UNCERTAIN FUTURES
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF MEN AT THE MARGINS

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1. Introduction

The study aims to give voice to young men at the margins of society whose voices are rarely heard. It presents the experiences of social marginalisation as seen by young men in their struggle for dignity and survival. The study addresses:

- School days and work opportunities
- Everyday life in marginalised communities
- The role of men in the family and what it means to be a father

Key practitioners agreed to refer young men to the study and 18 young men volunteered to be interviewed. This is an exploratory study, which documents the views and experiences of the young men who were interviewed.

Criteria for selection were that the men were aged between 18 and 33 years and grew up or lived in areas designated under the RAPID (Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment and Development) Programme as socio-economically disadvantaged in Limerick City. The average age of the young men interviewed was 22 years. Interview questions are outlined in Appendix A.

It was a challenge to design ethical, non-exploitative research that does not further stigmatise the young men who engaged with the research project. Each participant was given a letter outlining the purpose of the study (Appendix B). Prior to starting the interview, a consent form was read out by the researchers, and participants were asked to give their written consent to be interviewed. It was made clear to those interviewed that they could terminate the interview at any point (consent form is in Appendix C).

Participants’ identities are protected by the use of fictitious names and by removing or altering any other identifying information not essential to the analysis.

The interviews were semi-structured using probes and follow-up questions where relevant. It was stressed that a key concern was to get the views of young men regarding their life experiences, what would have helped them to cope with the difficulties they encountered or what would be helpful to them now. The researcher took handwritten notes, which were transcribed following the interviewing. On average interviews lasted one hour.

Practitioners who referred young men to the research had an input into the research questions and were given a draft report and an opportunity to contribute their reflections on the issues raised by the research.

In writing the report, the interpretation of the experiences of the young men interviewed is informed by the wider sociological literature on class, feminism and critical studies of men/masculinities. The literature points to the patriarchal nature of our society where men hold the legitimate leadership, power and authority. Men in this view are at the highest levels in political, economic, educational and cultural organisations (Morgan 2005). How patriarchy is expressed is particular to specific cultures and societies.
One of the main points made is that although large numbers of men in general benefit materially, socially and politically from patriarchy, the advantages described as the “patriarchal dividend”, are not spread equally amongst men (Connell 1995). In other words, not all men are equally powerful.¹

Across classes and across many cultures, it is argued that a key aspect of men’s identity is the performance of a public masculinity, that is their role outside of the home whether in the workplace or in more public arenas. Segal (1990) suggests that traditionally men reassert their masculinity through an active dissociation from the private sphere or their lack of involvement in the home. It was seen as an essential part of male competence to provide a family home. As workers, their power was expressed symbolically in the notion of the “breadwinner” and or “main provider”. Although women as well as men are now performing the role of breadwinner, culturally, the identity of the male with the breadwinner role persists.

In contrast to men, women’s role has traditionally been confined to the private sphere in the family home, and “behind the scenes” in the corridors of power, where women carry the one-sided responsibility of supporting men in their work and for the care and maintenance of relationships. According to Chodorow (1978), women follow a different developmental path than men and “girls emerge (from adolescents) with a strong basis for experiencing another’s needs or feelings as one’s own”. In Gilligan’s (1982) view, women not only define themselves in a context of human relationships but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care. As far back as 1976, Jean Baker Miller in *Towards a New Psychology of Women*, outlined what she saw as women’s strengths – authenticity, empathy and the drive to connect and the skills to stay connected. The problem is, however, that these valuable strengths have not developed in a context of mutuality, and they have not been complemented by the full right and necessity to attend to one’s own development as well (Miller 1976; 1991). Miller sees that men, rely heavily on women’s skills, but devalue these skills precisely, because they do not to admit that they need these skills.

Men can find it difficult to engage at the emotional level. Emotional distancing allows men to focus on achievement and autonomy. Reaching out to others and asking for help can be seen as a weakness.

In the context of the present study, where the opportunity for men in disadvantaged communities to perform the male “breadwinner” and public role is curtailed, men’s identities as men are “on the line”. The key issue is how do men in these situations renegotiate their identities within the context of economic and social marginalisation. The present study seeks to address some of these questions.

¹ The relative privileges of some men leads to the domination of some men over other men. The people who benefit most are not necessarily the people who carry the greatest amount of social cost. For instance, the families of working class men who gave their lives in the two world wars were not the people who made the decisions to go war or the main beneficiaries. In relation to the United States, C. Wright Mills (1956) argues that the power elite (upper classes, military and political classes), although numerically small, exercise the power and influence in society and are the main beneficiaries of how society is organised. Other authors have pointed out that as the world becomes more globalised, a transnational elite comes into play with, “finance capitalists” performing in a central role.
2. School Days and Uncertain Futures

The right to education is outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and other human rights instruments. Education gives people a right to other rights. Good literacy and numeracy skills are important for everyday living. The fact that 30 per cent of pupils in primary schools in disadvantaged areas in Ireland have serious literacy difficulties (which is about three times the national average) is a human rights issue (Baker et al 2004).

Education credentials are also a gateway to employment, social mobility and pay levels. In Ireland, since the 1980s access to the top jobs in skilled manual work and in professional, administrative and managerial work are based primarily on educational credentials. Critically, the need for high educational credentials has extended to apprenticeships, one of the traditional ladders of working class mobility from low paid insecure jobs to skilled employment (Smyth and Hannan 2000). The disadvantages associated with early school leaving, and income differences between people with different levels of education are increasing rather than abating over time.

It is in this sense that we live in what the American sociologist, S. M. Miller calls the “credential” society (Miller 1967; quoted in Miller 2002). Education performance is highly related to social class. Without education credentials, people are regarded as employable only in marginal, low paid jobs.

In the present exploratory study, 13 of the 18 young men interviewed left school at 15 years or younger with no formal qualifications. The remaining five men passed the junior certificate and left before completing the leaving certificate or qualifying for a trade. This contrasts with the fact that the majority of Irish young people complete the leaving certificate (82 per cent in 1998), with boys, especially those in disadvantaged areas being less likely to do so. People who do not complete the leaving certificate are considered “school drop-outs”. In the words of O’Donnell and Sharpe (2000), young people in the study are making “careerless transitions”, where only insecure, low paid jobs are open to them and where it is difficult for them to have a stake in society. This has serious implications for the breadwinner, provider role of men who leave school without qualifications.

2.1 Schools Days

Almost all of the young men interviewed found school difficult and many “hated” school, particularly secondary school. They encountered difficulties in managing the school environment and school culture and in some cases their special needs were not diagnosed or met by the school. Many left school without basic reading and writing skills.

Many felt alienated from school. Kevin who is now 23 left school at 15:

*I did not like school. I hated being in school being told what to do. I hated being locked up all day.*
Dylan left school at 15 years, His experiences of school made him feel that he was not intelligent:

_I had not got what it takes. I was no good at school. School was not for me._

Colm who left school at 16 years had a similar experience and also found homework difficult:

_I was in the lowest class and I never did homework. I always got someone to do it._

Some coped with the school environment by being rebellious:

_We were all messers. I was thrown out of school. I had got suspended a few times. They said that they would take me back if I signed a form for good behaviour. I wouldn’t sign it (Joe)._  

Vince who is 23 years, found the transition from primary to secondary school problematic:

_Primary school was ok. Secondary school was boring. We had all different teachers. I left school at 14 and went to a special school._

Like Vince, both Jason and Mark found the transition to secondary school difficult:

_Primary school was alright. Secondary school, I could not cope with it. I was a bit of a blagguard. I never did what any teacher asked. I could not sit down. I preferred to be outdoors (Jason).  

_I left school in the first year of secondary school. I had difficulties learning. I had difficulty spelling and did not get any help. I was under pressure. It was too much. I had to get out (Mark)._  

Some people found school difficult because their special needs were not met. Declan is 20 years old. Declan liked school but struggled with his reading and writing. He feels strongly about the fact that his learning disability was not diagnosed until after he left school and that he did not receive one to one tuition in school. He did not pass the junior certificate:

_I was not diagnosed until after I left school when I was 18 years old. I knew that I had difficulties. I got bullied and harassed at school because of my learning difficulties. There is a lack of services for a person with a learning disability. There is no centre in Limerick._

Four men experienced high levels of personal distress and grief as their fathers had died in very difficult circumstances. Two fathers were murdered, one committed suicide and one died tragically in an accident. The trauma experienced by the young men affected their ability to concentrate at school and affected their school performance. Niall is 29 years old and left school at the age of 13:
My father had a mental illness and committed suicide. Having no father and the environment I grew up in led me astray. I was hanging around the streets and got into trouble with the law and left school. I was too busy wanting to be one of the men.

Brian’s family also experienced a traumatic bereavement. His father was shot in tragic circumstances:

When my father died, I could not hack it anymore. I was 14 years and got a job in a Community Training Workshop. I stayed there until I was 18 years. I learned how to read and write and did basics in computers, cars and motorbikes.

Like Brian’s family, Tom’s family was bereaved by the very brutal death of his father who was stabbed. He left school at 15 years.

Special Schools and Community Training Workshops

Some young people who left mainstream education early transferred to special schools or community training workshops. Paddy left primary school when he was 12 years old to attend a special school where he received greater individual attention:

It was there that I learned most of what I know. I learned to read and write. It was a good school. It had small groups and individual attention. We had loads of breaks and did not feel the day passing. In summer we went camping. It was great.

Vince left school at 14 and also benefited from the attention given to him in a special school and later in a community training workshop:

There were smaller classes in the school. Then I went to a community training workshop for years.

Like special schools, the experience of community training workshops for Mark, and Davy was positive:

It was much simpler. It was a good experience. I learned computers, baking and how to wait on tables (Mark).

I went to a community training workshop for three years and did woodwork and mechanics and english, computers and life skills. It was brilliant. I learned to read and write (Davy).

Although their experiences of special schools and community training workshops were positive and enabled them to develop basic skills, they had not sufficient qualifications to get an apprenticeship to a trade or a “decent job”.

2.2 Uncertain Futures

What comes across in the interviews is that because of lack of formal qualifications the jobs to which many of the young men have access to are uninteresting and low
paid and some cannot find work at all. Now as young adults, they see themselves as personifications of failure precisely because they share the values of the wider culture in wanting to have a “decent” job to support a family. Their feelings of hopelessness are even more acute given the upturn in the economy and the prosperity and expectations generated by the Celtic Tiger. Unemployment or low paid work damages confidence and undermines the breadwinner role:

*Men value themselves in work. Without work many feel useless. It is an emptiness feeling* (Declan).

Many of the young men face the challenge not only of making their way in society with low education credentials, but also encounter severe and brutalising discrimination and disrespect.

Almost all of the young men interviewed have encountered discrimination because of where they live:

*Your address affects your chances of employment. If I want to apply for a job I have to give my sister’s address. I was advised to change address on my application form, as it would discriminate against me when applying for a job* (Declan).

*Your will never get a job if you are from here. They don’t like people from here. They find it hard to trust you. It is unfair* (Davy).

Added to living in a particular area, having a criminal record further hinders young men’s chances of getting work:

*If they find out that you were locked up they sack you. If you are trouble with the gardai, they will not give you a job. You cannot lie because they will find out* (Colm).

**Unskilled Insecure Work**

For young men with low levels of education, the type of employment available to them is unskilled work in the building industry, in large companies and in supermarkets.

On leaving the special school Paddy who is now 22 attended a community training workshop. He has a Safe Pass and would like employment in the building industry. He is not hopeful of even getting a low paid job because he has very little work experience:

*When I hand in my CV I never get a phone call.*

Colm who is now 28 years is living separately from his two children who he sees regularly. Like Paddy, he sees low paid jobs in the building industry as his only possibility. He was a forklift driver for 12 years. His job was terminated because of a prison sentence for drink-related crime:
I worked for 12 years driving a forklift. The hours were long - 12 hour shifts with no overtime pay. I would like to get work on the buildings, but I need contacts.

Chris who is 25 lives with his two children and partner who is in full-time employment. He was employed for two years as an unskilled factory worker until the factory went into liquidation. Outreach workers from the local project have helped him to develop a CV. He is aware of the need to get a job and his intention is to get a Safe Pass and to look for work in the building industry:

Everyone needs work. You need money coming in. You get lazy and depressed when you are stuck in the house.

He is now linked to a local project, which is helping him to plan his future. His hope is to get work as a block layer in the building industry.

Dave who is now 32 dropped out of school at 15 as he was “dying to make a few pounds”. He had several insecure low skilled jobs. He has been a lone father for four years. His son is in primary school. He would like “a decent job to get a mortgage and get a house”.

Brian is 24 years has some basic work experience working in the local supermarket where according to Brian, employees are not paid well and do not get double pay for over-time. He would like a well-paid job as he has joint custody of his daughter. Ideally, he would like to be a mechanic, but would have to return and sit his junior certificate to do so. He is not hopeful that this will happen.

Mark who is 26 years left school when he was 15. He finds it difficult getting work:

It is hard to get jobs. I have not the education. I can get odd jobs. I need help to build up my experience.

Special Needs
Some young people find it difficult to source suitable employment because of their special needs and the lack of support. Niall who is 29 years old dropped out of school at the age of 13. Niall suffers from depression:

I left school early. The next thing you know you are older and end up in prison. I would love a job. I am nearly 30 and still have nothing. I have no proven work history. I would love to have money to provide for my kids. I need a job to help me to move on. When my kids are asked “what does your father do?”, I would like them to be able to say that I do something. I would not be able to work full-time due to depression but I would like to get on to a CE scheme.

Owen is 19 years old. He has a learning difficulty and left school without passing his junior cert. He has attended several interviews such as for jobs in local supermarkets stocking shelves, but has never been taken on. He is now attending a local project that is helping him to plan his future.
Declan is 20 years old and has a learning disability which was not diagnosed until after he left school:

I suffer from double discrimination, my disability and because I live in a particular part of Limerick. I have been going for a job for ages. It knocks your confidence. It makes you feel useless.

Kevin who is 23 years and Davy who is 19 have lost hope of getting work and “hang around all day” with little to do.

Return to Education and Training
The existence of community based projects, specifically designed to help young adults re-build their careers has enabled some young people to re-enter education as the following examples illustrate.

Now seven years after leaving school, at the age of 22, Dylan realises that without qualifications, only low paid jobs are open to him. He is now engaged in developing basic skills with the aim of sitting the leaving certificate applied (LCA). Dylan states:

I left school at 15. I thought that I would be better off working. I soon found out that there are few well paid jobs open to young men. For a job in security, you need education and the junior cert. I want to do the leaving cert. If this project was not here I would be in trouble.

Joe who is now 19 years left school at 15 and ended up in low paid jobs. Joe is currently studying for the LCA and would like to get a trade, preferably as a plumber. He is hopeful that he will succeed. Joe is very positive about his experience:

The project is very different than school where you are just sitting in a classroom. Here it is relaxed. You call the teacher by the first name. They are your friends. You know that they care about you. There is need for a lot more projects like this. A lot of people are waiting to get in.

Vince is now 23. After leaving a community training workshop, Vince worked as an unskilled worker in a computer company:

The hours were long. There were 12-hour shifts. It was hard and we did not get double time. I am now doing the leaving cert and would like a job in computers.

Jason commented on the fact that teachers in the project understood the pupils, were attentive to them, helped them to learn and made learning interesting:

It is the way they run the place. They know what is going on (meaning they understand the everyday life of people). The project is welcoming. They ask you, how you are. They have a great sense of humour. I know a lot of people who want to get into project, but there is a waiting list.

Although some young people are aware that education is one of the most important means of accessing a decent wage, they feel that they have left it too late to return to education.
The school was alright. I am sorry now that I did not stay on. I would not go back to school. It is too late to do that (Kevin).

Young men interviewed felt that there was need for a lot more community projects and facilities. Community based projects came across as being important in many ways. Staff in community projects have the ability to “meet people where they are at”, were friendly and encouraging. They also challenged participants to work to the best of their ability and supported them in doing so. Projects are important in helping people to access information and jobs:

It is hard to get anything or to get anywhere. You need the outside contact - that is where the project is important (Jason).

**Self Employed**

Dan is an exception as he is has started his own business. He is now 22 years and is living with his partner and their two children. He sat the junior certificate and stayed in school until he was 17 years. He has always had part-time or full-time jobs and his family has helped him to set up his own business. This is in the initial stages, but he is hopeful that it will succeed.

**Competition from Migrant Workers**

In addition to the difficulties articulated by the young men in getting employment, five of the 18 without being asked, mentioned that competition from migrant workers affects their chances of getting work and is also lowering pay levels. Their perception is that foreign workers are “working for half nothing” and that Irish workers have to “struggle to get employment against foreign nationals”:

The Polish are doing work for lower wages. You go for a job. The foreman asks how much are you looking for. If you say 750 Euro a week, he says I can get two foreigners to do the same work. The Polish have adds in the paper looking for work. It is crazy (Colm).

Foreigners have all the jobs. I am not blaming them. They are messing up the whole system. Now we have not a fair chance of getting a job (Dylan).

**2.3 Conclusion**

Making a shift from unemployment into a job depends on educational qualifications and a work record. This leads to a vicious cycle in which early schools leavers can only access casual low-paid work and consequently have a poor employment record which over time reduces their chances of getting employment that would enable them to support themselves and their families.

The young men interviewed found school difficult and left school early without formal educational qualifications, thus making “careerless transitions” which leads to economic insecurity and poverty. Some left school with their special needs unmet. Like many other people in society, the majority of these young men aspire to having a “decent job”. Without qualifications traditional skilled jobs in trades are not available to them and they have insufficient income to consider marriage or to take on the role
of breadwinner. The upturn in the Irish economy with the Celtic Tiger results in a
greater sense of failure for those who fail to attain a decent job in the workplace.

Many benefited from special schools and special training projects where they felt
understood and where learning was organised in more informal ways in smaller
groups. In these projects they acquired basic education skills and some now as young
adults are re-entering education and rebuilding their careers. Many felt that projects,
using this relational approach to learning need to be more widely available.

An additional obstacle in getting work is the discrimination they felt because of where
they live and competition for low paid work from migrant workers. Many feel
discriminated against and disrespected at a very deep level. They experience “the
emotional wounds of class inequality” what the sociologists Sennett and Cobb (1972)
refer to as “the hidden injuries of class”, where injurious games of self-justification
elevates one group by ostracising and “othering” minority groups and groups on the
margins (Bourdieu 1984; Miller and Savoie 2002; Sennett 2004).

At a national level, initiatives have been introduced to address issues as to why pupils
are failing or being failed by the education system in disadvantaged areas. Initiatives
included:

- Early Start Programme
- Breaking the Cycle
- Introduction of the new curriculum programmes and approaches to certification
to promote pupil retention i.e. the Leaving Certificate Applied
- Local initiatives to promote third level participation among young people in
disadvantaged areas

More recently, an action plan for addressing education inclusion, DEIS (Delivering
Equality of Opportunity in Schools) was launched in 2005. This is an attempt to bring
together a coherent school supports programme.

Despite the range of educational initiatives to deal with disadvantage, ‘overall leaving
certificate completion rates have plateaued since the late 1990s’ (Smyth et al, 2007).
It is arguable that such trends are not unrelated to the fact that boys spend less time
doing homework than girls (Fahey et al, 2005). Furthermore, schools remain
hierarchical systems, with boys in particular seeing the classroom as a competitive
forum, and for those who are not achieving academically, the school experience
erodes self-esteem. The most negative attitudes to school occur amongst students
from lower income groups, those with lower ability, and male students. Students who
combine all three characteristics are most likely to leave school early (Smyth et al 2007).
Hence the attitudes and performance of the young men in the present study, in
a school context, although extreme, are very much part of a male response when they
have difficulty in achieving in a competitive environment
3. Everyday Life in Marginalised Communities

*I was brought up in Moyross. I enjoyed it. I love sport. Moyross has an all weather in-door soccer pitch, snooker, boxing-club. I love soccer and hurling (William).*

Many of the young men interviewed had very happy childhood memories:

*My father used to take me fishing and camping (Philip).*

*We used to go to football matches (Owen).*

Many men enjoyed a sense of family and community solidarity. However, they also pointed to how drugs have now devastated working class communities in recent years:

*St. Mary’s was a great place to grow up. There were regattas on the river. You could hang around for hours. But this has all changed. We have not got that these days. The feuds have destroyed the city (Niall).*

*It was a lot easier growing up. It was a great place to grow up in. I always had something to do. I loved handball and hurling. I used to hang around at the shop. There was none of the shit you have now (Dave).*

*Drug dealing is very serious now. Drug dealers did not have such power then. People were not as frightened (Mark).*

With the exception of deCleir (2003) and Fahey (1999), few social scientists have focussed specifically on what is now being termed the “residualisation” of some local authority housing estates. Residualisation refers to the fact that some local authority estates have been left behind, have a poor reputation and experience neighbourhood decline. deCleir’s specific focus is on Limerick City. She notes the highly polarised nature of housing in Limerick and estimates that about one-fifth (4) of 16 housing estates built by the local authority in Limerick City are “residual” and highly problematic.

Although the process of residualisation is complex, and involves a combination of factors including how tenant purchase schemes and loan purchase schemes operate, a key factor identified by deCleir and Fahey, as contributing to the process of residualisation is the policy practice over decades of allocating tenancies to the poorest and most vulnerable families in the least popular areas. Many households are welfare dependent, unemployed and lone parents. Today, in these areas there is a concentration of families who have problems with drugs, are involved in crime and young people leave school early. The majority young men interviewed live in these areas.
3.1 Drug Related Disorder

In the 1980s and 1990s the drugs trade became a source of vast wealth. Extended family networks that controlled the drugs trade began to exercise inexorable control over local communities. Before long, inter family feuds were taking place among the families who controlled the drugs trade. (Williams 1998, 2003; Reynolds 2004, originally printed 1998; Morton 1994).

Limerick City did not escape. Inter family feuds are now a feature of life in many of the more deprived communities in Limerick, as families involved in the drugs trade seek to retain control of, or extend their control over, “drug patches”. Hand grenades, pipe bombs and explosives feature in different disputes. Lives have been destroyed and communities devastated. Although feuding escalated significantly with the widespread availability of drugs, inter family feuds have long been a reality in many deprived communities in Limerick.

All families living in these areas have to deal with the consequence of the drug wars. Control over communities is exercised by fear and intimidation. If intimidation does not work, a family can have their house burned down, family members severely beaten or shot and forced to leave the area. Members of these controlling families are known locally as “scumbags”.

Families are drawn into the feuds in a variety of ways. Young men, alienated and susceptible agree to carry and to sell drugs to earn what they see as a decent wage when few other opportunities are open to them. They are the small dealers, couriers or mules, who smuggle drugs by “stuffing” or swallowing them. They are what Vince, one of the young men interviewed, calls the “penny boys” or the “runners”, the people who take the big risks of being caught, but are not recompensed sufficiently for the risks involved. Paddy echoes this viewpoint:

Many of the small dealers tried to work (looked for work). They were in little jobs (low paid work). There was a stigma. People did not like that they were from here. Because of this, they started selling drugs to get a bit of money. It was normal. Now they get shot at and arrested.

While some people are selling drugs to feed their families, others have greater expectations and are involved in responding to the escalating needs created by consumer society:

Young men want money for show. Young fellows want cars and money. They want tackies, clothes, the best of stuff. They want the brand names (Declan).

Also involved are drug addicts who sell drugs in order to support their addiction.

Control over “patches” and drugs have led to gangland feuds between a select number of local families who make vast profits from drugs. This in turn has led to revenge attacks ordered by gang bosses:

You cannot lead an ordinary life. There are too many people looking for revenge. There is no end to the feuds. There are too many people dead (Dave).
Many people who have nothing to do with the feud can get caught up in the feud because of whom they are related to. Referring to his own experience, Niall said:

* A friend of mine was stabbed in the lungs, because his nephew was involved in the feud.

There are numerous accounts of serious violence:

* I knew a fellow who was smoking heroin. He did not have the money to pay for it. He got a beating. If they couldn’t get him, they’d get his brother. He turned to someone else to borrow the money. He did not know that they were part of the feud. He is caught in now and cannot get out. In fact his whole family is caught in the feud (Jason).

Joe is of the opinion that “once you are involved you cannot get out, they know your face”.

Violence and destruction has caused devastation on many streets:

* A bomb was found in a house beside me. Two or three houses down from me have been burned down twice (Owen).

* There are only two houses left on the block I live in. Six or seven have been burned down. The whole block at the back of us has been burned (Paddy).

* A pipe bomb was found in my friend’s back garden (Dave).

When tensions are high, normal life is disrupted over innocuous incidences:

* Stupid things are happening. A fight can start over a girlfriend. It gets out of hand and cannot be stopped (Dylan).

* The feud is brought everywhere. In the dole queue, there is always hassle (Niall).

**Children**

The impact, which the feuding is having on children, is enormous:

* Kids are listening to adults talking about the feuding. They know who is involved and say things like “your father killed my granddad” (Niall).

Even young children’s activities have to be curtailed:

* When kids come home from school, families do not let them play on the roads. They could get caught up in an argument with a child from a feuding family. Next thing you would know is that you would have your window blown in (Colm).

Tom who is 23 and Niall who is 29 years, both of whom have two children, agree with this viewpoint:
It has come to a situation where our kids cannot leave the house. It is difficult to mind the kids. There is a lot of drug dealing. It is not safe out there (Tom).

There is hassle all the time. This environment affects the children’s behaviour. I have noticed a change in the children’s behaviour for the worst since we have moved here (Niall).

Role of Women
The role of women in selling drugs tends to be supportive rather than pro-active and women tend only to be involved if their partner or family is involved. Women tend to play a subservient role in the drugs game. They provide shelter, hold and care-take drugs, as according to Joe “women are seldom searched”. They also keep networks of people in touch when arrests are made.

However, the male members of the families that control the drugs trade also control “their women”. They invest heavily in the possession of women and “having women” is central to their construction of what it is to be a man. Women are enticed into relationships with these men, as they possess money and prestige and the promise of material possessions:

They have the money. They have nice houses. They have 06 and 07 cars and jeeps (Dan).

The women are bought off by the men. The men can pawn off (placate) women with a new car and a holiday (Niall).

The women that they are involved with are generally young and good looking:

It is the status they get from being with good-looking girls. They bring them back to house parties and get them pregnant. Some of the women are on drugs (Mark).

Once involved, almost total control is exercised over women:

Women are “trophies”. The women cannot walk away or they would be killed. They want the women as trophies and to give them children. They own this one and that one. Most women live as single parents. They (the men) are scumbags (Mark).

Women cannot leave. There is no protection for them if they leave. They will be got at (Niall).

Men in the area are left in no doubt as to who is in control:

Other men are not allowed to solute the women if they meet them on the streets. You would be seen as trying to win them. There are certain things you can do, certain things you cannot do (in relation to the women) (Mark).
In situations, it is difficult for women to leave as they are highly at risk of domestic violence and abuse.

**Protecting the Family**
In times when the family is under threat, many men see their role as that of protector:

*Men see that it is their role to protect the family if the house is broken into or shot at* (Declan).

However, often men simultaneously become the protectors and the aggressors:

*Men make it worse. They use a tough image and guns. They protect through aggression. They are not working their minds. They are playing the man for the wrong reasons* (Declan).

The threat, however of daily violence renders many men powerless, particularly now that there are guns involved:

*Some families are being terrorised with shotguns. Grenades are thrown in windows and shots fired in the windows. Families are locking up the houses and leaving* (Colm).

*If your family is involved in the feud, the only way really to protect the family is to get the family out. It is very hard to stop the feud. It has gone on for too long. Too many have been killed. You cannot protect them from guns* (Dylan).

As some families leave, the consequences for people who are left behind are exacerbated:

*Gangs are buying houses. People are being forced out of their houses* (Mark).

With the depletion of house prices in these areas many cannot afford to leave:

*My parents are over 65 years. They cannot get out. They have bought their house from the Corporation. If they sold it, they would not have enough money to buy a house somewhere else* (Mark).

Many also, do not want to leave because of the importance of kinship ties and the density of kinship relationships in many localities. The majority of men interviewed had siblings and aunts and uncles and other extended kin who live nearby and were highly integrated into the communities. Despite the horrific violence, it is interesting to note that only two people stated that they would like to move out of the area in which they live.

**3.2 Protest Masculinity**
The importance of the street for youth gangs has been described in many sociological studies (Whyte 1943; Willmott 1969). Connell (1995) makes the point that many young men use the street to make a claim to power in the absence of any real educational or occupational resources. This he calls “protest masculinity”. The
sociologist, Robert K. Merton (1968: originally published in 1957), a half century ago in his essay “Social Structure and Anomie” showed how blocked opportunities for particular groups may lead to antisocial behaviour and creative solutions as they attempt to compete for the same goals as those who are more advantageously placed. It is not however only the material gains that are sought after in protest masculinity. The symbolic meaning of the activity is also important. Protest masculinity provides young men with recognition, an identity and a place in the world that has been denied to them.

The youth gang can be important in the lives of these young people. At a basic level it relieves boredom. Mark who is now 18 years recalls:

*Gangs are important. Our gang had 16 or 17 boys and girls. At 12 and 13 we used to drink and smoke cannabis. Fuck all else to do. Fuck all here. We just hung around drinking and having a laugh.*

Joe who is 19 years, also “drank cans in the park when he was young”. Dan contends that young children are now out at an earlier age, as young as ten years. Alcohol and other stimulants and the excitement of being in the group can lead to disruptive behaviour which impacts severely on neighbourhoods:

*Young kids are burning fires at night-time from the rubbish dumped by people in the fields nearby. The area is filthy. There are a lot of rats and needles all around* (Mark).

The point was made repeatedly that many families are afraid to challenge groups of young people for fear of retaliation, such as having their house burned down.

As the children grow older, many get involved in burglaries:

*They go around robbing houses. They are doing it to get money for drugs.*

(Jason).

*A lot are robbing to pay for drugs* (Dan).

The description given of street gangs is one, which causes severe neighbourhood harassment and disruption:

*A lot of young fellows hang around at night-time. There is no sign of them in the morning or afternoon. They come out at night-time. They stand around the corners talking and drinking. They have loud stereos. They are on the dole, living with their mothers and doing “nixers”* (Colm).

Stealing cars and joy riding is a common activity in many working class neighbourhoods and young people talk about the excitement and exhilaration involved (Rush et al 2006). Over time young people graduate through a series of stages from watching joy-riders to actually driving cars:

*Young fellows are hanging around saying - what will we do? Rob a car. When I was young I used to rob cars. I did it to see what it was like. At first I used to*
watch the older lads robbing cars. It is exciting. Everyone gathers around. Girls stand at the corners looking on. Then I was a passenger in the car. Then I drove. (Paddy).

Paddy explains further:

Generally there are three or four that rob and drive, say two in a car. They make up for the field. The odd girl is a passenger.

It is important to maintain control of the car and skill is needed to drive:

You have to keep control, make sure that you do not hit anything. People come out to watch the hand brake spin. Young fellows come out of the cracks in the walls looking at the spinning (Chris).

Finally many of the cars are burned out:

I used to bring cars up at 11 or 12 at night time. Now the young fellows are bringing them up 8 or 9 at night. They burn the cars. I ended up in prison. Never again. There is no freedom when you are locked up (Chris).

Although there is excitement for those involved, for many of the young men interviewed and for the community as a whole, joy riding is not only dangerous but puts peoples’ lives at risk. Most of the young men interviewed, even if they were involved in the past would not condone joy riding now. It is one activity, which adds to the total disorganisation and turmoil in working class areas:

Cars are speeding up and down, horses and sulkies flying up and down the road, jeeps are speeding beside the horses to see how fast the horses are going, young children are on quads. The place is mad (Niall).

Joy riding is overwhelmingly an activity of older teenagers who temporarily take control of the public domain, transcending their feelings of powerlessness and boredom through ‘displays of risk, excitement, masculinity and even carnivalesque pleasure’ (Rush et al 2006 quoting Hayward, 2004). It creates a sense of excitement, enacted ritualistic defiance and most importantly, is an opportunity to publicly demonstrate skills before audiences and so gain social status and “street cred” in a context where their lives are characterised by educational failure, bleak prospects and high alcohol and drug use. It is what Lyng (1990) describes as “edgework”. In edgework there is an emphasis on skill and performance which if not successful can lead to injury and death. The risk involved creates a heightened sense of self and a feeling of “omnipotence”. McVerry (2003) sees joy-riding as the ultimate expression of alienation.

Alienation and social disenchantment with the gardai is another theme that comes across strongly in conversations with young people in disadvantaged areas and a number of publications have pointed to the link between lack of confidence in and antagonistic relations with the gardai and social marginalistaion (Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System, 1985 (the Whitaker Report); McVerry 2003; Mucahy
Aggressive patrolling and targeted street searches by the gardai are experienced as harassment by young people. Joe states:

Young people doing nothing get “pulled”. You could be just going to Supermacs and you’d get pulled.

Hostility towards the gardai was expressed by Vince and Joe:

People in our area do not like the gardai. They are “rats” (Vince).

They (gardai) are muppets and scumbags” (Joe).

Brian continued:

If they stop me in the car I won’t get out of the car. I’d be afraid that I’d get battered (Brian).

Other young people feel looked down on, not respected and stigmatised:

Some gardai are very judging. If you drive around, you get surrounded by gardai. They pulled us and ask for our name and address. He (the garda) threw his eyes up in the air, and said “another one, aren’t ye all the same from there” (Mark).

While some young people are not hostile towards the gardai, they feel that they are not effective:

I have nothing against them. They are on bikes and walking around. They are not making much of a difference (Colm).

The gardai have little control. They can’t do much. They can’t catch the drug dealers (Paddy).

In the present study, many young men mentioned that the community gardai were “ok” and even “helpful”. Some felt that many of the community gardai understood them and engaged with them in such activities as kicking football. Some also mentioned that they were sympathetic when they told them how their horses had been impounded.

Some young men indicated a need for gardai who were familiar with the local area and understood the local culture. They regretted the change in garda practice from being “on the beat” to patrolling in cars. Bringing more gardai back on the beat would create greater confidence in the gardai and strengthen the links between the gardai and the community:

If more gardai were walking around it would do a lot of good (Mark).

Four men indicated that they had spent time in prison. Some had been to prison on several occasions. Three received sentences for drink and anger related crimes and
one person received as sentence for stealing cars. They are making a determined effort to remain crime-free.

Although prison sentence was initially seen as a “badge of honour”, generally young men found it difficult to serve the sentence. Colm who is now 28 and has two children was “locked-up” for being drunk and disorderly. He found prison very difficult:

*It was terrible. You had no privacy. It was crazy.*

Tom who is 23 years got involved in crime through drink and received an 18 month prison sentence. He spent time in Castlerea and Midlands prisons. He now feels that he has been given a second-chance and is living with his mother and step-father. He has two sons and intends to remain out of crime.

Niall who is now 29 years says:

*When I was young I was very angry. I was in a gang. I thought I was the bees knees, high on cider. After a few times in jail, depression kicked in. I knew that I had to do something about my life. Prison copped me out (did his head in). Once when I was up before the courts, I asked the judge not to lock me up and the judge gave me a chance.*

Chris, who is now 25 years was committed to prison for stealing and robbing cars. He is now living with his partner and two children. He is looking for work and intends to stay out of crime.

Within Irish culture the emotional importance of the mother in the family has been widely noted (O’Connor 1998). Many young men interviewed had very high regard for their mothers and acknowledged their key role in supporting them and in helping them to stay out of crime. For almost all, the relationships men had with their mother were extremely important. What came across is that mothers are seen as a tower of strength and when everything else fails mothers support their sons:

*My mother was a chain, she kept us all together. Not many could have done what she did with no support. I got my mother’s strength. I had no father to control me. I had to make my own decisions (Niall).*

*My father died when I was very young. My mother was a great figure for me, and girlfriends helped me a lot (Dan).*

*I am trying to get my life back on track. My mother pulled me back (Tom).*

### 3.3 Loss of Public Space

Several studies describe that men dominate public spaces and studies such as Liebow’s *Tally’s Corner* (1967) and Whyte’s *Street Corner Society* (1943) show how important the street is for unemployed men. Willott and Griffin (1996) suggest that
the pub is important for working class men where they can escape from domesticity and find expression and reinforcement of what it is to be a man.

Although some men do indeed frequent the local pubs, many men expressed a fear of going to the local pubs because of the prevalence of violence:

\[ I \text{ do not go to the pub. I am paranoid about fights (Niall).} \]

\[ I \text{ is too dangerous to go to the pub. I stay at home with my girlfriend and watch television. At weekends we get a few cans (Dave).} \]

Mark explains the type of danger he can encounter in the pub:

\[ To \text{ meet these men (drug barons) in the local pub they are very nice people. They know that you know that you cannot mess with them. When I have drink on it encourages me to slag them off. This is a dangerous situation to be in.} \]

Walking around the community for many is restricted:

\[ You \text{ cannot walk to the shop. You get jumped. You get mugged (Colm).} \]

\[ You \text{ can’t walk around the road without looking to see who is behind you. It got very bad two to four years ago (Jason).} \]

\[ You \text{ cannot solute people. You cannot talk to people. You don’t know who you are talking to (Joe).} \]

It can also be dangerous to go into Limerick City or to visit other working class areas of Limerick, even when you are not involved in the feud:

\[ You \text{ cannot go into town. You cannot go into another community, even if you are neutral and not involved. It is too dangerous. If you are seen moving around, someone would think that you are dealing in drugs (Dave).} \]

\[ I \text{ visited my sister in another area. Word got around that we were in the area and six shots hit the car. You can’t move from area to area. I can’t go to visit relatives (Niall).} \]

\[ I \text{ gave a mate a lift home. Turning round the block, there was a crowd shouting, “you are dead”. I drove off (Dave).} \]

3.4 Sport and Recreational Facilities
Everyday activity for many interviewed, if they were not attending projects consisted of “hanging around, doing nothing in particular”. Several including Kevin who is 23 years and Davy who is 19 years and not married mentioned that they would stay in bed until mid-day. This relieved some of the boredom for the morning. A typical afternoon could involve “watching television in a mate’s house” (Vince, Tom). At the weekends, “I’d phone a few friends and get them over for a few cans. We would put
on the play station and U Tube”. Many spent many hours watching sport on television.

For those who are good at sport, however, it allows for the display of physical skills, toughness, control and detachment. A major rationale for some playing was to “kept fit” and kept them out of trouble.

Twelve of the 18 men interviewed had strong attachment to sport and some had engaged in a very high level. One played under age soccer for Ireland, one played under age hurling for the county and one was in a provincial boxing final. Some were still very involved with sporting activities. One man organised the local soccer team. Many trained regularly during the tournament season:

I love sport. I train every Tuesday, Thursday and play matches on Sunday.
There are about 50 involved in the soccer. I got fellows involved in the soccer that you would not think would kick a ball. I knocked at doors to get them up out of bed for a match. To keep fit is very important (Dylan).

There was a strong view that the neighbourhoods were severely under-resourced in terms of recreational facilities, and facilities were unevenly spread throughout neighbourhoods. Vince’s view was supported by many others:

There is sweet fuck all to do here now. It is a dive.

Although soccer was a popular activity for many young people, one area had no club house. In another area, although there is a “soccer academy”, there is no soccer pitch and young people have to be transported outside the area by coach for soccer practice. Other facilities mentioned which were needed included:

- More age-related activities, for instance, there is need for interventions which target the young people between the ages of 12 and 16 who are causing great difficulties at neighbourhood level
- Adventure sports for young people interested in such activities as racing bikes
- Equine projects.

After soccer and GAA, many young people were passionate about horses. In the 1980s and 1990s, urban horse ownership became very much a working class phenomenon, and not just something, which belonged to the Traveller Community. In response to publicity about “wandering” horses, the Control of Horses Act 1997 was introduced. Local authorities are now responsible for the operation of this Act and are grant aided by the Department of Agriculture and Food to operate the Act. A whole series of conditions exist under which horses can be impounded, including if the horse is suspected of straying, causing a nuisance or if there is not a licence for the horse.

Jason expressed his love for horses as follows:

I have one horse here. It is a pony and does not cost too much. I love horses. I love just sitting there watching them. I love watching them trotting or racing.
(Jason).
Young people were angry about the fact that they were not supported to engage with horses in the absence of recreational facilities:

*The thing that did work was the horses. Now the Pound takes them. It is a dangerous place now, fuck all to do* (Jason).

*Everyone loves horses. I love horses. All I wanted was horses. The gardai and pound took them. They brought them to Cork* (Paddy).

Several other people had similar experiences to Jason and Paddy. They also resented the fact that one of the feuding families had horses wandering around and was seemingly immune to the law, as their horses were not seized.

3.5 Conclusion

The local area is important to the men interviewed. There is a strong sense of place, which they know intimately and are highly connected to through kinship.

The brutal violence that families encounter at a neighbourhood level has devastated communities. In the words of one man:

*Drugs have broken us. Drugs changed everything in our community. Through greed and power, the whole town is torn apart* (Paddy).

As vast amounts of wealth became available through the drugs trade, revenge became the new ethic and drug dealing brought death and devastation onto the streets. The people who are suffering the most are the ordinary families. They are the neighbours of the drug barons, and are virtually imprisoned in their own communities.

A murder, a burst of automatic fire or the burning down of a house are high profile activities. There is however low-level everyday violence and intimidation that eats away at people and creates fear and anxiety. Men feel intimidated going to the pub, or to the shop or walking around in the neighbourhoods. Visiting relatives in other working class areas in Limerick is also not to be taken lightly. The public spaces that men were so used to occupying have been taken away.

Fear however has not yet been instilled into young disaffected boys who underachieve at school and have few opportunities open to them. The opportunity to engage with horses, which many young people have a great affection for, has been taken away. Recreational and sporting facilities in many areas are underdeveloped.

It is not surprising that many young people are susceptible to getting involved in anti-social behaviour that is severely disruptive to the community. Some of the boys are as young as ten and are involved in neighbourhood harassment and disruption - setting rubbish on fire, drinking, robbing houses and finally joy riding in stolen cars. Connell (1995) refers to this phenomenon as “protest masculinity”. Protest masculinity is a “tough guy” assertion. It is the assertion of a masculinity where much of the traditional routes of respectability have been closed off.
A hierarchy of masculinities exerts itself on the streets. Many of young lads between 10 to 13 years graduate from street drinking to robbing houses, robbing cars, joy riding and prison as they observe and emulate the older lads. The older lads in turn see the crime bosses as heroes and want to be like them. Success is making it against all odd odds – flirting with danger and taking risks, yet steering clear of the gardai.

Connell (2005) however makes the point that young people who follow this strategy end up in a *cul de sac*, which can only be sustained by living in an “extended present” which is a heightened sense of excitement where only the present matters (O’Connor forthcoming). In the present study, many young people in their teenage years lived “for the present” but now realise that they need to create a future. Some are not hopeful that the future will be better than where they are at present.

Young people view the gardai with suspicion and hostility. Many feel unfairly targeted, not respected and stereotyped. Paralleling a strategy to combat organised crime and drugs related activity, some young people favour a community approach to policing. They would also like to see more gardai “on the beat” as opposed to a “patrol-car” approach to policing. A relational, as opposed to a control-over approach to local policing would create greater confidence in the gardai and strengthen the links between the gardai and the community.

What came across in the interviews is that many young men when they reach early to mid twenties are marooned in a social and cultural environment where it is extremely difficult for them to construct a life that ‘makes sense’ in any terms. Many of them have been through the stages of drinking in fields, causing mayhem on streets and some have been involved in joy-riding. Some have been to prison. Others were on the periphery or observers of anti social behaviour or crime.

The view coming across in interviews is that these young men want a chance to do something with their lives. They are ready to engage. Some have found community based projects to engage with and are doing well, as is outlined in Section Two. However, much more needs to be done.
4. The Changing Role of Men in the Family

There is a growing interest, both internationally and in Ireland, regarding the changing role of men in the household and the role that men play as fathers. The debate on the changing role of men and women is taking place in the context of rapid social and demographic changes which has brought about the diversity of family types leading to an increasing diversity of “types of fathers” including non-resident fathers, step-fathers, lone fathers and gay fathers. The diversity in family situations can mean there are revolving doors to family life with many parents and children living together only some of the time.

In Ireland, women’s role in the workforce has increased and only one-third of families fit the traditional family model where the male is the sole “breadwinner” (Mc Ginnity et al 2007). Given the increased role of women in the workforce, one would expect some parallel increase in men’s participation in caring and housework. The most recent Irish evidence shows that although there is some shift in the amount of housework and caring work men do, women spend almost five times longer than men on adult and child caring work and more than twice the amount of time on household work (Mc Ginnity et al, 2007).

The social and demographic changes also include a steady increase in the number of one-parent families, mainly headed by mothers. Eighty-six per cent of lone parents are women and one-parent families now comprise 18 per cent of all families. In the neighbourhoods under discussion over 45 per cent of families with children less than 15 years are headed by lone parents, the majority of whom are women (Haase and Pratschke 2005).

Kiernan’s (2006) explanation for the increase in lone motherhood in disadvantaged areas is that many women feel that they cannot rely on men to support the children financially. Rather than have irregular payments coming in, they opt to parent alone, and to rely the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) to support their children.

Nine of the 18 men interviewed have children. Between them, they have 15 children. While many embrace fatherhood with enthusiasm, it is possible that some men may not be aware that they have fathered children or some men may deny that they have fathered a child. As Tom states:

*Some men get girls pregnant and don’t want to know them. They do a runner.*

All of the nine men who have children have some contact with their children. Three of the nine who have children are living with the mother of the child(ren). Two of these men are the main carers and the mothers are the main breadwinners and one man is the main breadwinner.

One of the nine is a lone parent as his partner “left for England”.

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2 Twenty-seven per cent of one parent families are living in consistent poverty compared to 7 per cent of the population as a whole.
The remaining five men who have children are non-resident fathers.

The large proportion of men living in their parents’ house is notable. In all, nine of the 18 men interviewed are living in their parents’ house. This includes three non-resident fathers.

4.1 Housework and Care of Children
In line with national trends there is some evidence that men are doing more housework and are involved in caring for their children even if only in a “helping capacity”.

Sixteen of the 18 men interviewed “help out” in the house, with only two men stating that they would not do housework:

*I help out at home. Things have changed. I do the hovering upstairs and polishing. I do the shopping every Friday* (Tom).

It has been widely noted that men’s participation in their children’s lives has increased and questions have been raised as to what fathers do with their children and who takes responsibility for the organisation of childcare and associated tasks. Joe is of the opinion that the role of men in caring for children has changed significantly and talked about being a different kind of a dad from his father:

*Things are changing. A lot of men walk around with prams. This was very different from my father’s time.*

Dan also feels that roles are changing:

*Men are much more involved with their children. Fatherhood has much more standing than it had years ago. Parents should be accountable for their kids.*

Despite men’s increased role in housework and the care of children, men perceive that women have the main responsibility for children. Three men specifically referred to the greater freedom which men have:

*Men can take off. Women are more involved with the children. The mother always has to be there. Mothers are great* (Joe).

*They (women) can’t move – they have to stay with the kids – I guess that this makes life more difficult for them* (Jason).

*The man can get up and walk. Children are more women’s responsibility. Women have it hard. Men can get up and take off* (Chris).

Dylan who lives with his mother “helps out”, but is also sceptical about the role of some of his friends:

*You won’t get many to do housework. Women do most of the housework. I know a lot of lads with children who would not bother.*
Declan explained it this way:

*There is still the old way of thinking. Men do the building work, women do the caring work. There is need for men to get over the macho image of what it is to be a man.*

Colm talks about how the role of some men has changed, while other men continue to opt for a traditional role:

*Some men have changed. A lot of my friends are staying at home and the women are going out to work. Sometimes they are stressed out looking after the kids. At the end of the day it has to be done. Other men come home from work and go to the pub and stay there all evening. They don’t see the kids.*

Two of the 18 men interviewed are the main care-takers as their partners are the main earners. One other man is in receipt of the Carer’s Allowance and is caring for his mother who is ill. In these situations there is some evidence that there was genuine role reversal with the men doing most of the work traditionally done by women:

*I get them (children) up for school, collect them and make their dinner. I don’t sit down until they are in bed. I am there for my kids (Niall).*

*This is a big change. I wash the dishes. I do the shopping. I love kids. I push a pram and would not care what people thought. They are your own children (Chris).*

In the present study, there is some evidence that all five non-resident fathers wished to retain an involvement with their children. One non-resident father has an agreement with his ex partner to jointly care for their children and has the children overnight three nights a week. Three non-resident fathers have/had cases in the family law courts.

There is anger among non-resident men against the legal system:

*Unmarried men are discriminated against. They get an unfair deal. They do not have rights, yet have to pay maintenance. If a couple is married it is 50/50 custody – four days with one parent and three days with the other (Colm).*

Many had difficulty coping with their former partners after the relationship ended. There is also a lot of distrust between women and men. Chris felt that having the children gave women power over men:

*For the first while she let me take the kids. Now she is using the kids to control me.*

In Ireland in a context where child-care has to date been overwhelmingly done by mothers there is increasing discussion about the extent to which family law discriminates against men, particularly unmarried men. (Ferguson and Horan 2004; McKeown and Ferguson 1998; Commission of the Family 1998). There is an absence
in the Irish Constitution of any constitutional recognition of the rights of unmarried fathers. In the present study, concerns were raised about alleged inequalities in the treatment of unmarried fathers before the law in terms of access and custody. Unmarried fathers are asserting their rights to guardianship and the related rights of custody and access.

4.2 Economic Barriers to Supporting Families
Poverty and the lack of material resources is likely to affect the decisions of unemployed men to have children, establish a home or to get married. Kiernan (2006) draws our attention specifically to the economic barriers, which unemployed men encounter in making a decision to have children. For some men if they do not have the economic resources to support a family, it is better to avoid having children than failing to meet one’s obligations.

None of the 18 men interviewed for the present study were ever married. One man commented on the fact that marriage in his community is a very rare event.

Many men interviewed, now in their early 20s would like to settle down and have a family. The difficulty they encounter is the lack of any likelihood of getting a decent job because of low education qualifications and poor work history.

Dylan, aged 22 years who has no children would like to settle down:

I would love to be able to support a family. I feel that this is not possible at the moment. I have not a decent job. I have no qualifications.

Not having a breadwinner role affects a man’s sense of self:

It emotionally affects a man that he cannot support a family. It leads to anger. He can feel that it is not fair (Declan).

Both Chris and Niall, who are full-time carers in the home would also like to work outside the home. Chris is of the view that “you need the money coming in”, but is finding it very difficult to find work. Niall because he has a mental health difficulty would like part-time work:

I would not be able to work full-time due to depression but would like to get on to a CE scheme. I would love a job. I am nearly 30 and still have nothing. I have no proven work history. I would love to have money to provide for my kids. I need a job to help me to move on (Niall).

4.3 Confiding in Others
It has been widely noted that confiding in others is more common amongst women than men (O’Connor et al, 2002) and that there is a tendency for many men to shut down emotionally and to deny their own vulnerabilities of grief, loss and loneliness, as this is a sign of male weakness.
The absence of a willingness to confide in others was found in the present study. Sixteen of the 18 men stated that they would have not confide in others if they had an emotional difficulty. Reaching out to others was seen as a weakness:

_ I would not talk about things bothering me. Men keep it all in. Fellows are frightened to talk to other fellows. They are afraid that the fellows will talk about it to someone else. I would try and sort it out myself (Dylan).

_Men find it difficult to open up. They put on a brave face (Colm)._ 

In a context of what Rich (1980) calls “compulsory heterosexuality”, confiding with other men can be equated with gay sexual activity, which according to Connell (1995) is a socially subordinated masculinity within a hierarchy of masculinities. Vince feels that to talk about feelings goes against his sense of what it is to be a man:

_It is pansy stuff. I am not one for shared love stuff. If you told about your troubles in our group you would get a smack in the jaw (Vince)._ 

For many men, difficulties confiding in others extends to counselling:

_ I am going to a counsellor (mandated by the court because of alcohol abuse). Don’t see how she can help me. I lost my relationship through drink/gambling, but no counsellor can help me. I have been talking to her for five weeks. It is all me telling her (Mark). _

Not being able to confide can lead to anger. As Miller (1991) points out, if anger in men is not resolved it can lead to violence and aggression. Dylan explains:

_Men can’t say how they feel. In the pub, they start roaring and shouting. They take the aggression out on someone else – what the fuck are you looking at? _

For one man counselling helped him to resolve trauma that had been there for many years:

_The Probation Service really helped me. They kept me in line. They are great counsellors in themselves. I was holding everything on my chest. The Probation told me “these need to come out”. I was trapped in a hole, no light. Prison would do that to you. You would let no one know. I held everything on my chest. It was eating me up slowly. I felt better when I could speak up. I sat and cried for hours and copped on that this was not normal behaviour. Something was wrong and I needed psychiatric help. (Niall) _

4.4 Hopes for their Children
All nine men who had children expressed a commitment to their child(ren) and acknowledged the positive impact that becoming a father had on them. Having a child challenged them to have some level of stability in their lives and to take some responsibility for their children. Many mentioned their determination “stay out of trouble” because they now have children.
Their hopes for their children revolved around their children having more opportunities than they themselves had. They recognised the key role which education has in providing their children with good work opportunities and a good lifestyle:

*I would like to see them going to college and getting a good job. I would hope that the kids make something of their life and do better than me* (Tom).

A major concern was that their children would not become involved in crime:

*I hope that they keep out of trouble and settle down* (Dan).

In addition, if the feuding and violence ended, children would have a more peaceful life:

*What would help kids is to end the feuding and let them have their childhood* (John).

### 4.5 Conclusion

Traditionally in Ireland, family life has been organised around the male as “breadwinner” and his wife as carer and housekeeper, financially dependent on her husband (O’Connor and Shorthall 1999). This has changed significantly, with one-third of households now having a male breadwinner only (McGinnity 2007). However, there is some evidence that particularly among men in their 20s, men’s sense of masculinity still revolves strongly around the breadwinner role (O’Connor et al. 2002).

Many of the men interviewed do not have work in the traditional meaning of having a “job”. Not having work profoundly affects a man’s sense of self and makes it difficult for him to support a family. The literature correctly identifies the importance of addressing issues relating to the feminisation of poverty but has neglected to study the consequences of poverty on men. The impact of poverty on men urgently needs to be examined.

Much debate has taken place about “absent fathers” and the invisibility of men in some communities has given rise to a concern about children growing up in fatherless households and lacking stable adult male role models (Corcoran 2005). It is contended that this can have a negative impact upon children in terms of their intellectual and emotional development. A key point made in the literature, however, is that no universal claims can be made about the impact of the father’s involvement on the outcome for children and Fetherstone (2007) contends that poverty and race are more likely to be factors than the presence or absence of fathers.

There is some evidence in the present study that traditional gender patterns are changing and that men are taking on a greater role in doing housework, although it would appear that it is more a “helping hand” than a decisive shift. As Ferguson notes (1998), the discourse and language around the “new father” has more to do with changing cultural expectations than behaviour, as the gap is revealed between culture and conduct. However, in the present study where the woman was the sole earner in the household there was an acceptance that the men would undertake domestic and
child-care work. Also, one man was a carer and carried out the main household and caring work. It was also apparent that men who have children want a relationship with their children and want to be involved in the lives of their children.

Non-resident unemployed fathers with few economic resources face many challenges. From the point of view of the men and from the viewpoint of supporting lone mothers, a clearer understanding is needed, than the present exploratory study can give on the reaction of non-resident fathers to fatherhood and the role which they wish to play, and, what might help or hinder their positive involvement in their child’s upbringing. Non-resident fathers in the present study wish to have contact with their children and some are asserting their rights as fathers in relation to children through the courts.

Women writers such as Chodorow (1978) as quoted by Fetherstone (2007) argue for breaking the female monopoly on caring for children. Chodorow argues that the gendered division of care-taking in which mothers are exclusively responsible for children, both boys and girls, is a key factor in the creation and perpetuation of male dominance. The key to understanding why men and women develop as they do, as well as why men continue to dominate women, lies in the fact that women, not men, mother. Strategies supporting the rights of fathers to care for their children are potentially a challenge to patriarchy (Featherstone et al 2007). However, supporting the rights of fathers needs to be done within the context of children’s welfare and gender equity. Not to locate it within this framework could lead to reinforcing traditional male power over women and children. It also needs to take into consideration the dangers posed by abusive men to women and children, particularly in terms of custody and access as stressed by the violence against women’s movement (Kelleher Associates and O’Connor 1995; Office of the Tanaiste 1997).

Taking on a changing role in the family poses serious challenges to men, not only to develop the skills of housework and caring, but also to develop the capacity for relationship competence and emotional communication (Ferguson 1998). The present exploratory study indicates that men’s capacity to open up emotionally is limited. Furthermore, men at the margins experience the additional difficulties of not having a secure income to support a family. It is clear from this study that any strategy for transforming the dynamics of relationships between men and women needs to be worked out in different cultural and class contexts.
5. Overall Summary and Conclusions

5.1 Education and Careless Transitions
The 18 young men in this exploratory study grew up in areas designated under the RAPID (Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment and Development) Programme as socio-economically disadvantaged. The majority were disaffected from the school environment and school culture from an early age. It was little wonder that making the transition from primary to secondary school was complex and difficult, as this transition involves managing a wide variety of subjects, a more academic language and relating to many different teachers. They left school early without formal qualifications. Some left school with their special needs unmet.

Alongside difficulties with the education system, these young people struggled with a multitude of other factors outside the school, which affected their ability to learn. These included neighbourhood violence, traumatic loss of friends and relatives and social and emotional difficulties. Schools are in a good position to identify the social and emotional difficulties that interfere with learning. To address these risk factors, schools need to be highly resourced to liaise with other services and plan a response.

Young men without educational credentials make what O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) refer to as “careeerless transitions” to insecure, low paid jobs or are not able to get work at all. An additional obstacle to getting work is the discrimination they experience because of where they live and competition for low paid work from migrant workers (Chapter Two).

Not having work affects their prospects of settling down and establishing a home. As young adults they see themselves as personifications of failure because they share the values of the wider culture in wanting to have a “decent” job to support a family. Their feelings of hopelessness are even more acute given the upturn in the economy and the prosperity and expectations generated by the Celtic Tiger.

Many young people benefit from special education projects that are person-centred have small classes and where a relational, informal approach to learning is adopted. These models are participatory, affirm the self-esteem of the young person and also foster closer and stronger relationships between the young people and teachers. In such a context, young people can feel more connected. These models contrast with that of many services, which operate along hierarchal lines, are impersonal in nature and provide for little consultation with the users of services

Some young adults are returning to education realising that they need qualifications and skills to get a decent job to support themselves and their families. There is a clear need for more special education projects for young adults at local level, which are linked to progression routes to apprenticeship training and employment.

5.2. Young Fathers
Many young fathers separated from their family want to retain an involvement with their children. Young fathers who have limited economic resources face specific challenges in supporting their children (Chapter Four). Also, they are challenged not
only to develop the skills of housework and caring but also to develop the capacity for relationship competence and emotional communication (Ferguson 1998; Featherstone et al 2007). There is need for a clearer understanding than we have at present on the response of non-resident fathers to fatherhood, what having children means to them and on the role, which they would like to play as fathers.

5.3 Violence and Loss of Public Space
Control in the communities is exercised by a small number of families who control the distribution of drugs and other criminal activity. The escalation of violence, resulting from the drugs trade has devastated communities. Anti social behaviour is also a feature of many young lads between 10 to 13 years who graduate from street drinking to robbing houses, robbing cars, joy riding and prison as they observe and emulate the older lads. The older lads in turn see the crime bosses as heroes and want to be like them (Chapter Three).

There is need for a greater number of interventions, which can disrupt the stages of violence through which many young people progress. Equine projects, so much loved by many young people and which have been taken away from them and greater resourced recreational projects and adventure sports facilities could be a gateway to help redress the disconnections with the world which many young people feel. Such projects could help to build self-esteem and positive connections with others.

There is a lot of unresolved anger and intimidation around “revenge” killings. People begin to believe that their “loved one” who has been killed is of no value. Bereavement and anger can manifest in inter-generational feuding, which needs to be addressed through a variety of interventions, including more streetwork, bereavement counselling and groupwork. There is also need for more men to be involved in community development work, a sector that has been mainly dominated by women.

The local area is important to the young men interviewed. There is a strong sense of place, which they know intimately, and, are highly connected to through kinship. Families experience low-level everyday violence and intimidation that creates fear and anxiety. Because of the violence, men feel restricted walking around their community, frequenting local pubs and even visiting pubs in other areas and in Limerick City. Despite the violence and the loss of public space, it is interesting to note that only two people stated that they would like to move out of the area in which they live. Many reported that friends and families were being forced to move out of their houses because of the violence. In addition there are people who wish to leave but feel they cannot because of intimidation. A comprehensive protection and support programme is needed for both men and women who wish to leave the community.

Ensuring that these communities are made safe needs to be a key priority of law enforcement agencies. There is also need to enhance the visibility of public services which are seen are retreating from communities. Local people are increasingly required to travel to Limerick city centre in order to access services.

Paralleling a strategy to combat organised crime and drugs related activity, there is need for greater links between gardai and the local community. What has been called a “relational” approach to local policing would create greater confidence in the gardai
and strengthen the links between the gardai and the community. In this context there is need for more gardai “on the beat” and for community policing fora to be established.

5.4 Need for Structural and Institutional Change
What comes across in the interviews is that many young men when they reach their early to mid twenties are marooned in a social and cultural environment where it is extremely difficult for them to construct a life that ‘makes sense’ in any terms. They are “bystanders” of two cultures – an alien mainstream culture and a hard-core criminal sub culture, which permeates communities. Many of these young people are ready to engage with projects and services. However, there are few interventions for young people in their early twenties.

Many young people feel powerless in their interaction with state agencies and there is a great sense that the needs of families are not being met. Neighbourhoods are fractured by poverty, drugs, social exclusion and crime. The challenge for the recently established Limerick Re-generation Programme is to make the built-environment more resident-friendly. Major social and economic regeneration also needs to take place. In this context, the challenge for agencies is to come together to deliver comprehensive, integrated, respectful specialist and mainstream responses to the needs of these young men.

The need for a radical overhaul of how services have traditionally been delivered is acknowledged by the Chief Executive of the Limerick Regeneration Programme (Hayes 2007). We can also learn from lessons emerging from the Children’s Services Committees being rolled-out by the Office of the Minister for Children where the school is seen as a focal point in the co-ordination of services (Personal communication with the Office). A similar concentrated emphasis needs to be put on integrating services for the over 18 year olds. Most importantly, there is need for one agency to take responsibility for co-ordinating a response to the needs of these young men.

Change requires inter-agency identification of individual needs and joint planning of service delivery. Inter-agency protocols and better systems of co-ordination between different players need to be put in place in relation to care, education, criminal justice services and family support. In delivering programmes, the methodologies developed by special education projects in the community can provide some guidelines.

Paralleling reform at a local level, reform needs to take place at national level. Barrington (1976) noted thirty years ago that there has been a failure of successive governments to “grasp the nettle” to devolve powers to local government and broaden the range of activities of local government. Devolution needs to be undertaken within a national framework and where there is effective alignment between national, regional and local policies and programmes.
Appendix A

Interview Questions

Introduction: Thank you for making the time for these one-to-one interviews. The interview should take no longer than one hour. By gathering this information we hope it will help government agencies and community organisations in Limerick to take the needs of young men into consideration in the planning of their programmes. We would like to assure you of complete confidentiality. Your name and any details, which might identify you, will not be used. If you decide to participate in this study, you may decline to answer any of the questions asked. Further, you may choose to withdraw from the interview at any time. There are a number of areas we would like to cover but if you feel that there are specific issues that you wish to raise please feel free to do so.

ID Number:
Age:
Neighbourhood currently living in:
Neighbourhood lived in growing up:

1. Could you tell me about your family and about the community you lived in growing up?

2. Do you see your life as being different from that of your father’s? In what way?

3. In working class areas, are there advantages/disadvantages to being a boy as opposed to a girl? What about being a man as opposed to a woman?

4. It is said that men’s role vis a vis women is changing in relation to: their role in the family; household work; and looking after children. Do you think that this is changing? If so, how?

5. Is it important for a man to be the main breadwinner or not really? Is this getting more or less difficult for men? What work is available for men in your community?

6. When you were growing up, were you closer to your mother or your father? What about now?

7. What does it mean to be a man today? As a man, where do you feel most at home? (e.g. pub, bookies, at a match or other sporting event? watching tv with family? ).

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Interviewees are from one of five areas in Limerick City: Our lady of Lourdes, St. Munchin’s, Moyross, Southill and St. Mary’s
8. What is your day-to-day life like? Tell me about yesterday. Do the week-ends differ in any way? Say last week-end.

9. It has often been said that men find it difficult to express feelings that it is difficult for them to acknowledge fear or vulnerability or to confide in people. What do you think of this?

10. Some men look for prestige and status through involvement in gangs, reckless driving, physical violence, daring robbery etc., what you might call “laddish” behaviour. Is this true for some young men in your community? If yes, why do you think that they get involved in this type of behaviour?

11. There is a lot of public discussions about the availability of drugs, particularly heroin in working class communities, how is this affecting your community?

12. Do you feel that society is fair or not? In what ways? What do you see as the main barriers experienced by young men in working class areas in achieving success? What would you mean by success?

13. Have you felt disrespected by people in the community or people from outside the community? (little recognition, discrimination because of address, refused permission to enter night clubs).

14. Were you ever up before the courts? If yes, what age were you and what was your experience e.g. fear, shame, anger, let down family. What was the worst thing about it?

15. How would you describe your relationship with your father? Were there particular activities which you did with him when you were younger e.g. fishing, football, crime. Was this important for you or not really?

16. What did you want out of life when you were young? Have you realised your dreams? What hopes have you/would you have for your children?

17. Many people have had negative experiences of school and the education system. What was school like for you?

18. What do you see as the strengths of your community (informal coping strategies, community rituals, celebrations)? Are there strong local organisations? Is there strong local leadership? Are there activities which men like you could get involved in?

19. What do you think needs to be done (e.g. housing re-generation, education system, community development, men’ groups, recreation activity, parenting courses, training and access to jobs) to improve the opportunities for young men living in (mention area)?

20. When you think of yourself in five years time, what do you see?
21. Is there anything that I have not asked or we have not talked about that you think is important?

   Thank you very much for talking to me
Appendix B

Participant Information Letter

Inset date

Dear (insert potential participant’s name)

This letter is an invitation to participate in a study on the experiences, challenges and support needs of young men in working class areas of Limerick City.

The study is being conducted by Patricia and Carmel Kelleher from kelleherassociates and Pat O’Connor from the University of Limerick.

We are interested in talking to young men between the ages of 18 and 30 from some of the economically disadvantaged areas of Limerick City to find out what life is like for young men today. By gathering this information we hope it will help government agencies and community organisations in Limerick to take the needs of young men into consideration in the planning of their programmes. We would like to assure you of complete confidentiality and your name or any details, which might identify you, will not be used.

Participants in the study will be interviewed by either Carmel Kelleher or Patricia Kelleher. The interview will last approximately one hour.

If you decide to participate in this study, you may decline to answer any of the questions posed. Further you may choose to withdraw from the interview at any time.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information please contact Patricia Kelleher, 027-73344 or patriciakelleher@eircom.net.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Patricia Kelleher, kelleherassociates

Carmel Kelleher, M. Soc. Sc., kelleherassociates

DR. Pat O’Connor, University of Limerick
Appendix C

Consent Form

- I consent to participate in the study on *Young Men in Disadvantaged Areas.*
- I have read and understood the information letter provided to me.
- I understand that the study is about the lives of young men in disadvantaged areas of Limerick City and how government might respond to their needs.
- I understand that no details that reveal my identity will be used in any publication or report following on from the study.
- My participation is voluntary; that I may refuse to answer any question and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
- I have had sufficient time to read and consider this consent form and the information letter.
- I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to these study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

Participant’s Signature:

Date:
About the Authors

kelleherassociates
Patricia Kelleher and Carmel Kelleher established kelleherassociates in 1987. kelleherassociates has an acknowledged expertise on a range of issues relating to social inclusion and marginalisation. The firm has an interest in knowledge transfer, particularly in the area of policy formulation and strategic planning and has advised many government departments and agencies. kelleherassociates has extensive experience working in the area of social exclusion, including community planning, family studies and gender issues. Publications include Voices of Immigrants: The Challenges of Inclusion (2004); Left Out on their Own: Young People Leaving Care in Ireland (2000); Making the Links: Towards an Integrated Strategy for the Elimination of Violence Against women in Intimate Relationships with Men (1995), The State and the Voluntary Sector: A Study of Voluntary Organisations in One Region (1993); Dublin Communities in Action (1992); Patterns of Hostel Use in Dublin (1992).

Profile: Patricia Kelleher has a background in community development. She has PhD in Sociology from University College Dublin and was a Research Fellow at the Centre of European Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Currently she is an Adjunct Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Limerick.

Profile: Carmel Kelleher has a background in youth work. She has an M. Soc Sc from University College Dublin and Diploma in Public Administration from the Institute of Public Administration. Prior to co-establishing kelleherassociates in 1987, she worked in the Agricultural Research Institute as a Senior Research Officer.

Profile: Pat O’Connor has a PhD from University of London and is Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Professor of Sociology and Social Policy, at the University of Limerick. She has twenty-four years teaching experience in various academic institutions. Her research interests revolve around the area of gender. In particular she has focussed on how gender is manifested in discourses amongst young people, its structural and cultural reality as reflected in masculinities in disadvantaged areas and in organisational culture and in the state.

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