



**Foreword from the Minister of Social and
Family Affairs,
Mary Coughlan T.D.**

I welcome this important report ‘Strengthening Families Through Fathers’ which was completed under this Governments Family Research Programme

The Families Research Programme was developed to support research projects, which have the ability to inform the future development of social policy and to address the issues that face our society today.

This report emphasises that vulnerable fathers love their children as much as other parents. It also highlights the need for men to be directly included in assessments of their capacities as fathers, unless there is compelling evidence on which to exclude them.

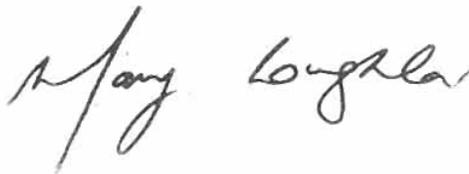
The finding that non-expressive, traditional masculinity keeps men closed off from the skills and emotional capacities required to be good active fathers in the post modern social conditions of today needs to be addressed. The challenge facing us today is to create and foster an inclusive society where effective engagement and positive action by fathers becomes the norm. We must aspire to a society where vulnerable

fathers are supported and encouraged to play a more active role in their children's lives for the betterment of all.

This research will inform the effective targeting of resources to where they are needed and raises the awareness of key issues facing society today. This is a key feature of this Government's social policy agenda.

We are very pleased to have assisted the production of this report on a valuable research project initiated by Professor Harry Ferguson and Fergus Hogan into the process that exclude fathers from the bulk of childcare and family support roles.

I would like to thank Professor Harry Ferguson and Fergus Hogan for this excellent piece of research and for their hard work in completing this study. I look forward to the publication of further quality research studies under the Families Research Programme, which is now the responsibility of the Family Support Agency.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary Coughlan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and 'C'.

Mary Coughlan TD
Minister for Social and Family Affairs

Foreword - Michael O'Kennedy SC, Chairperson of the Family Support Agency

As chairperson of the Family Support Agency, I am very pleased to welcome “Strengthening Families Through Fathers” which was co-funded by the Family Support Agency and the Department of Social and Family Affairs under the Families Research Programme.

Research is a key responsibility for the Family Support Agency in developing its clearly defined role in the area of family services and policy. The Agency's first Strategic Plan, to be published in May, sets out how the Agency will progressively develop this responsibility during the period 2004 to 2006.

“Strengthening Families Through Fathers” examines what needs to be done to ensure that fathers are included in childcare and family support work. The study shows how some fathers are in many respects excluded, often on the basis of their appearance alone. It looks at the role of fathers (young vulnerable fathers, working fathers, separated fathers) in families and talks about the presence and importance of fathers in their children's lives. The research also examines how family members and professionals view fathers, fatherhood and family life.

The importance of families and family life for individuals, communities and society generally is central to the Family Support Agency's strategy over the next three years. In that regard, and particularly in relation to the role of fathers, this excellent research will greatly inform the work of the Agency.

I would like to thank the researchers Dr. Harry Ferguson and Fergus Hogan for this excellent piece of research. I look forward to further research studies under the Family Support Agency's Research Programme.

Michael O'Kennedy SC
Chairperson
Family Support Agency