

## **Robin Hadley: MA Summary**

(The University of Manchester, 2008).

**Dissertation:** *Involuntarily Childless Men: Issues surrounding the desire for fatherhood.*

The rationale for this study stems from the researchers experience of counselling male clients who were affected by their childless state. This led to an exploration of the issues surrounding the yearning for parenthood in men entitled 'Involuntarily childless men: Issues surrounding the desire to be a Father.' With little existing information on the experience of childlessness for men, literature surrounding infertility, fatherhood, social issues and health was examined. The majority of that research is based on couples undergoing infertility treatment and records the effects of that process on their physical, mental, and social inter-actions. Included in the effects were depression, anxiety, and social isolation.

In order to provide an insight to the lived experience of childless men who desire fatherhood, a qualitative methodology - grounded theory - was selected. This approach allows codes and themes to emerge from the data and categorised to form a theory. The 'emergent' concept of the method suited the lack of available data and allows the participant's story to be retained using verbatim dialogue extracts. Ten respondents to a poster invitation were individually interviewed and the interviews transcribed and analysed. All ten had suffered from depression with eight reporting that childlessness was a feature in their depression to a lesser or greater extent. The participants ranged in age from 33 to over 60 years and all identified as white-western, biologically childless men.

The analysis findings generated six categories: a core category of 'Lifescape's of Childless Men: Enduring Anticipation and Expectation in an Uncharted World' and five main categories of Consequences of Childlessness, Ideation, Relationships, Socio-environmental and Health. The attitude to childlessness was related to their life stage; younger men were aware of the unknown but feared responsibility, the older ones more regretful of an opportunity denied or not utilised. Poor experience in formative familial relationships affected all subsequent relationships and for those in relationships, their partners were of great significance. Charting the desire for children indicated a peak in the thirties and that gradually reduced but did not disappear. Fatherhood was seen as a repayment, replacement, re-connection or repeat of his own childhood experience. Those who had experienced the role of father indicated a desire for biological parenthood. As they aged, the men found ways to adapt and reappraise their beliefs about themselves emotionally, psychologically, and in their relationships. A gap between themselves and others was emphasised with suggestions of discrimination in familial, social and work settings. The issues surrounding childlessness reflected the individual's upbringing and guided and shaped each participant's unique responses, beliefs, feelings and actions.

Parallels were drawn with the findings of those in infertility treatment. These included a range of responses: complex bereavement, depression, isolation, substance abuse and addiction. Implications for counsellors are examined and possible approaches to working with childless men, for example, feminist and gender therapy are discussed.