**Fathers’ Gendered Experiences in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit**

Dr. Lisa Lorino (Cummings) PhD. RN, MSN, MHA, RNC

Dr. Roxanne Vandermause, PhD. RN

Keywords: prematurity, fathers, preemie, neonatal intensive care unit,

**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** To explore the gendered experiences of fathers whose premature or unhealthy neonates were admitted to a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

**Design/Method:** An interpretative phenomenological inquiry guided this study. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with fathers (n=11). A semi structured interview guide was used to generate: (1) an interpretation of the meaning of fatherhood whose infants were admitted to an NICU, (2) uncover how a fathers’ gender, expression of self, family and fatherhood manifest in their practices, habits, and skills.

**Findings:** One constitutive pattern and two overlapping dynamic patterns were found. The constitutive pattern of *Being Thrown into Groundlessness and Gaining Resoluteness* and sub-patterns *Being Present/Being Absent and She and I Are Different* were identified within the experience.

**Conclusion:** The findings from this study bright to light the gendered challenges encountered by fathers during their infant’s stay in the NICU and their journey to fatherhood. Based on the importance of the father-infant attachment process, fathers should be recognized as equally important as the mother in the care of their premature or unhealthy neonate. To neglect the needs of the father is to neglect the needs of the infant.