Gender Relations and Unplanned Pregnancies in Ouagadougou.</b></p> <p><b>Rossier et al., (2013)</b></p>	<p>Design: Multisite research project</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Snowball sampling method via various entry points</p> <p>Data collection: Semi structured interviews</p>	<p>N = 77</p> <p>50 women</p> <p>27 men</p> <p>Age = 18 - 40</p> <p>Some sub analysis by age</p>	<p>Analyses point to pronounced inequalities between the two sexes and across social classes regarding prevention of unwanted pregnancies. If a premarital pregnancy occurs subsequent events depend almost entirely on the man. If he wants to marry the girl, he will usually succeed with the help of family pressure to “regularise” the situation, even if the girl has other ambitions. Young men may also be vulnerable however, unable to construct a strong social</p>	<p>The authors note that a study of premarital male and female sexuality is not sufficient in itself to cover all aspects of the link between gender inequality and prevention of unwanted pregnancies in this population.</p>	<p>****</p>
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			identity in a context of high unemployment, they may see multiple sexual conquests as a means to assert their manhood.		
<b>Ambivalent Messages: Adolescents' Perspectives on Pregnancy and Birth.</b>  <b>Tanner et al., (2013)</b>	Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling  Data collection: six gender- stratified focus groups	N= 47  Age = 13 - 19	Results fit into a social-ecological framework. Individual (e.g. contraceptive use behaviours, religion), interpersonal (e.g. peer norms), and community (e.g. clinic factors, perceptions of community) level influences on adolescent pregnancy emerged. Participants discussed contradictory messages that were often	Small sample size therefore results offer insights but are not generalizable.	****



			gendered in their expectations; for instance, women were responsible for not getting pregnant and raising children.		
<p><b>“Um...Im Pregnant”. Young Men’s Attitudes Towards Their Role in Abortion Decision-Making.</b></p> <p><b>Sharp et al., (2015)</b></p>	<p>Sampling Strategy: Purposive, recruited through flyers distributed around the University of New South Wales campus, via a group email, through an event on Facebook and through snowballing.</p>	N = 10	<p>Young men generally expected a higher level of involvement in decision making in longer relationships than in brief liaisons. Those with real-life experiences of abortion tended to think that men should have a greater role in decision making. Young men felt that it was the woman’s right to make the decision on the pregnancy outcome. Young men were</p>	<p>The authors of this study note that because the interviewer was female the men often self-edited and were careful to avoid saying the “wrong thing”.</p> <p>This study solely recruited men from middle-class backgrounds in university education, a</p>	****

	Data Collection: Semi-structured in-depth interviews		culturally concerned with maintaining face - not being seen as ‘deadbeat dads’, abandoning mother and child. None expressed religious or moral concerns about abortion.	consequence of the location of the flyers and snowball sampling. Thus, their views reflected this social milieu.	
<b>Becoming Teen Fathers: Stories of Teen Pregnancy, Responsibility, and Masculinity.</b>  <b>Weber (2012)</b>	Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling. Drew on a variety of gatekeepers who offered access into several different networks of teen father. Snowball sampling also utilised.	N= 26  Age = 16 - 21	In telling their stories of “what happened”, young men in this study utilised three gendered discourses to deny responsibility for the pregnancy: the feminisation of birth control, a discourse of uncontrollable male sexual desire, and love.	The young’s stories and perspectives in this study are based on their retrospective accounts of past experiences which could have changed over time.	*****

	Data collection: In-depth interviews				
<b>Experiences of, and attitudes towards, pregnancy and fatherhood amongst incarcerated young male offenders: Findings from a qualitative study. Buston., (2010)</b>	Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling  Data collection: In-depth interviews purposively sampled using answers from a questionnaire administered to 67 inmates.	N = 40  Age = 16 - 20	Amongst the interview sample as a whole, most said they did not feel ready to become fathers. The main reason given was being unable to fulfil what they regarded as the key role of financial provider. Most of the men had given little or no thought to the possibility of a sexual partner becoming pregnant.	Findings are not generalisable to other populations.  The authors did not request access to participant's prison records, however, they did acknowledge that this would have added depth to findings.	****
<b>'I am going to be a dad': experiences and expectations of</b>	Study design: Narrative methods	N = 7  Age = 16 - 22	The pregnancies were all unplanned and though participants were all	This study had a small sample size of 7 young fathers. The	****

<p><b>adolescent and young adult expectant fathers.</b></p> <p><b>Wilkes et al., (2012)</b></p>	<p>were used to collect qualitative data</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling</p> <p>Data collection: Semi structured in-depth interviews</p>		<p>willing to face the responsibilities associated with fatherhood, they also reported feeling ill prepared for the challenges that lay ahead. Impending fatherhood has caused the young men to reflect on the quality of fathering they had received themselves. The young men were hoping to provide their own infant with a better quart of fathering than they had experienced.</p>	<p>study was unable to follow the young fathers up over the first year of their fathering as the study had originally planned.</p>	
<p><b>Why Young Men in South Africa Plan to Become Teenage Fathers:</b></p>	<p>Sampling strategy: Snowball sampling using community informants</p>	<p>N = 27</p> <p>Age = 14 - 20</p>	<p>This study highlights that some young men choose to become fathers because of relationship insecurities,</p>	<p>The sample in this study was biased toward participants who were generally</p>	<p>*****</p>

<p><b>Implications for the Development of Masculinities within Contexts of Poverty.</b></p> <p><b>Hendricks et al., (2010)</b></p>	<p>Data collection: Semi structured interviews, social network study and debriefing and consultation.</p>		<p>peer influences, and ontological insecurities, and that these reasons are driven, in some fashion, by poverty and a drive for alternate pathways to express dominant masculinities.</p>	<p>pleased with fatherhood, had not denied paternity, and had high levels of involvement with their off-spring.</p> <p>Due to the small sample size and qualitative nature of this study, findings are not statistically representative and therefore cannot be generalised. However, it is clear that the young fathers who participated in the study represent the diversity of</p>	
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				impoverished young men in South Africa and therefore this study offers guidance for future qualitative and quantitative research.	
<p><b>Young Native American Men and Their Intention to Use Family Planning Services.</b></p> <p><b>Rink et al., (2012)</b></p>	<p>Design: Community based participatory research</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling techniques by partnering with community organisations</p>	<p>N= 112</p> <p>Age = 18 - 24</p> <p>Median age = 21</p>	<p>As young men transition from late adolescence into early 20's, they are less likely to consider it important to use family planning services to practice birth control. Fatherhood appeared to be an important factor influencing young Native American men's intention to use family planning</p>	<p>This study only focused on young Native American men living in a rural frontier environment on one reservation in Montana. Therefore, results are not generalizable to other populations.</p>	<p>****</p>

	<p>Data collection: Face to face structured interviews</p>		<p>services. Almost 40% of the young Native American men had children. Given that the average age of the study participants was 21, this finding is worth emphasising because it suggests that men experienced fatherhood at an early age. 88% of young Native American men reported that it was very important to have self-control over their birth control method within the next year to prevent a pregnancy with their partner.</p>		
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Quantitative Studies					
<p><b>The Attitudes of Kenyan In-School Adolescents Towards Sexual Autonomy</b></p> <p><b>Adaji et al., (2010)</b></p>	<p>Cross Sectional Descriptive Survey carried out among in-school adolescents in Kenya in 2002.</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Random sampling</p> <p>Data collection: Self-administered questionnaire</p>	<p>N = 626 males</p> <p>Age = 13 - 19</p> <p>Median Age = 17</p>	<p>89.9% disagreed that abortion should be allowed for girls with unintended pregnancies. This negative attitude is in conflict with the high rates of abortions among in-school adolescents in Kenya. The pervasive influence of the church could be one reason for this negative attitude to induced abortion. 78.8% of boys agreed that a girl who becomes pregnant should be allowed to continue her education.</p>	<p>This survey was conducted by researchers therefore responses to the survey may have been swayed by their presence.</p> <p>This study was carried out only in seven schools in Kenya and the findings may not totally represent the views of all in-school adolescents in Kenya. Out of school adolescents were not involved in this study</p>	<p>****</p>



				and their attitudes might be different.	
<b>Predictive Ability and Stability of Adolescents' Pregnancy Intentions in a Predominantly Latino Community.</b> <b>Rocca et al., (2010)</b>	<p>Secondary Data Analysis from the Mission Teen Health Project, A prospective cohort study.</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Purposive venue based sampling</p> <p>Data Collection: A baseline survey was conducted, randomly determined to be administered either by a trained interviewer or by</p>	<p>N=258</p> <p>Age = 14 - 19</p>	<p>The largest proportion of pregnancies occurred among boys who reported no pregnancy intentions or the lowest level of intentions. Although adolescent who expressed positive intentions were at increased risk of pregnancy, those who expressed lower intentions were still at risk. The results reaffirm the importance of male partners' intention in adolescent pregnancy.</p> <p>Study shows that a</p>	<p>This study had to rely on self-reports alone for boys, whereas for girls, the incidence of pregnancy was drawn from self-reports as well as urine pregnancy tests.</p> <p>The recruitment strategy of this study resulted in the participants all being from similar social, neighbourhood and peer groups. The results may not be</p>	<p>****</p>

	audio computer-assisted self-interview. Every six months for next two years, participants completed an in-person study visit that included an interview, containing the same intention questions.		relationship exists between perceived partners' intentions measured prior to pregnancy occurrence, and subsequent pregnancy. The role of partners' intentions in determining risk, particularly among Latinas, has been attributed to power imbalances between the sexes.	generalizable to other predominantly Latino Communities in the US or to adolescents of other ethnicities.	
<b>Pregnancy Intentions among Expectant Adolescent Couples</b> <b>Lewin, A., Mitchell, S.J., Hodgkinson, S.,</b>	Cross-sectional pilot study collected interview data from expectant adolescent mothers and their male partners.	N = 34	15% of fathers were ambivalent. A kappa statistic of 0.12 (P = .33) indicted very little "accuracy" of mothers' perceptions of their partners' pregnancy intentions. Young fathers	This study has a small data set and therefore may not be representative of all sexually active couples.	**

<p><b>Gilmore,J. &amp; Beers, S.L. (2014)</b></p>			<p>who wanted or were ambivalent about pregnancy were significantly more likely to use no contraception or withdrawal.</p>	<p>The measurement used (pregnancy intention measurement) may have introduced self-preservation bias into the fathers' reported pregnancy intention.</p>	
<p><b>Understanding the Complexity of Ambivalence Toward Pregnancy: Does It Predict Inconsistent Use of Contraception?</b></p>	<p>This analysis used data collected by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy in collaboration with the Guttmacher Institute in the 2009 Survey of Unmarried Young</p>	<p>N = 1147 571 men and 576 women</p>	<p>Did not find evidence that men's own attitudes toward pregnancy are associated with men's contraceptive use, perhaps because the burdens of an unplanned pregnancy are more immediate for women and thus women simply might give more thought to pregnancy risk</p>	<p>The ambivalence measure that this study used is imperfect. The measure was unable to account for the strength of the feelings of ambivalence.</p>	<p>****</p>

<p><b>Yoo,S.H., Guzzo, K.B., &amp; Hayford, S.R. (2014)</b></p>	<p>Adults’ Contraceptive Knowledge and Practices which surveyed 1,800 unmarried men and women aged 18 to 29.</p>		<p>and fertility timing. Men’s contraceptive use may be more sensitive to current relationship status than to broader attitudes.</p>	<p>The results are only generalizable to unmarried young adults.</p>	
<p><b>Young Adults’ Contraceptive Knowledge, Norms and Attitudes: Associations with Risk of Unintended Pregnancy. Frost et al., (2012)</b></p>	<p>Secondary data analysis from the 2009 National Survey of Reproductive and Contraceptive Knowledge, which collected information from unmarried 18-29-</p>	<p>N= 618 Aged 18 - 24 = 65%</p>	<p>Many young men displayed serious gaps in objective knowledge about the major contraceptive methods. High proportions of young adults agreed with social norms that both contribute to and protect against unintended pregnancy. 70% of men agreed that it is acceptable</p>	<p>As in all multivariate analyses, additional unmeasured variables contribute to respondents’ behaviour. To test for these possibilities, explanatory models included additional variables and looked at different ways of</p>	<p>****</p>

	<p>year-old men and women in the US.</p> <p>Sampling strategy: A nationally representative stratified random sample of both cell phone and landline telephone numbers was used to identify eligible respondents.</p> <p>Data collection: Telephone interviews</p>		<p>for an unmarried woman to have a child and 74% agreed that every pregnancy was a blessing. 45% of young men were committed to avoiding pregnancy. Young adult's low level of knowledge about contraceptives may reflect the strong emphasis of abstinence until marriage sex education that prevailed during the last decade, when this generation was in high school.</p>	<p>coding them. These strategies did not change the basic findings. Another limitation is the inability to determine the direction of cause and effect, especially for the model looking at use of hormonal or long-acting reversible methods of contraception.</p>	
<b>Adolescent pregnancy and associated factors in</b>	Design: Cross-sectional population	N = 3123 54.6% men and 45.4% women	19.2% of females said they had an adolescent pregnancy, while only	The authors of this study state that 69% of females felt that	****

<p><b>South African Youth.</b></p> <p><b>Mchunu et al., (2012)</b></p>	<p>based household survey</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Multi-stage stratified cluster sampling approach</p>	<p>Age = 18 - 24</p>	<p>5.8% of male youth indicated that they had impregnated a girl. Among men, wanting the pregnancy and having a sense of the future were associated with adolescent pregnancy.</p>	<p>they would be able to use a condom every time they had sex, however the findings showed that 9.5% did compared to 36.9% of their male counterparts. Further qualitative research may be needed to explore this in greater detail.</p>	
<p><b>Adolescent Men's Pregnancy Resolution Choices in Relation to an Unintended Pregnancy: A Comparative</b></p>	<p>Design: Cross-national analysis</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Stratified random sampling</p>	<p>N = 711</p> <p>Ireland = 360</p> <p>Australia = 330</p> <p>Italy = 81</p>	<p>The biggest differences put Australian males on one (liberal) side and Italian and Irish on the other (conservative) side. Adolescents in Australia placed greater emphasis on</p>	<p>There are variations across the three samples, notably the non-random and smaller sample size in the Italian case, and the marginally older</p>	<p>***</p>

<p><b>Analysis of Adolescent Men in Three Countries.</b></p> <p><b>Lohan et al., (2013)</b></p>	<p>Data Collection: Computer based interactive video drama</p>		<p>being able to finish school, babies being costly, losing sleep, and not liking nappies. The greater chance of adolescents in Australia choosing an abortion over those in Italy and Ireland suggests that levels of individualisation may be greater in more highly secularised and liberal countries. A proportion of adolescent men across the three countries suggest they would feel shocked and frightened on receiving news of their partner's unintended pregnancy as</p>	<p>sample in the Italian case relative to the Ireland and Australia cases. In addition, the results are based on men's views on a hypothetical pregnancy in their lives rather than on a retrospective study of actual experiences.</p>	
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			well as the high number of men who said they would tell their parents and would like to seek help from a counsellor.		
<b>A quantitative exploration of the sociocultural context of teenage pregnancy in Sri Lanka.</b>  <b>Rajapaksa-Hewageegana et al., (2014)</b>	Population health-register based sample survey Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling  Data collection: Interviewer administered questionnaires	N = 600 Age = Below 20  450 pregnant women and 150 male partners of pregnant women	87% of men reported having had only one sexual partner, suggesting that the teenage pregnancies had occurred within monogamous stable relationships. Two-thirds of the males reported that the current pregnancy had been planned and just 29% indicating that pregnancy had occurred as a result of contraceptive failure. 85% of male respondents said	The study did not detail the response rate.  The multi-variate model was unable to explain a large amount of the variation in planned versus not planned pregnancies despite inclusion of a wide range of variables, suggesting important unobserved	**



			they welcomed the pregnancy and 99% of male partners reported receiving support from family and providing support themselves to their pregnant partner.	factors. The results raise a number of questions that require more qualitative methods of investigation.	
<b>Desire to Father a Child and Condom Use: A Study of Young Black Males at Risk of Sexually Transmitted Infection.</b>  Crosby et al., (2015)	Design: Secondary data analysis of an NIH funded randomised controlled trial of a safer sex intervention program Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling	N= 578  Age = 15 - 23	Most of the Young Black Men (YBM) (60.6%) reported “not at all” wanting somebody to become pregnant with their child right now. On the other hand, the majority of the sample (52.8%) reported higher levels of someone wanting to become pregnant with their child right now. Those who	Findings are limited by the validity of the self-reported measures of condom use behaviours.  This study used a convenience sample, limiting generalisability of the findings to other populations of YBM.	***

	Data collection: Audio-computer assisted self-interview		perceived higher levels of someone wanting to conceive their child right were 1.73 times were more likely to report unprotected vaginal sex and 1.62 times more likely to report a lower proportion of times condoms were used.		
<b>Male experiences of unintended pregnancy: characteristics and prevalence.</b> <b>Kagesten et al., (2015)</b>	Secondary data analysis on the FECOND study, a population based survey conducted in France in 2010.  Sampling strategy: Two stage random probability sampling	N = 8675 Men = 3373 Age = 15 - 49  Some sub analysis by age	Among all heterosexually active men the proportion with recent pregnancy was the highest between ages 20-34 and lower among 15 - 19 year olds. In contrast, for those with recent pregnancies, unintended pregnancy tended to be the most common among the	From the perspective of men, the unintended pregnant rates may be underestimated due to a combination of underreporting of abortion and post rationalisation of birth intentions.	****

	method, Random digit dialling Data Collection: Telephone interviews		youngest age groups (15-19 and 20-24). Results from the multi variate analysis showed that the relative risk of a pregnancy being unintended was higher if reported by younger men rather than peers aged 25 or above, by men to whom religion was less important or by men whose mothers had a higher level of education.		
<b>Pregnancy Desire Among a Sample of Young Couples Who Are Expecting a Baby.</b>	Design: Observational cohort study conducted in 2007 - 2011 at clinics in Connecticut	N = 592/ 296 couples Age = 14 - 21	53% of males and 49% of females reported having wanted the pregnancy. Pregnancy desire scores were positively associated with being male, expecting	Due to the retrospective nature of the pregnancy desire measure, the casual direction of	***

<p><b>Sipsma et al., (2012)</b></p>	<p>Sampling strategy: Purposive</p> <p>Data collection: Audio computer-assisted self-interviews.</p>		<p>a first baby, perceived partner desire and parental response to the pregnancy; scores were negatively associated with being in school, being employed and parental support. Females' perceptions of their partners' pregnancy desires were slightly more accurate than males' (kappas, 0.36 and 0.28 respectively). Pregnancy desire was positively associated with both life and relationship satisfaction, particularly among males.</p>	<p>relationships is unknown.</p> <p>Future longitudinal and prospective studies are needed to confirm the associations found in this sample.</p> <p>There is a lack of generalisability of the sample, given that it included only couples from low-income neighbourhoods who chose to have a baby, remained in a romantic relationship and chose to</p>	
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				participate in this study.	
<p><b>Adolescent men's attitudes and decision making in relation to an unplanned pregnancy: Responses to an interactive video drama.</b></p> <p><b>Lohan et al., (2011)</b></p>	<p>Design: Cross sectional survey</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Random sampling</p> <p>Data collection: Responses to an interactive video drama</p>	N= 360	<p>Adolescent men were more likely to choose to keep the baby in preference to abortion or adoption.</p> <p>Adolescent men's choices to continue the pregnancy in preference to abortion was significantly associated with anticipated feelings of regret in relation to abortion, perceived positive attitudes of own mother to keeping the baby and a feeling that a part of them might want a baby. Religiosity was also shown to underline</p>	<p>Hypothetical nature of data cannot draw conclusions about actual experiences of unplanned pregnancy.</p> <p>The study did not differentiate between those who were sexually active and those who were not; and those who had experienced an unintended pregnancy and those who had not.</p>	***

			adolescent men's views on the perceived consequences of an abortion in their lives.	Failed to find a significant association between some of the predictor variables, may be due to the fact that these measures had somewhat weak internal consistency.	
<b>Pregnancy Ambivalence and Contraceptive Use Among Young Adults in the United States.</b>  <b>Higgins, Popkin and Santelli (2012)</b>	Secondary data analysis from the National Survey of Reproductive and Contraceptive Knowledge from October 2008 to April 2009 Sampling Strategy: Random digit	N=774 Age = 18 - 29 Mean Age = 22	Men were significantly more likely than women to be ambivalent (53%) compared with women (36%). Majority of respondents supported the notion that "every pregnancy is a blessing", only 21% disagreed. Relationship between pregnancy ambivalence	Respondents' reports of their partners' contraceptive methods may not have been accurate, was beyond the scope of the study to compare couples' reports.  A narrower measure of pregnancy	***

	<p>dialling of phone numbers</p> <p>Data collection: Telephone interviews</p>		<p>and reduced likelihood of contraceptive use was statistically significant only for men. Compared with men with clear intentions to avoid pregnancy, ambivalent men were less likely to have used any contraceptive method with their partner in the last month. Young men were especially disposed to lack clarity about pregnancy desire; men had nearly three times the odds of women of being ambivalent even when other associated variables were held constant.</p>	<p>ambivalence would likely yield different results.</p>	
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<p><b>Exploring abortion attitudes of US adolescents and young adults using social media.</b></p> <p><b>Altshuler et al., (2015)</b></p>	<p>Study design: Cross-sectional design through an online survey</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Purposive</p> <p>Data collection: Americans 13 - 29 years of age were recruited through web-based social media to complete an online survey.</p>	<p>N= 996</p> <p>Majority of participants (86%) 13 - 18</p>	<p>The majority of participants (74%) felt that abortion should be allowed but the circumstances under which they would have an abortion or want their partners to have an abortion. The distributions of abortion stances were statistically different by age group and sexual experience but not by gender (<math>p &lt; 0.001</math>, .017 and .525, respectively).</p>	<p>Non-participation bias may seem a limitation, considering that only a small proportion of those viewers who clicked on the Facebook advertisement enrolled in the survey, However, this bias was unlikely to have affected the analysis with respect to the key outcome, abortion attitudes, as participants should not have different from nonparticipants on abortion views</p>	<p>****</p>
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				because the recruitment strategy was abortion neutral.	
<b>Relationship Characteristics and Feelings About Pregnancy Among Black and Puerto Rican Young Adults.</b>  <b>Carter et al., (2013)</b>	Secondary data analysis from the Philadelphia and Hartford Research and Education on Sexual Health and Communication Project  Sampling strategy: Time place sampling methodology  Data collection: Questionnaire	N = 640  Age = 18 - 25	Results suggest that men's feelings about the relationship were positively associated with their feelings about pregnancy.	Participants were black or Puerto Rican young adults from low-income neighbourhoods, which may help explain why age and education were not significant. Results not generalisable to all young adults.	****
Mixed Methods Studies					

<p><b>Exploring Power and Sexual Decision Making among Young Latinos Residing in Rural Communities.</b></p> <p><b>Zukoski et al., (2011)</b></p>	<p>Design: Mixed methods study</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling.</p> <p>To be eligible for the study, participants had to be between 18 and 25, self-identify as Latino, report sexual intercourse within the past 3 months and report that that they were not seeking to get their partners pregnant within the next year.</p> <p>Data collection: Bilingual and</p>	<p>N = 29</p> <p>Median Age = 21.9</p>	<p>77.2% of the participants reported making a shared decision over reproductive decision making. The majority of men (81.9%) reported that both members decided if he will use something to prevent pregnancy, only 7.1% said that he made the decision alone. 79.3% of men reported sharing the decision to use condoms.</p>	<p>The sample for this exploratory study was relatively small and the findings cannot be generalised to broader populations. Men and women interviewed were not couples which prevented data analysis from a dyadic perspective.</p>	<p>****</p>
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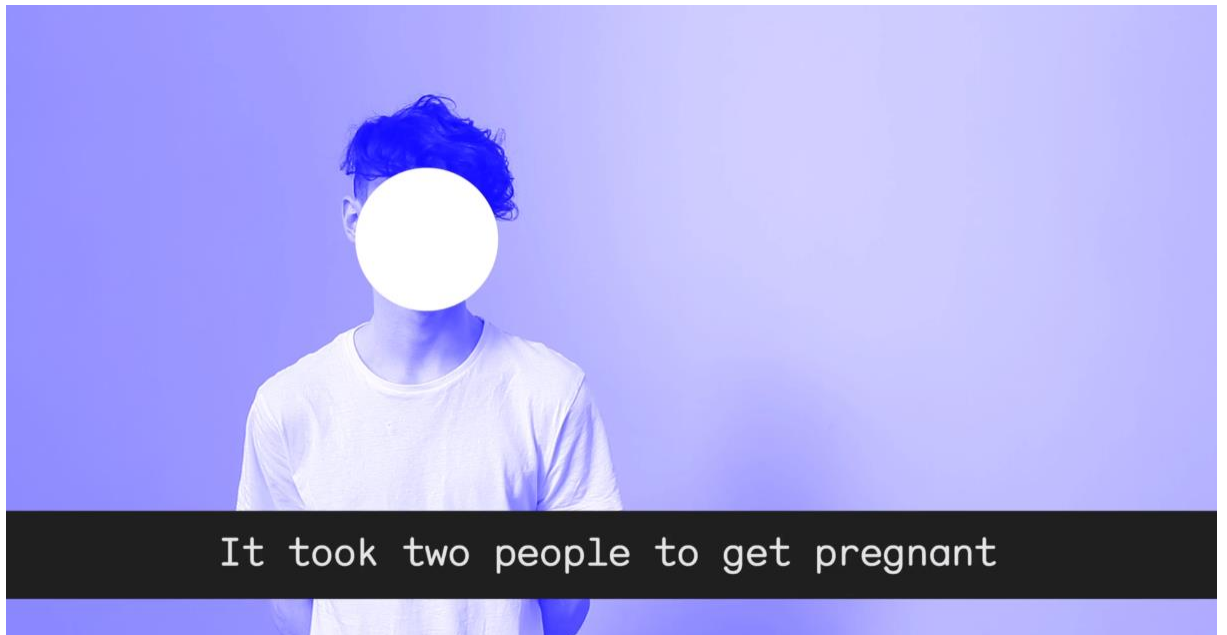
	bicultural staff members conducted semi structured interviews.				
<b>Young Rural Males in South Africa Speak on Teenage Pregnancy: “It’s Really Her Problem”.</b>  <b>Sathiparsad, R. (2010)</b>	Two methods of data collection were used.  A quantitative survey with a sample of 294 male youth from 10 schools. This was followed by focus group interviews with three groups, each comprising ten males, from three of the schools.	Quantitative Study N = 294  Focus Groups N = 30	It is evident in this study that many young men grapple with issues in the social context and in the intimate sphere. Alongside assertions of having power and control over women and dominant displays of masculinities relating to sex, there emerged feelings of fear relating to impending fatherhood, guilt on denying paternity, pain at being rejected by girls and uncertainty at	Not generalizable to broader populations.  The study does not detail the response rate.	***

			handling certain issues that confronted them.		
<p><b>Pregnancy Prevention Among American Indian Men Ages 18 To 24: The Role Of Mental Health And Intention To Use Birth Control.</b></p> <p><b>Rink et al., (2012)</b></p>	<p>Design: Community based participatory research</p> <p>Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling techniques by partnering with community organisations</p> <p>Data Collection: In-depth interviews using qualitative and quantitative interviews</p>	<p>N = 112</p> <p>Age = 18 -24</p> <p>Median age = 21</p>	<p>Qualitative results suggest that the young men, who did report emotional responses to losses, were concerned about delaying fatherhood until they were ready for the responsibilities of being a parent. Based on the briefness of the young men's responses, they may have a difficult time making a connection between their feelings and their decisions about sex.</p>	<p>Results cannot be generalised to other American Indian populations. The use of purposive sampling weakens the validity of the study's statistical findings. Data was derived from self-reports, which may be restricted to opinions or feelings rather than being based on facts or evidence. The men in this study were only asked questions about</p>	<p>***</p>

				<p>their intention to use birth control to prevent pregnancy, and were not asked questions regarding whether they wanted their partner to get pregnant. Thus, the study's findings are limited to young American Indian men's intention to prevent pregnancy; they cannot be applied to their overall feelings and attitudes towards pregnancy.</p>	
<b>Intergenerational Life Courses of</b>	The data for this study were gathered	Male teen parents' N = 84	Almost half (48.5%) of the male respondents informed	Focus groups did not include teen fathers.	****

<p><b>Teenage Pregnancy in Ogbomosho South –Western Nigeria</b></p> <p><b>Salami, K.K and Ayegboyin, M. (2015)</b></p>	<p>using the questionnaire which was administered among the three groups, teen fathers, teen mothers and parents of pregnant teenagers.</p> <p>Four Focus Group Discussion were also conducted amongst pregnant teenagers and female adults who were pregnant in their teens.</p>		<p>their parents that they had made their girlfriends pregnant, 20.4 percent denied being responsible for the pregnancy, about 14 percent consulted peers for advice, 10.7 percent ran away from home, while 6.8 percent of these pregnancies were terminated.</p>		
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**APPENDIX 5.1: Screenshots from the recruitment video**



## APPENDIX 5.2: Screenshots of recruitment call

 **Joleen Kane** shared **Men's Health Forum in Ireland's** post. ▼  
8 March · Belfast · 

Could all my friends please share this and send it to any young men you know or work with who may be willing to take part. It's only a quick one off chat with myself. Thanks!

 **Men's Health Forum in Ireland**  
8 March · 

Research into Young Men and Unintended Pregnancy  
A PhD student from the S... [Continue reading](#)



**YOUNG MEN AGED 16-24**  
We'd like to chat with you about your experiences in order to develop supports for young men in the future. Please get in touch.  
075 5702 0598  
jkane27@qub.ac.uk

**Young men and unintended pregnancy**  
This is "Young men and unintended pregnancy"...  
[vimeo.com](#)

 **Joleen Kane** ▼  
@joleen\_jkane27

Experienced an unintended pregnancy? Young men (16 - 24) we want to chat to you! [#men](#) [#research](#) [#phd](#) [#NI](#) [#belfast](#)

 Vimeo



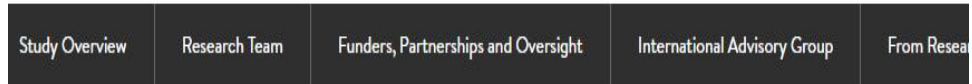
**YOUNG MEN AGED 16-24**  
We'd like to chat with you about your experiences in order to develop supports for young men in the future. Please get in touch.  
075 5702 0598  
jkane27@qub.ac.uk

Young men and unintended pregnancy



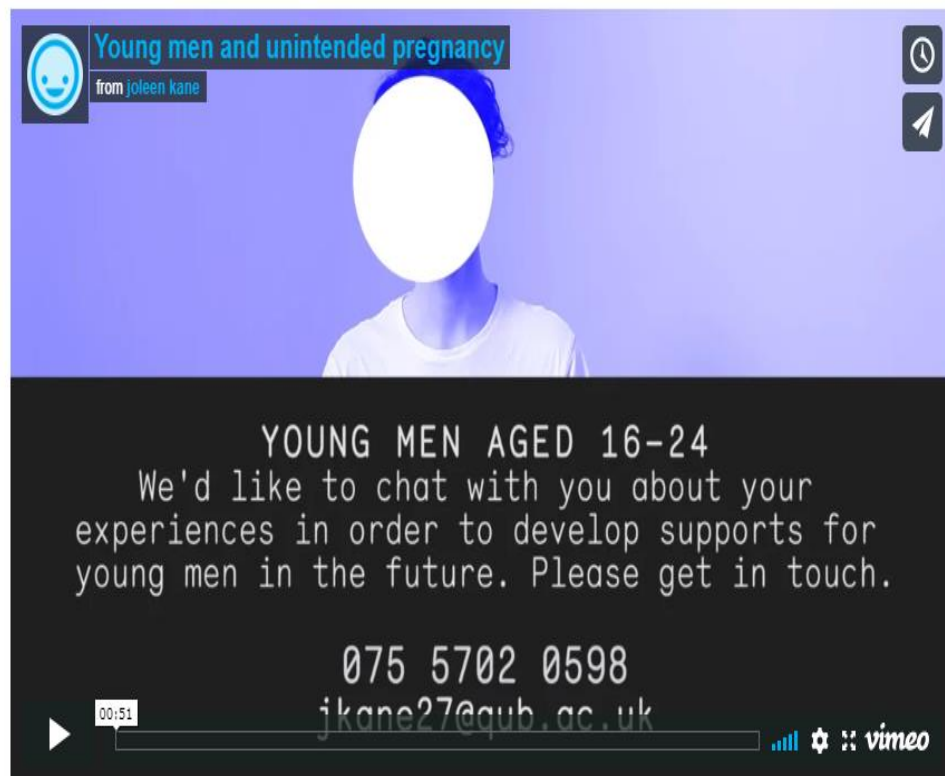
## APPENDIX 5.3: Screenshot of recruitment call on the 'If I Were Jack' website

IF I WERE JACK ▶ THE JACK TRIAL ▶ NEWS



# RECRUITING YOUNG MEN FOR A NEW STUDY

17/02/2017



A new study is currently recruiting young men aged 16 - 24 who have experience of an unintended pregnancy.

If you are interested in taking part, please check out the video and contact Joleen (details below)

## APPENDIX 5.4: Recruitment call through the Men's Health Forum in Ireland

**men's health FORUM in Ireland**

Home About Us MHW Newsletters Training Resources **News** Contact

Latest: Men's Health Week 2019 - THE Date for your New Diary!

### Research into Young Men and Unintended Pregnancy

A PhD student from the School of Nursing and Midwifery in Queen's University Belfast is conducting research into young men - aged 16 to 24 years - who have experience of an unintended pregnancy. The video below explains what it's all about and how to get involved ...

**Young men and unintended pregnancy**  
from joleen kane

**YOUNG MEN AGED 16-24**  
We'd like to chat with you about your experiences in order to develop supports for young men in the future. Please get in touch.

075 5702 0598  
jkane27@qub.ac.uk

**Men's Health Forum in Ireland**  
8 March 2017 · 🌐

Research into Young Men and Unintended Pregnancy  
A PhD student from the School of Nursing and Midwifery in Queen's University Belfast is conducting research into young men (aged 16 to 24 years) who have experience of an unintended pregnancy. This video explains what it's all about and how to get involved:  
<https://vimeo.com/201758105>

**YOUNG MEN AGED 16-24**  
We'd like to chat with you about your experiences in order to develop supports for young men in the future. Please get in touch.

075 5702 0598  
jkane27@qub.ac.uk

VIMEO.COM  
**Young men and unintended pregnancy**  
This is "Young men and unintended pregnancy" by joleen kane on Vimeo,...

👍❤️ You, Lesley Bell and 1 other 2 Comments 9 shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

## APPENDIX 5.5: List of organisations contacted via Facebook

Organisations contacted via Facebook	Organisations contacted via Facebook
The Northern Ireland Father's Rights Movement	Amnesty International QUB
St. Patrick's Youth Club	QUB Law Alumni Group
QUB (Queen's University Belfast) Politics Society	QUB GAA (Gaelic Football)
Parenting NI	QUB Human Rights Centre
Dads 'Do' Matter NI	QUB Scrubs (Medical students charity)
Thinking Cup Café	QUB School of Law
The Speakeasy (Student's Union QUB)	QUB RAG (Charity)
Maverick Mum (Mum blogger who is also a student at QUB)	QUB Sinn Fein
QUB Widening Participation Unit	QUB Law Society
QUB Pharmacists	QUB Mind Your Mood
The Tab Belfast (Online Newspaper)	QUB Feminist Society
QUB Skydiving Club	QUB Nightline
History at QUB	
The Gown Independent Newspaper (QUB Newspaper)	
Queen's Ladies Rugby	
Queen's Rowing Club	
QUB Student Consent Research Collaboration	

## APPENDIX 5.6: Screenshot of messages sent via Facebook chat

The Thinking Cup Café



The Thinking Cup Café

1.6K people like this, including Laurie Mck and 3 friends

Coffee shop

08/03/2017, 15:11

Hi, I am PhD student at Queen's. I am doing research looking at young men's (aged 16 - 24) experiences of unintended pregnancy. Would you be able to share some information about this research on your social media sites? It would be greatly appreciated. Hope to hear from you soon. Joleen Kane



Maverick Mum

2.6K people like this

Personal blog

08/03/2017, 15:00

Hi, I love reading your blog, me and my friends love chatting about you and reuben's adventures. I hope you don't mind me asking, I am not asking for your personal story, but I am doing research looking at young men's experiences of an unintended pregnancy as part of my PhD at Queen's. Would you be willing to share some information about this on your page for people who may be interested in taking part. Look forward to hearing from you. Joleen

Appendix 5.7: Screenshot of recruitment call in the McClay Library, QUB and leaflets advertising the study



## APPENDIX 5.8: Correspondence with the MAC Theatre

RE: Research relating to "I Told My Mum I was Going on an RE Trip"

To: Lucy Liddell <[Lucy@themaactive.com](mailto:Lucy@themaactive.com)>

Subject: Research relating to "I Told My Mum I was Going on an RE Trip"

Hi Lucy,

I saw that the MAC is hosting the play "I Told My Mum I was Going on an RE Trip". I am doing some research at Queen's School of Nursing and Midwifery, relating to young men's experiences of unintended pregnancy, with a specific interest in abortion. I will be at the play myself on Thursday evening and would it be possible to leave down some recruitment posters before the event.

If possible, would I also be able to hand out some fliers at the end of the play. I have attached a copy of the recruitment poster and below is a link to our recruitment video, so that you have all the information regarding the study.

Best

Joleen

Hi Joleen,

My apologies however both Contact and 20 stories have said no to putting leaflets on seats. They have had to say no to previous requests as they can't be seen to be endorsing any particular view point. The show is very much presenting view points from all angles so they don't want to present anything that could be seen as otherwise. Apologies, hope you understand.

You may be interested in the post-show discussion that is happening on Thursday when you're coming to the show.

After the show stay on for a discussion with the following panel:

Chair: Lisa Hallgarten - Advocate and educator in sexual and reproductive rights.

Emma Campbell - Alliance for Choice.

Marion Woods - LIFE NI.

Dr Fiona Bloomer - Lecturer Ulster University, School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy.

Mary Crawford - Director of Brook Belfast.


Plus the cast and the show's Director Julia Samuels - 20 Stories High.


Many thanks


Lucy

## APPENDIX 5.9: Example recruitment email

QUB Research - Unintended Pregnancy

 Joleen Kane  
Fri 17/02/2017 15:27  
info@lifeni.org.uk



 Information Sheet Recruit...  
182 KB

Download Save to OneDrive – Queen's University Belfast

Hello


My name is Joleen and I am a PhD student with Queen's University. I work in the voluntary sector with young people and through this work I have developed an interest in young men's experiences of unintended pregnancy.

I am currently recruiting young men aged 16 - 24 who have experienced an unintended pregnancy to tell their story.

If you would be free for a short chat about the research that would be fantastic. I have attached some further information on the research. I have attached a link to a video promoting the study.

<https://vimeo.com/201758105>

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Young men and unintended pregnancy on Vimeo  
vimeo.com

This is "Young men and unintended pregnancy" by joleen kane on Vimeo, the home for high quality videos and the people who love them.

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Look forward to hearing from you.

Joleen Kane

**APPENDIX 5.10: List of the main organisations contacted for recruitment purposes**

Organisation Name	Type of contact made and response
<b>Brook (Common Youth)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I emailed the Director on the 12/1/17 and did not receive a reply.</li> <li>• I rang the Centre Manager on the 6/2/17 and arranged a meeting for the 21/2/17.</li> <li>• After this meeting I met with the young men's worker on the 4/3/17 and the 1/4/17.</li> </ul>
<b>NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) Youth Forum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I emailed the Regional Project Manager on the 1/2/17 and did not receive a reply.</li> <li>• I rang the Regional Project Manager on the 20/2/17.</li> <li>• After this phone call the Regional Project Manager sent my recruitment email out to all the organisations on their mailing list.</li> </ul>
<b>FPA (Family Planning Association)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I made contact with a counsellor from the FPA on the 18/11/15 at a Regional Sexual Health Conference in Belfast.</li> <li>• I met with the Director of the FPA and a counsellor on the 16/1/16 to discuss my research.</li> <li>• I emailed the counsellor I had been in contact with on the 5/1/17 regarding recruitment for my</li> </ul>



	<p>study. I received a reply and we arranged for me to meet in their offices to leave down recruitment posters and leaflets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I kept in contact with the FPA throughout the recruitment phase of my study.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Include Youth</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I emailed two project workers on the 16/1/17.</li> <li>• I received a reply stating that they would pass my details on to their manager who dealt with research requests.</li> <li>• I received an email from their manager stating that an email had been sent around their organisation about my study and that she had asked project workers to pass on the details of my research with the young people they were working with.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Start 360</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After tweeting the recruitment video for the study on Twitter I received a reply on the 31/1/17 from a Project Manager in Start 360 stating that he worked with young fathers.</li> <li>• This was followed up the next day with a phone-call. He said that he would speak to the young men he worked with about participating in my research.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I contacted him two further times about the research and met him at his office to discuss the research.</li> <li>• This did not result in the recruitment of any participants despite interviews being set up.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Barnardo's</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I contacted three members of staff via email in Barnardo's Leaving Care Service and the Dr B's Project. (9/1/17)</li> <li>• I met with two staff members from Leaving Care and showed them the recruitment video and left them information sheets and leaflets about the study. From this I arranged an interview with a young father who had left the service but this interview did not go ahead despite attempts to rearrange.</li> </ul>

## **Appendix 5.11: Interview Topic Guide**

### **General Demographic Information**

- Age
  - Current relationship status
  - Religion
  - Where do you live
  - Who do you live with
  - Education
  - Occupational status
  - Parental occupational status
1. What was the decision reached about the unintended pregnancy (if known)?
  2. How was the decision reached?
    - Who had the most say in the decision?
    - Did you both agree on the decision?

- How long did it take to make the decision?
3. How would you describe your role throughout the decision making process?
  4. Did you offer support throughout the process? (In what way)
  5. How did it affect your relationship at the time? (If applicable)
  6. How has it affected your relationship since? (If applicable)
  7. Has experiencing an unintended pregnancy affected you in any way?
    - Prompt both negative and positive consequences?
    - Do you feel any differently about yourself as a result of the unintended pregnancy?
  8. If you were in the same position today would you do the same thing?
  9. Who did you speak to about what had happened?
    - Did you seek support from anyone?
  10. Did you tell your family about what had happened?
    - If so what did they say/think/do?
  11. Did you tell your friends about what had happened?
    - If so what did they say/think/do?
  12. Were you offered any support by services throughout the process?
  13. We've spoken about your experiences and decision making relating to an unintended pregnancy you have experienced. To finish up, how would you summarise your overall experience of unintended pregnancy?
    - How did you feel about the decision that was made?
    - How do you feel about the decision now?
  14. Is there anything that you would like to add, or anything that you feel has not been covered?
  15. Do you think that you would have answered the questions any differently if I was male?

## APPENDIX 5.12: Ethical Approval Letter



Queen's University  
Belfast

The School of Nursing  
and Midwifery

Queen's University Belfast  
Medical Biology Centre  
97 Lisburn Road  
BELFAST BT9 7BL  
Northern Ireland  
Tel: 028 9097 2233/2061  
Fax: 028 9097 2328  
nursing@qub.ac.uk  
www.qub.ac.uk/nur

04 January 2017

Ref: 01.JKane.12.16.M2.V2

Joleen Kane  
School of Nursing and Midwifery  
Queen's University Belfast  
Medical Biology Centre  
97 Lisburn Road  
Belfast  
BT9 7BL

Dear Joleen,

### SCHOOL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

**RE: Young men's decisions and experiences relating to unintended pregnancy –  
Opening up the gendered box on the right to choose**

Thank you for your recent re-submission to the Chair of the School of Nursing and Midwifery Research Ethics Committee. I wish to advise you that your application has been approved and you can now commence with your study. This approval has been given by Chair's Action as agreed at the last meeting.

To complete the Research Governance process, you should complete the Gov 3 form (request for sponsorship of a research project) and forward this along with your protocol to Ms Louise Dunlop at the Research Governance Policy Office.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oliver Perra'.

Dr Oliver Perra  
Chair, School Research Ethics Committee  
School of Nursing & Midwifery

cc File copy

## **APPENDIX: 5.13 Information Sheet**

### **Invitation to Participate**

#### **Unintended Pregnancy – Time to Stop Ignoring Young Men**

Hello, my name is Joleen Kane and I am a studying for a doctorate in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Queen's University Belfast. I am supervised by Professor Maria Lohan and Dr Carmel Kelly. As part of this study I am conducting a research study entitled: Young men and unintended pregnancy: Opening up the gendered box on the right to choose. This study aims to explore young men's experiences and involvement with decisions relating to an unintended pregnancy in their lives.

We (the research team) would like to invite you to take part in an interview, where you will have the opportunity to tell your story about an unintended pregnancy in your life. The voice of young men in relation to unintended pregnancy is seldom heard and we hope that this study will give an insight into how young men experience an unintended pregnancy in their lives.

Before you decide to take part in this study, we would like you to read this information leaflet. This leaflet, which is for you to keep, tells you what the research study is about and what would be involved if you chose to take part.

Please take time to read the information and discuss it with others if you wish. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact myself or a member of the research team. Contact details are provided at the end of this leaflet.

**Thank you for reading this**

**Study Title:**

**Young men's decisions in relation to an unintended pregnancy – Opening up the gendered box on the right to choose.**

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and decision-making processes of men aged 16 – 24 in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives, including any unintended pregnancy resulting in abortion.

**What will I be asked to do if I take part?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign the attached consent form. You will be invited to meet with myself for a one-hour face to face interview at a time and location that is convenient to yourself. You will be asked to talk about your own personal experience of unintended pregnancy. The interview will be audio-recorded so that we have an accurate record of what has been said.

**What are the benefits?**

Your participation in this study will provide you with an opportunity to tell your story about how you experienced an unintended pregnancy in your life. It is hoped that your participation in this study may contribute to a greater understanding of young men's experiences and decision-making processes regarding unintended pregnancy.

**Are there any possible disadvantages in taking part?**

You may find it difficult or upsetting to talk about your experience of unintended pregnancy or abortion. If this occurs you will be asked if you want to suspend or end the interview. You will be provided with the details of local support services that can be contacted if you would like further support.

**How will confidentiality be maintained?**

After the interview, a member of the research team (Joleen Kane) will type up the interview. All recording equipment and typed up versions of the interview will be kept in a locked filing cabinet or on a password secure computer that only the research team can access. At the end of the study, all data resulting from the study will be stored for a maximum of five years in accordance with Queen's University Belfast, Code of Conduct and Integrity in Research.

What you say to us in the interview is **confidential**. This means that whatever is shared in the interview will not be shared **except** where you tell us that you, or someone else, are at risk of harm or danger, there is a disclosure of illegal activity or you give permission for confidentiality to be broken.

### **What happens to the data collected?**

Once the interviews are over the researcher team will look at all of the interviews we have conducted. We will want to use quotes from the interviews in the articles we will write about this research. When we do this, we will remove any information (names, place names etc.) which could be used to identify you or anyone else you have mentioned in the interviews.

### **What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

You do not have to take part in the research if you do not wish to. Feel free to ask any questions that you have about taking part. If you do decide to take part, you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. If you change your mind about being involved in the research you can stop the interview at any time. You can do this without having to explain your reasons for doing so. You can withdraw your consent at any time during or after the interview.

### **Ethical Approval**

The study has been reviewed by the School of Nursing and Midwifery Research Ethics Committee, Queen's University Belfast.

### **Contact Details**

If you have any questions or concerns relating to the research please contact Joleen Kane

**Email :** [jkane27@qub.ac.uk](mailto:jkane27@qub.ac.uk)

**Telephone:** 028 9097 5766

Or Chief Investigator Maria Lohan

**Email:** [m.lohan@qub.ac.uk](mailto:m.lohan@qub.ac.uk)

**Telephone:** 028 9097 2839



**Complaints Procedure:** Any complaints should be directed to the primary researcher or the Chief Investigator. However, if you do not wish to make a complaint to the research team or they are the object of the complaint and you wish to make a formal complaint you can contact the Research Governance Office at Queen's University Belfast.

**Contact Information:** 028 9097 2529 or [researchgovernance@qub.ac.uk](mailto:researchgovernance@qub.ac.uk)

#### **Appendix 5.14: Consent Form**

**CONSENT FORM**

Young men's decisions in relation to an unintended pregnancy – Opening up the gendered box on the right to choose.

- |  | <b>Please<br/>Initial</b> |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have been given, have read and understand the information leaflet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask, and receive answers to any questions I may have had. | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.  | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| 3. I agree to the face to face interview being audio recorded.   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| 4. I understand all information will be treated securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and stored appropriately as required by the University.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| 5. I understand that any information which suggests that I or another young person is at risk of harm, or involved in illegal activity, may have to be passed onto the relevant authorities.       | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| 6. I understand that I will not be identifiable in any data published in relation to this study.   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| 7. I agree to take part in the above study.  | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| 8. I agree to anonymised direct quotes from the interview to be used.  | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| 9. I wish to receive a report on the findings of the study.  | YES/NO                    |
- If yes please provide your email/postal address:
- \_\_\_\_\_

(Your details will only be used to send a report on the findings and will not be shared with any third party)

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

**Appendix 5.15 Email correspondence [Abortion pills query]**

**From:** Joleen Kane [jkane27@qub.ac.uk]  
**Sent:** 09 August 2016 14:41  
**To:** Horgan, Goretti  
**Subject:** Abortion ethics query

Hello Goretti,

My name is Joleen, and I am a PhD student at Queen's University Belfast. I have a query regarding my project that I hope you could help me with.

My PhD study is looking at young men's experiences and decision making processes in relation to an unintended pregnancy in their lives, including an unintended pregnancy resulting in abortion.

Whilst interviewing young men there is a possibility that they may disclose details about a woman who has taken abortion pills.

My query is, do I need to pass these details onto the PSNI?

I hope to hear from you soon.

Kind Regards

Joleen Kane

Horgan, Goretti <g.horgan@ulster.ac.uk>  
Fri 12/08/2016 14:17  
Joleen Kane ↵



Hi Joleen,

The short answer is No, you do not have to report anything to the PSNI. I have checked this with legal experts myself so it is certainly the case. It might help with your ethics application to read this:  
[https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.112762!/file/Research-Ethics-Policy-Note-12.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.112762!/file/Research-Ethics-Policy-Note-12.pdf)

Your research sounds really interesting; please don't hesitate to contact me again if I can help in any way.

Goretti

**Goretti Horgan**  
School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy  
T: 02890366654  
E: [g.horgan@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:g.horgan@ulster.ac.uk) W: [www.ulster.ac.uk](http://www.ulster.ac.uk)