

# RESEARCH CONNECTION

## Caring masculinities and fathering on the Prairies

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### Why this research is important

Studies seldom consider fatherhood and mental health together, and when they do, they generally focus on the stress of becoming a new father. In this research, we explore how men experiencing mental health problems found motivation, relief, and wellness in fathering.

### How the research was conducted

Findings from our research are based on the first-hand accounts of rural men. These accounts were collected during interviews lasting approximately 90 minutes and using a semi-structured guide. A total of 24 men from southern Manitoba participated in the interviews.

### What you need to know

Men's lives are changing, and so too are their ideas about fatherhood. This study considers 24 men and their thoughts and experiences of fathering and how it is affected by mental health and wellness. Drawing on 'caring masculinities,' the research shows how the men desire to be good fathers, perhaps even better fathers than their fathers. In thinking about men's mental health and wellness, we argue that fatherhood can be an important motivation for improving and tending to one's own mental health and wellness, as well as that of the community.

### What the researchers found

Over the course of our research, fatherhood emerged as a key theme related to mental health and wellness for the majority of men. Men in the study spoke about fatherhood, and in particular, how they struggled to challenge normative masculinities when working with their fathers, their experiences of aggression, desires to be a better father than their father, and their reflections on changing practices and ideas about fatherhood and masculinity.

In this research, we argue that fathering can and does provide opportunities for rural men experiencing mental health and emotional distress to practice caring and connecting with their children in ways that support their mental wellness and sense of identity as men. This research contributes to research on changing masculinities and the consequences for challenging normative masculinities in rural space.

### How this research can be used

This project contributes to health and social policy by highlighting the important role of fathering in mental health as well as equitable social policy, especially in light of current debates about family care and labour force participation.

The research builds on feminist theories of masculinities with men's own voices and their own thoughts on masculinities, mental health and wellness, and fathering.

### About the researchers

This project is part of the collaborative and interdisciplinary research project, "Changing Rural Masculinities and Mental Wellness: A Prairie Case Study," led by **Dr. Rachel Herron**, Canada Research Chair in Rural and Remote Mental Health.

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The research team benefits from and is thankful for the research assistance of: **Mairo Ahmadu**, **Margaret de Jager**, and **Madeleine Kruth**.

### Keywords

Mental health and wellness; masculinity; fathering; rural masculinity; Manitoba; Prairies

### Acknowledgements

This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canada Research Chairs Program.

Research Connection is a periodical publication intended to provide information about the impact of Brandon University's academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary is supported by the Office of Research Services and by the Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, Faculty of Education.

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