



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Social Affairs Minister Says Time To Re-examine Attitudes To Role Of Some Fathers In The Family

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., said today (Monday, 22nd November 2004) that the time has now come for a re examination of our attitudes to some fathers and their role in the family.

Minister Brennan said that we must recognise that society in Ireland is changing and it is important that we respond in a measured and positive way to the new trends and relationships that are emerging.

“One trend that is becoming more evident in recent years is the pressures on family life as a result of increased work related demands. For fathers, irrespective of the types of relationships they are in, this can mean that the time available to participate in, and enjoy, family life is often limited and disjointed”.

The Minister was commenting on the findings of a new report-*‘Strengthening Families Through Fathers’*-which he officially launched in Dublin today. The report, which examines the role of vulnerable fathers and their families, was written by Professor Harry Ferguson, University of the West of England, Bristol and formally of Trinity College Dublin, and Fergus Hogan of the Waterford Institute of Technology.

The report was completed under the Government’s Family Research Programme and was co-funded by the Family Support Agency and the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Minister Brennan said: “The findings from this research project are a valuable contribution to broadening our understanding of the role of fathers in an ever changing and challenging society. The findings make it clear that we should be re examining our attitudes to some fathers and their role in the family. It is highlighted in this report that vulnerable fathers love their children just as much as other parents. It also shows that men need to be directly included in assessments of their capabilities as fathers unless there is very good reasons to exclude them. In the study it was found that, typically, younger fatherhood is unplanned. However this does not mean that it is always unwanted and it has been shown in this study that most of the men were delighted that they were going to be fathers”.

The Minister said that the report should make all of us re –examine our own personal attitudes to vulnerable fathers. “Many in this study felt they were being excluded from the child protection and family support process because they felt they were being viewed as dangerous, and non-nurturing. Some of these men felt they were “locked out” on the basis of their appearance- hard men with tattoos and skinheads. Some of these were labelled dangerous, despite any evidence to back up this assumption. It is assumptions like this that I hope this study will help redress. One of the main points to emerge from this study regards the need for men to be directly involved in assessments of their capacities as fathers, unless there is very strong grounds on which to exclude them, such as violence.”

The Minister said another interesting point to emerge from the study was the obstacles that some of the younger fathers had to overcome in order to remain



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involved, obstacles that were placed in front of them by family and professional agencies. "We must work to change this outlook. We should be putting in place means by which young men are encouraged to get involved with their partner and child, not deterrents to prevent them becoming a part of their child's life."

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