

Research Discussion Series

Dads on Dads

**Needs and expectations
at home and at work**

Warren Hatten

Louise Vinter

Rachel Williams

MORI Social Research Institute

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Social
Research
Institute



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Equal Opportunities Commission

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Both research and policy on balancing work and family have tended to focus on women's lives. As a result, men's fathering roles have often been neglected. However, the issues are indivisible – a more equal balance in family responsibilities is key to greater equality between women and men in all spheres. This research aims to help fill the gap in current knowledge by looking in detail at fathers' roles at home and at work, specifically to explore:

- how involved fathers are in the lives of their families;
- men's attitudes towards what it means to be a 'father' and how fatherhood relates to the reality of men's lives who are in employment;
- the barriers faced by men who wish to balance their work and family life;
- why men do not demand more access to, and use of, family-friendly policies and practices.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in two stages:

- 61 qualitative in-depth interviews with fathers, their partners and Human Resource (HR) managers. These were conducted in six different case study organisations between 25 April and 14 June 2002.
- Three focus groups among fathers, conducted on 24 and 26 June 2002, to explore the emergent issues in greater depth.

The case study organisations were carefully chosen to ensure that the research covered fathers in a range of employment sectors, size of employers and location. Interviews were conducted with six or seven fathers in each case study organisation, as well as one HR manager, plus follow-up interviews with wives or partners of some of the fathers (around three in each case study organisation).

The focus groups were conducted in North West England with fathers of young children (i.e. at least one child aged 10 or under), covering a variety of working patterns.

KEY FINDINGS

The research findings covered fathers' role at home, their attitude to work, how they currently balance work and family life and the role that family-friendly policies at work could play.

Fathers' role at home

How fathers think about fatherhood helps towards an understanding of their motivations and aspirations both at home and at work, as well as the way they manage their work-life balance. Fathers are not a homogeneous group and there is wide variety in the roles that they adopt.

Many fathers cite the breadwinner role as their main family commitment – both for practical reasons and psychological ones. Being a provider for the whole family gave these fathers a clearly-defined role. However, many also emphasise the importance of 'being there' for their children, and spending time with the family. To some extent there is a tension between these two demands.

There is widespread acceptance of traditional gender roles in parenting; the father provides financially; the mother looks after the children and home. For a significant minority, these roles are seen as rooted in the 'natural' abilities of men and women. In contrast, around half the fathers interviewed feel that mothers and fathers are equally capable of caring for children. They point out that men's lack of childcare experience, prior to becoming fathers, means that they are less likely to develop the relevant skills. Some fathers suggest a need for parenting classes.

Four broadly different types of working father can be identified:

- 'Enforcer dad'
- 'Entertainer dad'
- 'Useful dad'
- 'Fully involved dad'

'Enforcer dads' take an overview role in the family and have prime responsibility for discipline. This was perhaps a more common image of the father for previous generations and very few of those interviewed were of this type. Many of today's fathers appear to be either 'entertainer dads' or 'useful dads'. The former defined involvement with their children mostly in terms of play and leisure activities. The latter perform many childcare tasks but generally as a 'helper' to their partner. Many 'entertainer' and 'useful' dads have minimal involvement with their family during the week, but put their weekends aside to spend with their children. In contrast, the 'fully

involved dad' takes the lead in childcare and the tasks associated with it for substantial parts of the week.

A variety of factors affect a father's level of involvement in the family, including financial considerations (it often makes practical financial sense for a father to work full-time), motivational (whether they want to be involved), career aspirations, skills and confidence, the age of the children (some fathers play a larger role as children grow older), the number of children, their partner's hours of work, and the availability of informal childcare support. Some factors may both enable involvement and act as a barrier against it.

Finally, it is important to note that the majority of fathers in the study report feeling satisfied overall with their current level of involvement with their children. A substantial minority, however, clearly do want to spend more time with them. There is also a broad feeling that fathers these days want to feel more involved in their children's lives.

Fathers' attitudes to work

Many fathers say that fatherhood has changed their attitude to work and it makes them feel more responsible, but there is limited evidence of any practical changes. Some fathers are working longer hours, feeling a greater pressure to provide financially, while others compress their work into fewer hours so that they can get home earlier. Just a small minority have made major changes that enable them to be more involved in family life.

In contrast, a majority of mothers make significant changes to their working lives. Key reasons why mothers take prime responsibility for childcare are the gender pay gap, the fact that they tend to earn less than their partner and high childcare costs. Furthermore, men want to work – very few respondents wished to reduce their hours or to stop work altogether.

Balancing work and family life: The current situation

Almost all working fathers expect flexibility from their employers to allow them to take time off for occasional emergencies and other family events that might occur. This primarily includes time off if the children are sick (and if other childcare arrangements have fallen through), and for important occasions such as parents' evenings, school plays and school sports days. The actual level of demand for this depends on a father's level of responsibility for looking after their children, although even those fathers who have never asked for time off work for these reasons say they expect that it should be permitted.

There are a number of interrelated factors that affect fathers' ability to balance work and family.

Workplace culture can have a great effect on fathers' ability to meet both their home and work commitments. Some fathers report a tension between the demands of work and home, and feel under pressure not to take time off work if a child is ill, for example. If a father works in an environment in which family commitments are acknowledged and accepted then this can make the task of balancing work and family life much easier.

Assumptions about parenting roles are also important, and many employers expect that work is the primary focus of a man's attention. Some fathers are content with this and stress the importance of personal responsibility for arranging a satisfactory work-life balance, while for others it can be more problematic. There is a general feeling that although it is acceptable for mothers to take advantage of part-time or flexible working, it is still not accepted for fathers. It tends to be expected that mothers will make changes in their working patterns, while men will not. It is also generally accepted that women will be 'on call' in times of emergency, or for schools or nurseries, whereas fathers will not.

Certain working patterns, such as shift work, can be a barrier to spending time with children, particularly if a father is working evenings and weekends and if it is difficult to swap shifts. However, when children are younger, working shifts can also mean that a father is able to be more heavily involved in looking after them because he is at home for long periods of the day.

A father's level of involvement in the family may also depend on his seniority within the organisation and the ability to determine his own schedule. With more senior employees there is a certain level of trust that they will not 'take liberties', and there is often more scope for other family-friendly solutions such as working at home.

A lack of family-friendly policies may be a barrier for fathers trying to balance work and family life, because it sends a message to employees that the organisation is not thinking about their out-of-work needs. However, many fathers say they are happy to make informal agreements with their manager, rather than having policies that are set in stone and perhaps less flexible.

The role of family-friendly policies for fathers

Most fathers are unaware of the types of family-friendly policies available to them within their organisation. Many assume that such policies are not available to them or are not aimed at the main breadwinner. Furthermore, some organisations which do

have policies for fathers are reluctant to actively promote them, although there is an understanding that such policies can assist in the recruitment and retention of staff.

The key thing that fathers in this study request is flexibility and understanding from their employers. For many fathers it is more important for their manager to be understanding than to have formal policies in place. Some worry that the ability to negotiate time off with their manager on an individual basis would be undermined by a policy under which everyone is treated the same.

Flexible hours are key to enabling fathers to manage their work-life balance. One of the main demands of fathers who currently work fixed hours is a little more flexibility at either end of the day so that they are able to pick up children from school or nursery or drop them off without being 'late' for work or leaving 'early'. This is more important to fathers than any major adjustments in working patterns. Furthermore, those who do currently make use of flexi-time are very positive about it.

While some fathers accept the long hours culture as an inevitable part of their job, a change in culture could be invaluable for many to enable them to better balance work and family life. If organisations could develop a culture where it is the norm to work only your contracted hours, then this would take the pressure off many working fathers. Some fathers also emphasise that this culture is something that needs to change in Britain as a whole. There is widespread awareness that workers in this country work longer hours than elsewhere in Europe.

Fathers have mixed attitudes towards several family-friendly type practices. For example, part-time working is simply not an option for most fathers for financial reasons. In addition, they voice concerns about the status of part-time workers, who are generally seen as less committed to the organisation than those who work full-time.

In contrast, for some fathers a compressed week offers a valuable solution, by giving them an extra day off every two weeks to do odd jobs about the house or take the children to school. For others, it is either unrealistic given the nature of their job, or else would not suit them because it would leave four days a week on which they hardly saw their family at all.

More generous annual leave entitlement for everyone rather than specific policies for parents was called for, particularly among those whose current holiday entitlement is the legal minimum of twenty days per year. Similarly, help with childcare can make an enormous difference to parents. Some fathers say that financial help with

childcare is the ideal, while others would like a workplace crèche. However, help with childcare is not offered by any of the case study organisations in this research.

Many new fathers currently make use of paternity leave – either an official policy or unofficial arrangement – and expectations of what should be available generally reflect their current experiences. Statutory paternity leave is welcomed, but not the statutory pay of £100 per week. Some fathers see this as a backward step and would rather receive shorter leave on full pay. Parental leave is seen as unrealistic because it is unpaid and, as with part-time working, fathers feel that it may also send the wrong messages to their employer about commitment to the organisation. Apart from adding pay, one way of increasing take-up could be by organisations communicating the policy to employees in a positive way.

Conclusions and policy implications

- The fact that almost all fathers talk about the importance of ‘being there’ for their children is significant. The challenge is to enable more fathers to be confident about the kind of ‘being there’ which is often demanded at short notice (such as illness) or perceived as hard to raise in the workplace (for example, a school sports day).
- The experience of paternity leave demonstrates that practice drives expectations, and that policy also has the potential to do so. Current expectations of what is reasonable depend on the paternity leave offered by a father’s employer.
- Parental leave could help bring about a culture in which it is acceptable for fathers to take time off to spend with their family. However, the fact that it is currently unpaid means that many fathers would not even consider it.
- There needs to be a change in workplace culture. The long hours culture is prohibitive for fathers who wish to succeed in their job or career and also have childcare responsibilities.
- Help with childcare costs could benefit many families and again enable greater choice of parenting roles.
- Some fathers suggest that there should be courses for new fathers, or at least a greater acknowledgement that fathers want and need the opportunity to learn new skills after the birth of a child.

- The gender gap in pay is also key to understanding roles in the home. Men currently earn more than women on average, which encourages the traditional parenting roles of mother as carer and father as breadwinner to be the norm.

Enabling flexibility in the choices that fathers make about how to be involved in the family may help balance gender roles, be positive for fathers expressing a wish to 'be there' for their children and help firms attract and retain valued employees. This may allow, in the future, fathers to move in and out of different ways of working just as women often do now.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and objectives

The mission of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), established by Parliament in 1976, is to challenge discrimination, champion equality and to promote change. Work-life balance issues are a current focus of the EOC's work, and the Commission is committed to making non-discriminatory policies and practices available to all who wish to balance their working and family lives.

Both research and policy on balancing work and family have tended to focus on women's lives and, as a result, men's fathering roles have been somewhat neglected. However, the latter need to be addressed and arguably these issues are indivisible – a more equal balance in family responsibilities is actually key to achieving greater equality between men and women in all spheres, including the labour market.

The EOC commissioned MORI Social Research Institute to conduct research on fathers and employment. The overall objective of the research is to understand why men do not demand greater access to, and make greater use of, family-friendly policies and practices in their employment. However, this can only be understood in relation to fathers' conception of what it means to be a father. Therefore the research explores issues such as men's attitudes towards their role within the family, how involved they are at all levels of family life, and whether they would like to see changes in their role either within the family or at work.

This study aims to:

- Identify how involved fathers are in the lives of their families;
- Explore men's attitudes towards what it means to be a 'father', and how this relates to the reality of men's lives who are in employment;
- Identify the advantages and disadvantages faced by men in employment who wish to balance their work and family life;
- Determine why men do not make greater demands of their employers in terms of access to and use of family-friendly policies and practices in an effort to better balance their work and family lives.

1.2 Research methodology

The research was conducted in two stages:

- 61 qualitative in-depth interviews with fathers, their partners and HR managers. These were conducted in six different case study organisations between 25 April and 14 June 2002.
- Three focus groups among fathers, conducted on 24 and 26 June 2002, to explore the emergent issues in greater depth.

Depth interviews

Six case study organisations were selected for the study. These were carefully chosen to ensure that the research covered fathers in a range of types of employment, with regard to:

- Sector (private, public and voluntary)
- Type of industry (manufacturer, financial, printer, utility, local authority, national charity)
- Number of employees (ranging from approx. 45 to 6,500)
- Location (including fathers based in London and the south of England, the North-West, the North-East, Scotland and Wales)

Table 1.1 Case study organisations – size and sector

	Public	Private	Voluntary
< 50 employees	-	Printer	-
50 – 500	-	Manufacturer	National charity
500 – 2,000	-	Financial	-
5,000 +	Local authority	Utility	-

In each organisation, an initial interview was conducted with an HR manager or senior line manager, in order to ascertain attitudes in the workplace towards fathers having access to and using family-friendly and flexible working practices; whether attitudes differ towards mothers and fathers in this respect; and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of such policies.

Interviews were then conducted with six or seven fathers in each case study organisation. When selecting individual employees for interview, care was taken to cover those at a range of levels within the organisation and with a range of ages of children – including pre-school, primary school and secondary school.

The interviews centred around issues relating to both work and family life. These include fathers' level of involvement in the family, their current childcare arrangements, their attitudes towards both work and the role of a father, awareness and use of family-friendly policies, and future changes in the workplace that might enable fathers to better manage the work-life balance.

In addition, follow-up interviews were conducted with wives or partners of some of the fathers – three in each case study organisation. These fulfilled a largely 'validating' role, with questions centring around the partner's perception of how involved the father is in family life, the role they play within the family, and how they balance their family role with work.

Table 1.2 Summary of depth interviews

	Total number of interviews completed
HR managers/line managers	6
Fathers (from a range of levels)	41
Partners of the fathers	14
Total	61

Topic guides were developed by MORI and the EOC, with input from an advisory group specifically formed by the EOC to support this work. The topic guide acted as an *aide memoire* for the interviewer to ensure that key topics were covered during each interview.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone, according to what was most convenient for respondents, and each lasted approximately 45 minutes.

All interviews and discussions were tape recorded (with respondents' permission) and transcribed for analysis purposes. Verbatim quotes from the depth interviews and focus groups are included in the report, in italics, to illustrate the key points raised.

Focus groups

Focus groups were used to explore the emergent themes in greater depth. The interaction and exchange of views in a group discussion means that the moderator is able to test a range of ideas and issues among a wider group of people than is possible in a depth interview, and it enables the group to generate their own ideas and contest those held by others. For this research among fathers, the groups explored in detail the role of the father in the family, what it means to be a working father and ways in which the workplace might change in order to better enable fathers to be involved in family life.

Three groups were conducted with fathers of young children (i.e. at least one child aged 10 or under), covering a variety of working patterns. All were conducted in North West England. Participants for the discussion groups were recruited face-to-face, in-home. The table below details the demographic composition of the groups:

Table 1.3 Composition of focus groups

	Father's work status	Partner's work status	Age of children
Group 1	Working full-time	Working part-time	At least one child aged 10 or under
Group 2	Working part-time/ shift work	Any	At least one child aged 10 or under
Group 3	Working full-time	Working full-time	At least one child aged 10 or under

1.3 Structure of the report

The report presents the findings of the depth interviews and focus groups together. Chapter Two examines working fathers' attitudes to and involvement in family life, and suggests that fathers can be described in terms of four broad 'types' of working dad. This chapter also explores fathers' perceptions of the 'natural' roles of mother and father. Chapter Three focuses on working fathers' attitudes to work, examining how their attitudes have changed since becoming a father and whether this has been accompanied by a change in working pattern. Chapter Four develops these themes to consider how fathers currently balance work and family commitments, looking at fathers' expectations of their employers and the factors that affect their work-life balance. Finally, Chapter Five addresses the role of family-friendly policies for fathers. The chapter begins by looking at current awareness and use of family-friendly and flexible working practices among fathers, and then asks the question, 'What do fathers want?'

1.4 Interpretation of data

It should be noted that qualitative research is an interactive process between the researcher and the participant, allowing insights into attitudes and reasons for these attitudes. Results are not based on quantitative statistical evidence but on a small sample of a cross-section of working fathers – hence findings are illustrative rather than statistically representative. Further, bearing in mind that fathers are a heterogeneous group, it is important to note that they will have differing views on the basis of their age, background, ethnicity, work status and so forth.

1.5 Scale and scope of the project

Readers should bear in mind that this project is one of the first to explore the issues covered in depth, making the research exploratory in nature. Further, the limited scale of the fieldwork means that few of the findings can be considered definitive, and conclusions drawn are particularly tentative.

The project set out to examine the views and experiences of all fathers in the workplace – all such fathers were eligible. The research does not take account of ‘full-time fathers’ or ‘househusbands’ whose views may be relevant to the policy debate. In addition, the scale of the project means that the views of fathers in same-sex relationships and single parent fathers are not covered. Further research would be needed to understand the views of these fathers.

1.6 Publication of the data

As with all our studies, findings from this survey are subject to our standard Terms and Conditions of Contract. Any press release or publication of the findings of this survey requires the advance approval of MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

2 FATHERS' ROLE AT HOME

This chapter looks in detail at fathers' roles in the home. The first section begins by examining their perceptions of fatherhood, including the importance of the breadwinner role, and explores notions of the 'natural' roles of parents. The second section then suggests that working fathers' involvement in family life can be understood in terms of four broad 'types' of father. Finally, the chapter considers factors affecting fathers' level of involvement in family life, and asks whether fathers *want* to be more involved.

2.1 Perceptions of fatherhood

It is clear that a father's personal understanding of his role within the family will affect the way in which he balances his own work and home life. For example, at one extreme is the traditional view of the father as breadwinner, giving a model of a father who is somewhat distant from family life – he is productive in the public sphere of work, while his wife manages the private sphere of the family. In contrast, for some fathers the 'mother' and 'father' roles are seen as essentially interchangeable, rendering the function of breadwinner no longer the defining aspect of fatherhood. However, in practice, most fathers appear to lie somewhere between these extremes, taking a pragmatic approach to parenting roles.

Therefore, understanding the way in which fathers think about fatherhood is important for understanding their motivations and aspirations both at home and at work, and the way they manage their work-life balance. Of course, this pre-supposes that there is a large amount of choice in the roles that fathers undertake. For those with no choice or only a limited amount of choice, it could be that one of these positions is enforced.

Being a father

The research suggests that fathers cannot be taken as a homogeneous group, but rather that there is wide variety in the roles that they adopt. Reflecting this, the discussion below focuses on different conceptions of fatherhood, rather than one definitive account.

The breadwinner role

In accordance with the findings of recent studies which suggest that fathers see providing an income for their family as the central aspect of fathering¹, many men do cite the breadwinner role as their main family commitment. This is both for practical

¹ Warin, J., Solomon, Y., Lewis, C. and Langford, W. (1999) **Fathers, work and family life**, Family Policy Studies Centre. (Qualitative and quantitative research among families in Rochdale with at least one child aged 11 – 16.)

reasons of meeting the family's physical needs, but also the psychological aspect of being a provider, which gives the father an important and clearly-defined role:

Well, the only one [commitment] I can see is basically keeping them fed, a house over their heads.

Private sector, 2 children (1, 6), partner not working

I think that's very important for your self-esteem in being a provider and a role model to your children.

Private sector, 4 children (0+), partner works full-time

It appears that the breadwinner role still defines the way in which many men think about fatherhood, particularly those whose partners have stopped working (or never worked) and therefore take prime responsibility for childcare. Around a third of the fathers interviewed have partners who currently stay at home full-time to look after the family. Although almost all of these have very young children, and most mothers are planning to return to work eventually, the fact that it is women who have made this accommodation points to the continuance of traditional parenting roles. As one comment illustrates, the breadwinner role may also be central to how a father defines his relationship with his partner:

Well, I think if she was in a position where she was able to earn more money than me, I think that would just be a complete change in the relationship. I mean I can't ever see it happening. I think I might even find that quite hard to deal with, to be quite honest with you.

Public sector, 2 children (12, 15), partner not working

However, the notion that providing an income for the whole family is the 'proper job' of the father may conflict with the reality of today's society in several ways. Firstly, in practice it may be unrealistic, because many families find that it is simply not possible to survive on only one income. Secondly, the male breadwinner role may conflict with the views and aspirations of mothers.

There is a bit inside me that does not like Sarah having to go to work two days a week ... The truth is Sarah wouldn't like to be at home all the time, but there is a little bit inside me that makes me feel, "You are not doing your job properly and that she has to go to work".

Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

In practice, however, the research found little evidence of this kind of tension between actual and aspirational roles.

While the breadwinner role remains firmly entrenched in the minds of many fathers, there are also many who say that being a breadwinner is *not* an important aspect of being a father. They consider other aspects of fatherhood, such as spending time

with their children, to be more important, while work is simply a means to an end. It appears that, for many, being a father is about finding a balance between breadwinning and spending time with the family.

I think the breadwinner came first and the children came along later, so it is two different issues ... Giving them cuddles is more important than material things.

Private sector, 4 children (6+), partner works part-time

Obviously you need to have time for the children. But also a guaranteed level of income to be able to provide for the family. Obviously the importance of being a good father is more important than actually going out and working, but there is a sort of trade off somewhere along the line.

Public sector, 3 children (4+), partner full-time student

In particular, those in the focus group of full-time working fathers whose partners also work full-time said that being the main breadwinner was not important to them:

No, it makes no difference. If she could earn twice as much I would be quite happy. It doesn't bother me in the slightest.

Working full-time, partner works full-time (focus group)

All parents in the study agree that it is important for *someone* to provide an income, and many suggest it is a matter of finding the balance that works for your particular family – for example, it often makes financial sense for the father to work full-time if his likely income is higher than that of the mother. Some parents also emphasise that there are benefits for children, other than financial ones, if their parents have a role outside of the home:

I think it is equally important for the woman to go out to work ... I think it keeps both the husband and wife stimulated outside of the home, which makes it better for when you come back to the home environment.

Private sector, 6 children (2+), partner works part-time

I think they get a better deal from me because I have something [work] which I value. I think if I was there all the time – in fact I think if Laura was there all the time – we would be bored ... I also think, they are going to have to learn about the importance of work, so seeing us do it is probably part of their observations about life really.

Charity, 2 children (3, 6), partner works full-time

I think it is both parents, to be a productive member of society. But that is not to denigrate non-working parents, but I think children need to see parents that are playing an important role ... I think I am very proud that the children know what I do ... and they know me as a person not just as a mother, and I think that is important for fathers as well.

Partner, 2 children (3, 6), works full-time

Spending time with the children

Alongside the breadwinner role, an aspect of fatherhood that emerges as key to defining a 'good father' is being there for the children. However, fathers' definitions of 'being there' do vary considerably. For some, it implies a relatively limited sense of being available if anything unexpected happens, such as illness, or for particular events that occur occasionally (for example, school sports days, parents' evenings) – it is effectively being 'on call', but not necessarily having a consistent presence in the household.

I would never ever miss an important occasion. I will give you an example, what I define as an important occasion is the first day he starts school ... Things that are important to them.

Private sector, 6 children (2+), partner works part-time

For others, 'being there' for the children is a matter of being physically in the home as much as possible, within the constraints of their work commitments. Finally, many fathers qualify their definition of spending time with the children by emphasising that it is not enough to be simply around in the house a lot; it is more a matter of spending 'quality time' with the children.

Communication, spending time with children individually, and for long periods of time with children individually. It's this quality time thing ... I think trying to be creative and trying to stimulate them. Showing them new things, and to be there when they are upset or are finding things difficult or daunting. Then there's the practical things like helping them to read.

Charity, 2 children (0, 3), partner works part-time

Being available when they need it, being a good role model, being their mate, empathising with them, playing with them, facilitating them to develop and learn ... Being around and being part of their lives really.

Charity, 2 children (3, 6), partner works full-time

Therefore, being involved in family life for many fathers means more than simply having a presence in the home; it is about listening to children, understanding them, and relating to them as individuals:

Everything is simplistic to a child. You have to try and get down to that level and just see everything the way they see it. I think if you do you will have a good time. I think if you don't you end up very frustrated with them.

Private sector, 1 child (1), partner not working

Other aspects of fatherhood that fathers mention as being important include discipline, demeanour ("*trying not to lose your rag with them*"), and leading by example. The notion of fathers acting as a role model for their children is key – both

through their role at work and also trying to set an example in the way that they relate to their partner or wife.

I think as far as an ideal father is concerned, I think it is good to be childlike with them, I mean I feel I am friends with my boys. We play football, play the Playstation and all that. But I think it is also good, as someone said, to be a good disciplinarian. There has to be some boundary between being a friend and them overstepping the mark.

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

The most important thing to me is making sure my children grow up loved and are morally sound. I want them to be good people.

Private sector, 3 children (0+), partner not working

Loving relationships, with them and my wife; listening; understanding.

Charity, 2 children (12, 14), partner works full-time

Mothers' views on the father role

Overall, many of the partners interviewed reinforced the fathers' understanding of the role of a father. There tends to be a clear delineation of parenting roles by gender, with many saying that they are comfortable taking on the majority of childcare responsibility while their husband is the main provider. Further, while mothers also say that 'being there' is one of the most important aspects of being a father, many appear to have very low expectations of what this entails in terms of time commitment:

I suppose being around at times, like reading bedtime stories. Mornings are perhaps not such a crucial point ... but I think in the evening it is nice that he does come home – it might be that they are having their bath and it is almost bedtime, but he does get to see them. So I think just being around really.

Partner, 4 children (2+), works part-time

Some mothers feel that where the father is the main breadwinner, he should concentrate his efforts on this primary role, and they do not expect him to be involved in day-to-day aspects of childcare. This appears to be particularly the case where a mother is not working:

He needs to support me – that is important – but not necessarily to have to do all the little things, like potty training for instance ... I don't mind doing a bit of that. So a good father to me isn't necessarily one that would have a lot of 'hands on' ... It's things like playing with the oldest. That takes a lot of burden off me so I can get on with the others.

Partner, 3 children (0+), not working

It's not fair to ask men to work all day then come home and look after the children.

Partner, 2 children (1, 5), not working

In addition, one mother points out that domestic tasks such as washing and ironing make no difference to the children – it makes no difference whether they are done by the mother or the father; they are simply done – and she suggests that these things are not an important part of being a parent. From her point of view, it is more important that a father spends time with the children than shares domestic tasks.

Just a few mothers compare the characteristics of a 'good father' with those of a mother, with the predominant view being that the two roles are different but complementary. Only a very small number feel that the father should have equal involvement in and responsibility for their children's lives as the mother.

I think to be a good father, it's like being a good mother. You have to be loving and supportive.

Partner, 1 child (2), works full-time

Therefore, while the traditional breadwinner model is not universal – or even predominant – in defining how parents think about the father role, it still has considerable bearing in many families. This means that there are often low expectations of the amount of time a father is able to commit to his family. Further, while the key to being a good father for many parents is 'being there' for the children, definitions of this also vary, and for some it means only a minimal time commitment. Only a minority of parents appear to regard being a 'good father' as requiring the same qualities as a 'good mother'. These perceptions of the role of a father are also reinforced by beliefs about the natural caring abilities of mothers.

Are mothers 'natural' carers?

Understanding beliefs about the 'natural' roles of parents helps us to understand fathers' attitudes towards their own involvement at home. Views differ considerably regarding whether mothers are *naturally* better at caring for children than fathers; more than a quarter of fathers interviewed say that they are, while around half believe mothers and fathers to be equally capable at caring for children. It is difficult to identify common characteristics of those fathers who take the more traditional view – for example, by age, job sector, or partner's work status – and this study is too small to allow generalisations to be made. However, very few 'traditionalists' were to be found among fathers based in the south-east of England, and all of those working in the voluntary sector agreed that mothers and fathers are *equally* capable of caring for children.

Fathers' reasons for seeing mothers as the natural carer centre around the bond created between mother and child through childbirth – the 'maternal instinct' – which they suggest means that a mother will naturally care for a child more than its father. Many also stress that women have particular personal qualities, such as patience and sympathy, which cause them to be better suited to childcare than men.

I think intuitively women are more likely to do a better job ... it's in their genes, and genetically they've given birth and they're going to care a bit more for the child.

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner works part-time

I think from the experience I've had, this is probably going to sound really sexist, but I think women are built different, aren't they? I think women are programmed to bring up children.

Working part-time/shift work (focus group)

I think the mother-child relationship – there is none like it. I don't even think the father-child is the same as the mother-child. I don't think you can ever beat that mother-child relationship.

Private sector, 2 children (2, 2), partner working part-time

I think there is an innate ability for a female – it may sound sexist but it is not meant to be – I think women are more sympathetic and caring ... But other than that I think that women and men are all equally capable of doing all of the functions within a house.

Private sector, 3 children (0+), partner not working

Normally things are done because somewhere along the line it worked out to be better that way. And probably the sheer fact that women carry the child, bear the child, feed the child from the early age, probably gives them that maternal instinct. And maybe that gives them better qualities as females in doing that for children.

Private sector, 2 children (14, 16), partner working full-time

Some fathers use their own experience as a basis for thinking that mothers are naturally better at caring for children than fathers. This includes one couple who had both felt men and women to be equally capable *before* having children, but who have since *both* come to agree that women are naturally more patient.

Speaking personally, I think my wife is better at looking after sick children and mothering them. Fathers are perhaps better at looking after the sports and outside activity side of things. That is purely an opinion obviously.

Public sector, 3 children (4+), partner full-time student

I very rarely see a child fall over and cut their knee run to their dad. They run to the mother. It is just whether we like it or not, that is a natural role of a female.

Private sector, 6 children (2+), partner works part-time

Several mothers also agree that they are naturally better at caring, particularly highlighting women's ability to 'juggle' several different tasks:

I just think that we have something more that is natural to us than men. Men I would feel are very practical and they will function, but it is very much on a one step basis. If they do one bit with the children they can purely do that thing, whereas we are much more multi-tasked.

Partner, 4 children (2+), works part-time

In contrast, and despite some fairly traditional views about the role of a father, many men do *not* root these roles in biology, but say that fathers would be equally capable as mothers given the same opportunities. They point out that a lack of childcare experience on the part of fathers prior to having children means that they do not develop the relevant skills. Further, any perceived differences in the way that a mother and father relate to their children are seen as down to the individual, rather than gender-based.

The value of the father as a child carer is vastly underrated. I do spend quite a lot of time with him, and I think I am equally capable as his mother at looking after him.

Public sector, 1 child (5), partner working part-time

I feel that certainly in our relationship, the kids don't think that one is more loving than the other. I think that we both give equally and are quite open in the love and affection that we show for our kids, so I don't think that's any different.

Private sector, 2 children (8, 10), partner works part-time

It really depends on the personalities of the people involved. Some people are good at things that their partners are not.

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

Although it is not currently the case for any parents included in the research (largely because full-time fathers are not in the workplace and therefore not included in the scope of this study), several did relate stories of couples they know for whom the traditional parenting roles are reversed, with the mother earning the higher income and taking on the main breadwinner role, and the father having greater responsibility for childcare. Having contact with men who do take on a lot of responsibility for childcare appears to mean that fathers are less likely to see the mother as the 'natural' carer.

Some of those who do *not* agree that women are 'natural' carers *do* still cite differences between men and women which make women particularly suited to childcare, but are not necessarily rooted in biology. This includes empathy,

particularly with daughters, and greater determination and stamina that are required to look after children. Several men simply say that women ‘cope better’ with children.

Being able to sort of keep going without any sleep at all ... It's physically and mentally demanding, and I think that they're able to go that extra step, whereas I think the blokes tend to keel over first.

Private sector, 1 child (1), partner works part-time

With daughters, particularly teenage daughters, I think mothers are more able to help through the puberty stages and things, whereas some of that is alien to me. I understand the process but the emotional support is there from the mother. With sons people say it is the reverse.

Charity, 2 children (12, 14), partner works full-time

It is important to bear in mind these perceptions about the roles of mothers and fathers when looking at working fathers' involvement in the family.

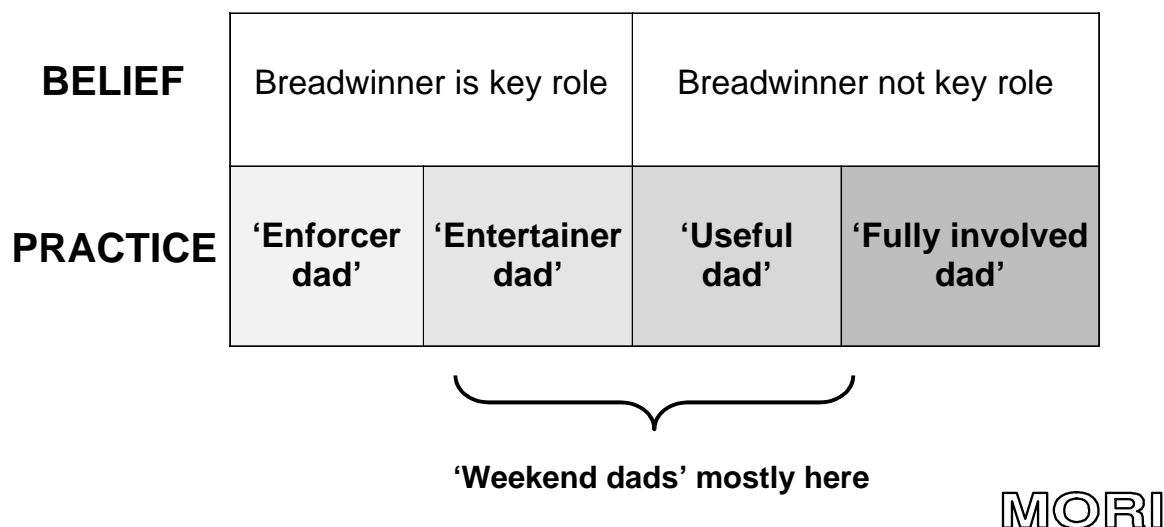
2.2 Working fathers' involvement in the family

As well as holding different beliefs about a father's role in the family, fathers' actual experiences of family life also vary considerably. However, whenever there is policy debate or opinion comment about fatherhood, ‘fathers’ are generally referred to as an homogeneous group.

While recognising that fathers cannot be taken as an homogeneous group, it is possible to suggest some broad divisions, or common ‘types’ of father, which can help in understanding fathers' roles at home and at work. The following typologies of working dads emerged from the interviews and focus groups among fathers. It should be noted that these are tentative suggestions, designed to provoke debate, and also that fathers do not use these labels themselves. The four ‘types’ of father are:

- ‘Enforcer dad’
- ‘Entertainer dad’
- ‘Useful dad’
- ‘Fully involved dad’

As circumstances change, it is quite possible that people move between groups. Most notably, a common characteristic of many fathers is that they could also be described as a ‘weekend dad’, and a discussion of this follows after the typologies.

Figure 2.1 'Types' of father

As shown in the diagram above, there is a link between fathers' beliefs (as expressed) and their practice. However, the link is not always as clear as illustrated in the model. Furthermore, it may be that beliefs are to a certain extent defined by practice, as well as vice versa. In particular, the research suggests that mothers' choices are key in defining practice in the family.

'Enforcer dad'

The 'enforcer dad' has very much a 'hands off' role in looking after the children, and is happy to leave the more mundane, day-to-day childcare tasks (and household tasks) to his partner or, invariably, wife. He sees himself as having an overview role – for example, looking at the children's education as a whole (their performance, choice of school and subjects and so on) – and is also responsible for discipline. He could be conceptualised as the 'macro-manager' of the family, setting the broad context, while his partner is the 'micro-manager' and has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the home and family (clothes, transport, food, health, etc).

There were a small number of fathers in the interviews who clearly fulfilled the role of 'enforcer dad'. They see the most important aspects of being a father as providing a role model and clear rules for their children. They also tend to emphasise bringing up the children according to traditional gendered roles:

The children have to be brought up, especially if they're boys, to be the future breadwinner.

Private sector, 4 children (11+), partner works part-time

The wife of one 'enforcer dad' comments:

I think he thinks it is the woman's job basically to stay at home and look after the children. He is quite old fashioned like that.

Partner, 4 children (11+), works part-time

It must be emphasised that there are very few 'enforcer dads', and those who do take this view of fathering perhaps tend to be older than some other fathers. A few men identified their own fathers as fitting into this model when drawing a contrast between the more traditional view of the father and how fathers are today.

There are a lot of myths about fathers in the workplace, and I think there is a lot of belief that every father is as I see my father in the 1970s. The kind of father who goes out to work at 6am and comes back at 9pm and slaps the kids around and then sends them to bed. And I think that things have changed. Things have come a long way.

Public sector, 1 child (2), partner works full-time

When I was growing up as a kid my greatest enduring picture of my dad was that he used to come home from work, have his tea and read the paper. My mum did everything.

Working part-time/shift work (focus group)

There is also a question mark over whether some other 'types' of father might begin to fulfil this role as their children grow older.

'Entertainer dad'

Many fathers appear to play the role of 'entertainer', and define their involvement with their children mostly in terms of play and leisure activities. Their role may include providing a distraction while the mother gets on with the work of cooking, cleaning, and other day-to-day household tasks, but they tend not to be heavily involved in such tasks themselves. An 'entertainer dad' might typically leave for work before the children are up in the morning, come home in the evening after they have eaten, and perhaps play with them for an hour or so before bedtime. One father says he usually takes his child to the park on Saturday mornings specifically "to give [my wife] a break".

I take them to the circus or the theatre or the cinema. So I like to be involved on that front.

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner not working

I think because you don't tend to get involved with the more mundane things you tend to be more focused on the entertainment side of it I suppose.

Private sector, 1 child (1), partner works part-time

This model sees the roles of mother and father as different but complementary. Some 'entertainer dads' even feel that this is the natural role for a father, or at least one towards which they like to gravitate.

I guess what I might be better at or more inclined towards is the playfulness, the rolling about and putting them on my shoulders and things like that.

Charity, 2 children (0, 3), partner works part-time

I think men like to, they tend to be a bit more active generally. They get the kids out more and doing things ... I think men find the child in themselves a bit easier.

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner works part-time

I think mums are always a bit more serious and that. Like it is always the dads who play football with them in the garden, or give them that little bit of time.

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

[My wife] won't sit and play with them as much as I do. She is too busy worrying about what needs doing, you know, the washing, school, [she] is too serious.

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

Some partners also recognise that their husband's role is as an 'entertainer', while they take on responsibility for meeting the children's basic needs such as feeding, washing and so on. They have mixed views about this arrangement, and some seem to suggest that being the 'entertainer dad' is taking the easy option.

I would say he would consider himself as providing entertainment for them, in the sense that he provides their rough and tumble games and that sort of thing with them ... But he doesn't provide the day-to-day things that they need ... He doesn't see to their basic needs.

Partner, 2 children (0, 3), works part-time

'Useful dad'

'Useful dads' go one step further than the 'entertainer dad' in terms of helping out with the day-to-day childcare and household tasks, but they still tend to take their lead from the mother in terms of what needs doing around the house. As with the 'entertainer dad', many fathers appear to fit into this model, and define their role in the home as one of a helper:

I try and help out as much as possible – do the dishes, that sort of thing. She mainly does the cooking.

Private sector, 4 children (9+), partner works part-time

I think [fathers] are more supportive aren't we. The woman does most of it and we just back it up

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

You have to support your wife as much as you can particularly in the early stage, but I think really at any stage in your child's life.

Private sector, 2 children (14, 16), partner working full-time

The role of the 'useful dad' is perhaps best understood when compared with the level of involvement of his partner in looking after the children. Essentially, a 'useful dad' plays a supporting role, and does not take responsibility for day-to-day management of the home and family. Several mothers describe the difference between their own role and that of their husband – some are happy with the differences, while others say they would prefer their husband to take a more active interest in the children's everyday lives:

He would rather do the playing, and I would rather do the getting them ready for bed and getting their nappies changed and that type of thing. He does help with that, if I want him to ... He would do anything that I asked him to do.

Partner, 3 children (0+), not working

When he is here, when he is not at work, he participates fully really. He gets involved with everything.

Partner, 4 children (2+), works part-time

I would say he is very helpful ... But I still feel that the majority, the ins and outs of every day, the looking after and the knowing what is going on and what is happening in their lives, he knows bits of it, but he doesn't know as much as I think he possibly should. Whether that is because he has got so much on at work that knowing that it is Cubs on a Monday and Beavers on a Wednesday is just not significant ... Mums always remember because they have to.

Partner, 2 children (8, 10), works part-time

Our social diary about who is doing what, and when we are having the sitters, which child's party invitation is when, when the sports day is – it is all me organising it. And typically I will buy all the birthday cards and all that sort of stuff, because he is always like "I can't possibly" ... He is very absorbed in work ... I think he arranges his family commitments, he puts it in a box and gets it out, and puts it back in a box and gets on with work.

Partner, 2 children (3, 6), works full-time

In addition to helping with childcare, the 'useful dad' often needs prompting in order to do tasks around the house:

I will occasionally leave a note on a Saturday morning for Philip to hang the washing out, but I would have to ask him or leave him a note to do it.

Partner, 2 children (8, 10), works part-time

'Fully involved dad'

The 'fully involved dad' is equally involved as his wife or partner in running the home and family, at least some of the time, with the mother and father roles being virtually interchangeable. Only a handful of the working fathers interviewed in depth are 'fully involved dads'. Of course, these fathers are all working full-time, and it may be that the demanding nature of the role means that it is difficult for many full-time working parents to take on this responsibility. The one focus group of fathers working part-time or shift work included several 'fully involved dads', most of whom had come to adopt this role through circumstance rather than choice.

Those fathers who are 'fully involved dads' have either made a conscious decision that both parents will play an equal role in childcare, or else have been almost thrown into their role by virtue of circumstance (for example, working hours which mean that they are often present in the home during the daytime, or the illness of the children's mother). What defines this group is that, for substantial parts of the week, they take the lead in childcare and the tasks associated with it – arranging the child's social life, medical appointments, 'running the home', and so on.

We are really committed to being equal really as much as we can be for responsibility.

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

He is very involved. We share everything basically. Sometimes the balance is either way depending upon if I have to go away with work for a few days, or whatever ... But I would say it evens out, it is very fair.

Partner, 1 child (4), works full-time

It's pretty much split in half really, and it's mainly due to timescales – what we can do. My wife works part-time, so she's able to do quite a few of the bits and pieces in the house that need doing.

Public sector, 1 child (5), partner working part-time

'Fully involved dads' tend to see being a father as a full-time commitment, and not one which they can switch off when at work and switch back on when they get home. They emphasise taking full responsibility for the children, and really being part of their children's lives.

You need commitment, perseverance, good humour ... You can't be a parent part-time. Well, you can be a part-time parent, but in my situation I am a full-time parent, and you are not always in the mood. You just have to be even handed, I think, to have an even temper and

be patient and committed and always on the lookout for things and thinking ahead, because she cannot look after herself at the age she is.
Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

Fathers who take on this level of responsibility for childcare do have additional workplace needs – those more closely associated with working mothers. While the ‘entertainer dad’ or ‘useful dad’ may also have workplace needs in relation to their family commitments, these tend to be more irregular and less challenging for employers than is the case with ‘fully involved dads’.

I do have definite childcare commitments, and there are certain times or occasions where it is non-negotiable and I leave on time.
Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

It's not brilliant [the childcare arrangements]. I have to pick him up by 6pm, so if I work late I can only work until 5.30pm which is half an hour extra. It's the same in the morning. I can't come in early because I can't drop him off until 8am.
Public sector, 1 child (2), partner works full-time

The research contains little or no evidence of fathers wishing to move from one role to another – in effect, to be more or less included in childcare and household tasks than at present in relation to their partner. Perhaps this is evidence that roles are dictated largely by circumstances rather than beliefs. Certainly in the focus groups, it seemed that a mother's choice of whether to work had a significant impact on the family's overall arrangements. For example, where a mother chose to work full-time, the father consequently took on a greater level of responsibility for childcare.

‘Weekend dad’

At present, many fathers recognise that they are not particularly available to their children during the week, but feel that they make up for this by designating their weekends as ‘family time’. With the exception of ‘fully involved dads’, many working fathers say that their presence in the family is minimal on weekdays. For example, several of the fathers interviewed are working regular 70 hour weeks, making it practically impossible to spend time with the children during the week. One of these fathers insists that his involvement with the children is in “*everything they do*”, although it is difficult to see how this can be the case when work is placing such a demand on his time.

We tend to go away most weekends, so I like to make sure that I set aside time for my family basically. But during the week it's no, just a story at night-time or half an hour mucking around and that's it.
Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner not working

It is much easier said than done when you come home after doing 10 hours. A lot of the time I come home, have my dinner and go to bed and that is it. So at the weekends I try to get involved more.

Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

First thing Monday morning until 6pm Friday, I almost sell myself to my job, but it has to be something pretty serious to have to work the weekend. So rather than dilute the weekend having to work, I push myself really hard through the week, so I have two clear days as a family unit.

Working full-time, partner works full-time (focus group)

I would say he is a bit of a weekend dad. I mean, he is fantastic at the weekends, he is great ... but during the week he is never here ... So he probably spends less than five minutes with them during the week, per day.

Partner, 2 children (0, 3), works part-time

Again, the role of the weekend dad is most evident when compared with his partner's role in the family:

Oh she does quite a lot actually. She does the homework with the kids. It's hard to say really – I can only go by what I see at the weekends because I'm not there most of the time during the week. ... She is a good mother. She does everything really.

Private sector, 2 children (1, 6), partner not working

Well, everything really. Running the house, buying their clothes, preparing their meals, keeping the house clean, the washing, taking them to school sometimes, picking them up from school. I am afraid she tends to be more involved in parents' evenings than I am. I work quite long hours. I mean, basically, I am hardly ever there because of work commitments really.

Public sector, 2 children (12, 15), partner not working

'Weekend dads' are not a separate 'type' of father but are most likely to be either an 'entertainer' or 'useful dad'. However, it does seem to be a very common pattern among full-time working fathers, many of whom have very little involvement with their family during the week. The level of involvement does of course depend on a number of factors, which are discussed in detail below.

2.3 Factors that affect involvement in family life

A number of factors can help to understand working fathers' differential levels of involvement in the family, including financial circumstances, personal motivation and aspirations, and both parents' working status. This section explores each of these factors (although the effect of a father's own working status on his involvement in the family is explored in greater detail in Chapter 3).

Table 2.1 Factors that affect fathers' involvement in family life

Barriers	Enablers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivational Beliefs about role as 'provider' Desire for time for oneself • Skills and confidence Fathers feel mothers are better at caring • Workplace Long hours culture and inflexibility • Financial Father needs to work full-time • Number of children Fathers less involved when >1 child • Career aspirations Pressure to work long hours • Mothers as gatekeepers Mothers prevent fathers' involvement? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivational Wanting to be involved • Skills and confidence Developing skills (e.g. courses for new dads) • Workplace Flexibility and understanding from employers • Partner's working hours May 'force' dad to take over some childcare • Age of children Shared interests with older children • Informal childcare support Lack of help increases burden on parents

Financial

While gender divisions appear to remain deeply entrenched in many families, with the father taking the main providing role and the mother the main caring role, many fathers explain that this is in fact a pragmatic decision for the family – it simply makes financial sense to arrange things in this way. The high cost of childcare in particular means that it is not possible for both parents to work full-time in many families, particularly those with pre-school aged children.

Financially it would be totally illogical for my wife to work. The childcare cost involved with three children, it would cost more than she could earn.

Private sector, 3 children (0+), partner not working

Furthermore, it is more usual for the father to be earning the higher wage than the mother, so there is often little question of him cutting down his hours in order to spend more time with the family. In fact, the gender gap in pay appears to be a key factor in propagating gendered roles in the family – this is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Motivation

Other than where circumstances dictate, fathers must *want* to be involved in family life in order for this to come about. However, as shown above, many men consider

being the breadwinner to be their primary role as a father, and the day-to-day childcare tasks the responsibility of their partner or wife. In addition, work is described by many men as a welcome 'escape' from home and family life. This means that they do not have the motivation to work any less nor to spend any more time at home.

There is also an element of avoiding greater participation in family life:

The things that do prevent me [from spending more time with the family] are things that I probably bring ... on myself.

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner not working

I would like to be more involved to a certain extent. But work sometimes provides a bit of an escape as well. You know, a change of scenery or what have you, which obviously with three young children can be a requirement from time to time.

Public sector, 3 children (4+), partner full-time student

In contrast, many fathers *do* have the motivation to be involved in family life. A small minority (the 'fully involved dads') actively play a lead role in the upbringing of their children, and to this end they aim to divide childcare responsibilities equally with their partner. Even among 'useful dads' or 'entertainer dads' there is a feeling that fathers generally wish to be involved in their children's lives more these days than in the past (for instance, when compared with their own parents' generation).

I think the younger generation of fathers, certainly among my friends, want to play more of an active role as a father and as a doer in the house.

Private sector, 3 children (0+), partner not working

Some fathers still want the opportunity to 'escape' and to enjoy their own time.

Making time for yourself so that you can be sane and enjoy the time with them. Some fathers can spend every minute either working or with their children, but then they have no time for themselves ... I am all for this 'new father' or 'new man', but you gradually go insane.

Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

Even the part-time or shift workers – who are heavily involved in childcare – say they have 'escapes' where they can create half an hour or so to themselves. For example, driving home a little later, or doing the cooking instead of bathing the children when both they and their partner are at home in the evening.

Career aspirations

Some fathers say that they *could* be doing a job that involves fewer hours, and hence they could spend more time with the family, but they have specifically chosen not to.

For many, this is not only because of the financial rewards that long hours bring, but also the job or career satisfaction. Many men feel that if they want to progress in their career, then they have to give it their all, which ultimately means that there is less time for being fully involved in family life. This is also linked to a father's sense of responsibility as a provider for the family:

I would prefer to make sure that [my son] was given all the opportunities that my job affords him ... but there's a price to pay in that and unfortunately that's time. So I'm not always there when he goes to bed.

Private sector, 1 child (1), partner works part-time

Skills and confidence

Fathers may let their partner take the lead in childcare because they feel less confident or less capable than her at looking after the children. With younger children, this may be because they feel a mother is better able to meet a child's physical needs in the early stages, and with older children it may be about providing emotional support.

I think you wonder first of all what to do with a very small child, because it does seem that most of the child's need are not ones that you can meet.

Charity, 2 children (0, 3), partner works part-time

Some fathers in the discussion group of part-time or shift working men suggested that there should be a course for new fathers, in order to prepare them for having children. They felt that this should cover issues such as what to expect, as well as practical childcare skills and time management. One father in the group also suggested that boys at school should be taught about the responsibility you have as a father.

Evidence from the literature on fathers suggests that mothers may act as gatekeepers, effectively preventing the father from having 'hands on' experience with the children. This research found little explicit evidence of gatekeeping in the negative sense – only one father describes his wife as actively preventing him from participating in childcare, and even he says that he does not mind. However, in most cases the mother does take the lead in childcare, and in this sense could be regarded as a gatekeeper though perhaps not a conscious one.

She claims she has a lot more experience of these things than me because her family, when she grew up, was quite big and she has lots of nieces and nephews, and so she assumes she knows a lot more than me ... I must admit I don't mind.

Charity, 3 children (3+), partner works full-time

Reinforcing the idea that confidence is important in determining roles, fathers on their second marriage, with children from both, generally describe having a greater involvement in the family this time around. This may be either because they are more confident in their parenting skills, or because they have greater motivation to be involved.

Age of children

Several fathers suggest that the traditional mother and father roles were more evident when their children were young, and as they have grown up there has been a narrowing of the roles. This change in roles appears to have come about because some fathers are less interested in being involved when children are very young. One father describes this as *"the physical side of things – just the feeding, the washing, and the general 'tumble' of younger life"*. However, he also warns other fathers not to wait until they are in their teens to start to enjoy their company, because they will not want the company of their father then! Some fathers suggest that they increasingly take the lead over the mother as children get older. For example, negotiating the time for teenagers to get home.

It's changed. As they are getting older I am doing more with the children. When they were young, babies, you don't really do a lot with them.

Private sector, 4 children (9+), partner works part-time

It is quite interesting being a father when you get to the teenage years, because there is not the same avoiding of responsibility for nappy changing and feeding ... Now there is being here to deal with other things ... But I think in their later years they need more presence and support perhaps than earlier on.

Charity, 3 children (14+), partner works full-time

As well as motivational factors such as these, there are also other reasons why a father's involvement in the family may change as children grow older. For instance, it is often fathers who watch their sons play football on a weekend, or act as a 'taxi service' to older children who take part in evening activities. Furthermore, when children are young, mothers are more likely to be at home with them full-time and hence develop a closer relationship with the children than a full-time working father is able to.

My partner prefers to do the bathing and whatever. She seems to take more of a role there, whereas I take more of an interactive role with the older two like going on the computer.

Working part-time/shift work (focus group)

Sometimes as they get older, their interests might evolve along the same lines as yours, which my son's has. He likes one of the things

that I like, so it doesn't make it as difficult when he is involved in sports and things ... And I think that sort of sharing an interest as they get older is a big thing.

Working full-time, partner works full-time (focus group)

However, there are also fathers who emphasise the importance of being involved while children are young.

When you are looking at small children, I think that's the period in their life when a lot of their personality and a lot of their opinions of what's right and wrong are formed. I think if you can try and influence that when they are at that young age then that stands them in good stead for later on ... I think dads nowadays spend a lot more time and I think that's good.

Working part-time/shift work (focus group)

Number of children

It is interesting that many of those fathers who could be described as 'fully involved dads' tend to have only one child, and it seems that taking an equal role in childcare is more difficult for working fathers with two or more children. In several of the families involved in the research, the mother returned to full-time work after the first child, with responsibility for childcare being shared. However, after the birth of the second child, it became more difficult to sustain two full-time jobs, because of the cost of childcare and also the demand on time. Invariably, it is the father who continued to work full-time while the mother took over the childcare role, thus reverting to more traditional parenting roles.

One father found himself in this situation, saying he tried to be a 'new man' when his first child was born, but found that it did not work in practice, so was less involved at the birth of the second:

I was more involved with the first one ... I tried to be the new father, the new man. Then I realised after four years it does not really work, and I am taking a bit more of a back stage this time. With [first child] I would have got up in the nights and helped with things and so on, but if I have to be up at 5.30am for work, you realise that just does not work. I do not know if that is selfish or not, but Sarah is off work, so when the baby sleeps she can sleep and so forth.

Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

Partner's work

Whether or not a mother works, and her actual hours, also play an important part in influencing a father's level of involvement in family life. In families where the mother works in the evenings or at weekends, fathers tend to take on full responsibility for looking after the children at these times. Where both parents work full-time, a lot

depends on the flexibility of both jobs. However, in households where the children's mother does not work, she tends to take on full responsibility for childcare. Several fathers say they strongly prefer that their partner stays at home rather having a stranger look after the children:

I consider ourselves quite fortunate that my wife can be at home. Because there are not many couples that I know where the wife does stay at home these days ... they have to put their children in a nursery or something like that. I don't particularly want to do that.

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner not working

Changes to working patterns made by both fathers and mothers are explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Informal childcare support

Having friends or relatives nearby can be a huge help for families where both parents are working. For example, several couples say they rely on grandparents to a great extent, and they are the first port of call for the school or nursery if the parents are both at work. Others have networks of friends who they can call on for babysitting.

However, some families do not have such networks of informal support, which means that they share the childcare responsibility entirely between themselves. This appears to be a particular problem for parents living in London, which can be a very socially isolating place to live, especially when the grandparents are in the provinces.

Particularly in the first year of having a child, I think your social world, which used to be quite big, becomes very small, and I think it is a particular problem in London.

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

In London people are busy, people lead their lives very quickly ... there isn't that same kind of look out for your neighbour type of thing. I think for new mothers and people with small children it is really difficult.

Partner, 2 children (0, 3), works part-time

2.4 Do fathers want to be more involved?

Clearly fathers are a diverse group, with different motivations and aspirations, and differing perceptions of the 'father role'. Many fathers appear happy to be on the sidelines, or playing a supporting role, with the mother taking prime responsibility for the children. Around three-quarters of the fathers interviewed say they are either 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied overall with their level of involvement in looking after their children, and only very few fathers are dissatisfied. On the face of it, this suggests that fathers do *not* really want to be more involved. However, for those who say they

are only 'fairly satisfied', there may be ways in which they could be enabled to become more involved.

Some fathers who are prevented by work commitments from spending time with their family do admit that this is a choice, and do not appear to want to be more involved. This perhaps reflects the fact that parenting is not seen by fathers as an 'easy option', and they understand that looking after children for a large part of the day is hard work. Work therefore provides an 'opt out' and is seen as preferable to childcare.

I probably should be spending a lot more time with the family and I should be spending a lot more time helping my wife in the home. But the way I see it is that I'm burning candles at either end – a business and a full-time job – so you've got to make some sacrifices there.

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner not working

Several fathers say they are unable to find any extra time to spend with the children in their present job. However, it may be more a lack of motivation that is preventing them from doing so:

We asked them [the senior members of the company] a question ... We said, "What would you do if you had a 25th hour in the day?" They said, "Go home and be with my family." But they are not doing that at the moment with the 17th or 18th hour in the day.

Private sector, HR Manager

Corporate culture can be to blame in some cases, with high expectations of hours worked, although sometimes these are self-imposed. The above comment suggests that some fathers lack the skills and/or confidence to leave at a time that would enable them to be more useful at home.

It is difficult to make generalisations, but while there are certainly fathers who are happy to remain on the sidelines, there are also some working fathers who most definitely *do* want to be more involved in their children's lives. Several say that their ideal lifestyle would be part-time working in a role that they enjoy, with more time available for themselves and to spend with their children. Despite this, there is little sense that fathers have seriously considered such options.

[Ideally] I would probably work less hours than I do ... and maybe an extra day off during the week. So that I could be involved – it's a real treat for me I think sometimes to either take the kids to school or pick them up from school because it's just something which I completely miss out on ... so I think to be involved in that on a regular basis would be quite nice.

Private sector, 2 children (8, 10), partner works part-time

In studies of working mothers, women have described a strong sense of guilt whether they choose to work or be a full-time carer.² This appears to be less evident among working fathers, perhaps because they see work as their main responsibility, and are secure in the knowledge that their partner is taking responsibility for childcare. When fathers do mention feeling guilt, it tends to be work-related – that is, guilt at leaving work early to be with the children, rather than because of spending too long at work. Having said that, there are some fathers who do express guilt over their lack of involvement in the family, or allowing work to encroach on family time:

I think there are times when as parents you're quite hard on yourself really and think, well "I'm not spending as much time as I should be or as I'd like", and then there's other times when you think, "Well, hang on a second, you know, you've got all these other responsibilities and there's got to be some sort of balance there".

Private sector, 2 children (8, 10), partner works part-time

If you are very tired and work is stressful ... and you come home and there is a child jumping up and down and wanting your attention, and you are stressed out and you think, "I am not being a very good father because I am not playing and I am not meeting her needs very well because I am just sitting there with stress pumping through my veins".

If you can't turn off you can't be a very good parent.

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

2.5 Summary

- While the breadwinner role continues to be important for some fathers, many also emphasise the importance of 'being there' for their children. To some extent there is a tension between these two demands.
- There is clear evidence of widespread acceptance of the traditional gender roles in parenting. That is, the father provides financially while the mother looks after the children and home. For a significant minority, these roles are seen as rooted in the 'natural' abilities of men and women.
- It is possible to identify four different typologies of working father: the 'enforcer dad', the 'entertainer dad', the 'useful dad' and the 'fully involved dad'. Most working fathers appear to fit into the middle two 'types' of dad (either 'entertainer' or 'helpful'). Many can also be described as 'weekend dads' – that is, they hardly see their children at all during the week, but deliberately set the weekend aside as 'family time'.

² For example, Williams, R. and Stevens, J. (2001) **Women's experiences and perceptions of Government initiatives**, Women and Equality Unit.

- Most fathers are satisfied with their current level of involvement in the family, and being more involved is something which many have not questioned before.
- There are a variety of factors which affect a father's level of involvement in the family. Some factors may both enable involvement and act as a barrier against it – for example, a family's financial situation, the father's own motivation, and both parents' workplace situations.

3 FATHERS' ATTITUDES TO WORK

This chapter looks at how men's attitudes to work change when they become a father, and whether this is reflected in changes to their working patterns. It also examines how mothers alter their working patterns after having children and asks why mothers tend to make more changes than fathers.

3.1 Changes in attitudes since becoming a father

Most fathers interviewed agree that their attitude to work has changed since becoming a father. However, it seems that there have been a range of reactions, with some men working longer hours once they have a family to provide for and others working fewer hours in order to spend more time at home.

For many, there is a heightened sense of responsibility as the family's 'provider', which may also lead to a greater sense of commitment to their job, in order to improve job security, or even the desire to take on a bigger role or a promotion. This is a pressure created by society's view of the father as breadwinner.

I think it gives you responsibility, definitely. You can't say, "right, that's it, I'm leaving now", quit your job and blow everything! Maybe it gives you a greater reason to work and to keep going.

Private sector, 2 children (14, 16), partner working full-time

You have responsibilities now ... You have to feed and clothe all of them. The job becomes a lot more important. It is not just for yourself the money, it is for your whole family.

Private sector, 2 children (2, 2), partner working part-time

Types of fathers who are particularly likely to mention the heightened sense of job commitment include those in less senior positions, or shopfloor workers, who perhaps did not previously have a notion of a personal career path.

You have to shut your mouth more, because you can't afford to lose your job.

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

Moving up into management – the whole drive of it is from being a father.

Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

I was more conscientious. Rather than just coming in and doing the hours and going home, I stepped up a gear.

Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

Several fathers feel that having a family has made them more efficient or better organised, because there is greater incentive to get through their day's work and leave as soon as possible. However, they are more senior, and tend to be working in the types of jobs which allow them a great deal of control over their day-to-day work schedule.

I think it's probably made me concentrate on more things, because I've become more organised and responsible. I think it makes a difference and I don't spend as much time sitting down and not being as productive as perhaps I could have been.

Private sector, 4 children (1+), partner not working

Finally, some men say becoming a father has meant that work is no longer the central focus of their life – for example, many who previously would have worked over the weekend now set this time aside as 'family time'. Again, these fathers tend to be in more senior positions, and in the types of job where it is considered normal – and is even expected – that employees work far longer than their contracted hours.

It matters less. It's much easier to switch off. I often take work home on a Friday and then don't do any of it over the weekend ... Weekends are now specifically there for the family.

Charity, 2 children (0, 3), partner works part-time

It's becoming more of a means to an end now, rather than sort of huge, ambitious career development plan. I still think that's at the back of my mind because obviously you still want to be providing, but it's not so focused now as perhaps it was ... It's clearing your desk as quickly as possible so you can get home to be honest.

Private sector, 1 child (1), partner works part-time

Nobody ever sat on their deathbed thinking, 'I wish I spent more time in the office'. Work is a means to an end.

Private sector, 3 children (10+), partner not working

It is clear that many fathers do readjust the way they think about work after having children, and this can have an impact on what they do in practice.

3.2 Changes in working patterns

Changes made by fathers

Despite thinking differently about work, most fathers report having made no actual changes to their job or the way in which they organise their work since becoming a father.

Just a small minority of fathers have actually changed their job in order to spend more time with their family. For example, one father moved from shift work to regular

weekday working, while another changed his job so that he was no longer working away from home during the week:

It was family that was. More for the weekends – doing the days and being off weekends ... It was 6 hour days and 6 hour nights, so you had plenty of time off, but you could have the whole week off but then you were working weekends.

Private sector, 4 children (9+), partner works part-time

I used to work all over the country travelling up and down, and I wanted to change my lifestyle because I wanted to take an active part in my son's upbringing and be closer to him – to be there when he needs me.

Public sector, 1 child (10), partner working part-time

One father switched to part-time working (as a nurse) when his wife was given the opportunity for promotion, dropping his hours so that there was always one of them at home. Another couple – currently both office-based in London – are planning a very big change in lifestyle in order to help achieve a better balance between work and family, with one of them retraining as a teacher, and the other going back to full-time study. However, these examples are the exception and not the rule.

Other fathers have found it difficult to reduce their working hours, and instead are making small adjustments, such as saving some work to do in the evenings after their children have gone to bed:

Reducing on more occasions the working hours, and be home earlier to spend time with the family, and I may adapt certain routines during my working day, i.e. do some ... e-mail reading in the later night hours, after I have gone home a bit earlier to play together.

Private sector, 1 child (0), partner not working

However, it should be emphasised that most fathers have not made substantial changes to their jobs, and there are also some fathers for whom the changes that they have made have meant that they now have *less* time to spend with their family. This appears to reflect the pressure on the father to be a breadwinner.

I was working in a job which was closer to home and less demanding. So it has often been a source of regret to me that I gave that up. In a way I sacrificed my children for my career in many ways ... But I think for men particularly, the job that you do does say something about your self-esteem, and you know, you can't really go through life with low self-esteem I suppose.

Public sector, 2 children (12, 15), partner not working

Changes made by mothers

In order to understand why most fathers are able to continue working without making adjustments to their own working pattern it is also important to consider the changes made by women. In contrast to the relatively few fathers who have adjusted their jobs in order to accommodate family commitments, the majority of men report that their partner has had to adapt her working life quite significantly. This is also supported by the interviews with mothers themselves.

I think she's had to make her job work around the children much more than I have. She's had to find a job or find within a job a way of being able to get the children to school and pick the children up from school, and do things with them during the week, as well as carry on the work. So she's had to work around the children.

Private sector, 4 children (0+), partner works full-time

I would say, on balance, [my wife's] commitments were sacrificed more quickly than mine.

Public sector, 5 children (18+), partner works part-time

It has affected my career enormously actually, and it hasn't affected Tim's at all. When Tim and I met we were in very similar positions ... And then I had my first child and went back into the same job, and I did it for a year but it was exhausting.

Partner, 2 children (0, 3), works part-time

It has very much been my side that has had to give over his side.

Partner, 2 children (3, 6), works full-time

Some women also mention that a similar pattern applies to changes in their home or social life. They feel that, as a mother, they tend to sacrifice their own personal time more readily than a father. For instance, one woman describes how she had to relinquish her gym membership because she simply did not have the time to go, while her husband still managed to fit in trips to the gym and two other weekly hobbies, saying that he needs the time to relax – a luxury not afforded to many mothers. Moreover, even in households where the partnership is equal in most respects, when the man is earning significantly more than the woman, it may be difficult to escape from the notion that this ultimately gives him some sort of power.

You realise that ultimately it is the woman that always gives, not the man, no matter how interested they are in their family, and he is very interested in them. ... And it is a very difficult thing, because obviously he is earning a lot more than I am.

Partner, 2 children (3, 6), works full-time

While it seems that many women do choose to stay at home in order to look after the children, it must also be acknowledged that this is not necessarily a free choice, but

is affected by a number of factors. Many mothers who stay at home are frustrated by not working but feel constrained by the acceptable notion of 'a good mother'.³ Others may be in this position because there needs to be one parent available during the day, and it makes financial sense for their husband to continue working full-time.

3.3 Why do mothers make more changes at work than fathers?

The majority of fathers interviewed are clear that both mothers and fathers are equally capable of working or having a career; however, many point out that it is difficult for *both* to do so. When children are young, the high cost of childcare means that they need to have one parent at home at least some of the time.

One of you has got to [have a career], but I don't think that both of you can and bring up children.

Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

We couldn't afford for my wife and me to work exactly the same hours Monday to Friday. Even if we wanted to we couldn't afford to do it, because you run into horrendous childminding costs.

Private sector, 6 children (2+), partner works part-time

The reasons why most families seem to follow fairly traditional gender roles are, on the face of it, quite straightforward. Firstly, men tend to earn more than women, so it makes financial sense for them to continue working full-time, and secondly, fathers want to work. There are very few working fathers who say they would like to cut down their hours to part-time or stop working altogether for a while in order to look after the children, while in contrast, many mothers do so.

Other factors include societal and workplace assumptions about the mother and father roles which mean that the infrastructure is more likely to be in place for mothers who wish to change their working pattern. It is generally more accepted for a woman to take time off, work part-time or job share. Factors outside the workplace also enforce this – the research, for example, provides plenty of evidence that schools tend to ring the mother initially, not the father, when a child is sick.

Gender gap in pay

As many studies have shown, on average, men earn significantly more than women in Britain. Women working full-time earn on average 18% less per hour than men working full-time, while women working part-time earn on average 41% less per hour than men working full-time. This helps explain why for many families it is simply a pragmatic decision for the mother to stay at home more with the children while the

³ See Williams, R. and Stevens, J. (2001) **Women's experiences and perceptions of Government initiatives**, Women and Equality Unit.

father continues to work full-time. This is the case even for families where the father says he would be happy to work shorter hours and to spend more time at home:

We did talk at one time about whether I would take a reduction in hours and Fiona would work, but because I happened to be on a higher wage it made economic sense not to. But, yes, I think it would have been fine.

Public sector, 1 child (2), partner works full-time

If I could stay at home and be a house husband and my wife go out and earn the money that I am earning, I would swap tomorrow.

Private sector, 1 child (8), partner works part-time

If your wife has got a better job than you, and she can prove that she can earn more money, then that is another matter. But when, I mean my wife, when we met she was earning half the money I did, so it was inevitable.

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

Her job had to revolve around my job, because I was the main breadwinner ... It came down to the point where we had got four kids, and she had got no time to go out to work. So I had to just make sure I had got enough hours, so I worked 12 hours a day, five or six days a week. In fact for a while it was seven days a week, 18 weeks permanently working, just to make up the money.

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

For a long time society has decided that men work and women nurture, and consequently because of the differing ways of treating women in the workplace – always as second best – they gravitated or were pushed towards a specific role which was traditionally childcare ... Whether it is right or wrong, and I happen to think it is wrong, I stand a better chance of earning the income that we need to sustain our lifestyle than my wife does.

Private sector, 1 child (8), partner works part-time

The difference in pay and job status between men and women also helps explain why a mother often tends to take time off work if a child is sick.

I don't care. It sounds really horrible – I have the same argument with her every time it happens – at the end of the day my wife has got a part-time job that doesn't hugely contribute towards our family income ... if she has a day's compassionate leave from work it costs her nothing.

Private sector, 1 child (8), partner works part-time

One implication of this father's comment is that his own workplace would be unsympathetic or would not be willing to accommodate such needs. Taking time off

may be seen as showing a lack of commitment to the company – something that is not necessarily expected in mothers' jobs, which tend to be part-time and/or low paid.

Fathers want to work

The second major reason why mothers make more changes to their working pattern, other than the gender gap in pay, is a lack of enthusiasm among working fathers for staying at home more. Many fathers of young children say they would rather be at work during the daytime, and would find spending a day with the children either hard work or mundane. However, there is often little reflection that this is the same for mothers.

I am not sure how I would cope, looking after a child all day if I had to. I think it would drive you mad, because at the moment even now when we are playing, and you've read the same book 12 times, you think can I put the telly on!

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner works part-time

I think possibly the mother is more suited. That's not to say that fathers who decide to stay at home are wrong ... but probably again with the traditional root of things maybe the mother is better equipped all round at being with the child and being with the baby, toddler and the child.

Private sector, 2 children (14, 16), partner working full-time

In practice, mothers often make a conscious decision to be at home with the children during the daytime, whereas their partner would not be happy to do so:

We did discuss [Tim cutting down his hours] but he wasn't very interested in that. And he felt if he worked four days a week he would get a bit fed up on the day he was at home with our daughter ... On the other hand I was very keen to be at home with her more, so it was a very natural decision really. Whereas it was a very equal relationship in terms of career, it has made it more of a traditional one now ... But it is actually working very well.

Partner, 2 children (0, 3), works part-time

Some fathers say they simply did not consider any other arrangement, or they saw this as the natural division of roles in the family:

I don't know if we gave it any great thought at the time to be honest. I suppose I might be old-fashioned, but I wouldn't see myself as a person staying at home ... I couldn't imagine being a 'house father' myself.

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner not working

I think most females are focused on the needs of the family, whereas men, if you are going to compare the two, are going to be more kind of career focused. There are exceptions, but in the main.

Private sector, 3 children (0+), partner not working

Of course, it is important to note that there are some working fathers who say they *would* like to be more involved, but are working full-time because of the income.

Personally I wouldn't have any hesitation in a kind of stereotypical role reversal if you like, where she went out to work and I looked after the kids ... I'm sure they'd drive me up the wall from time to time as well, but equally they do with my wife as well, so I can't see that as being any different, I really can't.

Private sector, 2 children (8, 10), partner works part-time

Assumptions about roles

Mothers who have personal experience of balancing work and family point out that it is taken for granted that the mother will alter her working pattern rather than the father, especially because women tend to be lower earners. They also say that women who do continue to work face the double pressure of a 'work career' and a 'family career', whereas the assumption is that a man will only have primary responsibility for his 'work career' – which makes it much easier for a father to maintain a full-time job and still perform his expected role as a father.

I think it is a pressure that is put on a woman that even if you do have a career you have to have two, basically. You have to have the work career, and you have to have the family career ... Just because you decide to have a work career does not mean that you drop the other one off. You end up with both. Whereas a man would have his work career, and the child career would come further down the list because there is always a woman behind him who is doing it already.

Partner, 2 children (8, 10), works part-time

I think that a mother needs more support to be able to [continue with her career]. I think to a degree it is taken for granted that it will be the mother that alters her working life, and I think that there are some financial pressures in that – not all women are in jobs that pay sufficiently well to replace their husband's salary for them to become the main breadwinners. I think there are still some issues like that that will need to be sorted out before it is completely equal.

Partner, 1 child (5), works part-time

I certainly felt when I was working full-time, I felt as though I had to do everything. I felt I had to try to be there continually for my children, and do fantastically at work, and it was very difficult to find any time for myself. Whereas Tim would probably be more likely to be found in the front room reading the newspaper or something.

Partner, 2 children (0, 3), works part-time

Finally, mothers feel that, because they take on the majority of responsibility for the children (which is seen as a mother's role), they are less able to 'switch off' from this role, even when at work. In contrast, some suggest that working fathers put the

family into a 'box' for the time that they are at work, and only take it out at weekends or in the evenings.

I do think there is a tendency for men to be able to put these things in boxes, whilst women, there is no way that I could ever work through and forget to pick the kids up, or that sort of stuff. Always in my mind I feel as if I am juggling three or four thought processes at the same time, whilst I never get the feeling that he does. And I wonder if we are conditioned to be like that – conditioned to always please others.

Partner, 2 children (3, 6), works full-time

[Philip] can walk through the doors at work and is totally absorbed in it, whereas I think a woman can walk in the door and she has still got the thought of other things going on in her head: "Did he remember to take his PE kit" and stuff like that.

Partner, 2 children (8, 10), works part-time

Fathers themselves also describe being able to 'switch off' from the family while they are at work:

I think if you have got a job to go to then you are in a luxurious position. If your wife doesn't work, she has got the kids all day every day, without a release, without a way out. You leave the house and go to work in the morning, you don't have to bother with the kids until you get home 6.00pm. So you have got all day.

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

You think totally differently when you are working away. You forget about kids when you are not with them.

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

3.4 Summary

- Although many fathers say that fatherhood has changed their attitude to work and it makes them feel a greater sense of responsibility as a provider, there is limited evidence that many make any practical changes.
- As a result of fatherhood and the responsibility it brings, some work longer hours, while others compress their working day or week so that they can get home earlier. However, only a few fathers have made major changes to their working patterns, enabling them to become more involved in family life.
- In contrast, a majority of mothers make significant changes to their working lives. It is evident that mothers tend to take responsibility for childcare because of the gender pay gap – both their lower current earnings and future earnings – combined with the high cost of childcare. There is currently a clear sense that parenthood and a career are largely incompatible, at least for one parent.

- Furthermore, in terms of choices, the research suggests that men want to work – very few wish to reduce their hours or stop work altogether.

4 BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE: THE CURRENT SITUATION

This chapter looks at the current experiences of working fathers when balancing their work and family commitments. The first section explores fathers' expectations of their employers in terms of taking time off for occasional emergencies or important family events. The second section considers factors affecting fathers' ability to balance work and family, including workplace culture, assumptions about a father's role, motivation, and working pattern.

4.1 Expectations of taking time off for family commitments

For many fathers, one of the key aspects of balancing work and family involves being able to take time off work for occasional emergencies or family events that might occur, often with little or no notice. This type of flexibility appears to be expected of employers by almost all working fathers. It primarily includes time off if the children are sick (and if other childcare arrangements have fallen through), and time off for important occasions such as parents' evenings, school plays and school sports days. The level of demand for this depends on a father's level of responsibility for looking after his children, although even those fathers who have never asked for time off work for these reasons say they expect that it should be permitted.

The two main types of need are time off in emergencies and time off for special events. With time off in emergencies there is a near-virtual expectation that this should always be available, and many working fathers expect that it should be taken as compassionate leave. Time off for special events is 'one step up' in that it is not always expected that this will be granted, and there is an understanding that the time will either be made up at a later date or taken as annual leave. It is important to note that these expectations are for leave that is ad hoc, rather than policy-based, and depend on having a sympathetic manager. Many fathers report that their current employers do understand their needs:

Well Christmas, I needed a couple of hours off just to go and see the nativity play and that, no problem, I worked the time back. Dropping them off at the school when Vicky is ill, things like that, no problem.

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

I think if it involved taking a whole day off [for a hospital appointment] it would have to be taken as annual leave. But I think if it was a few hours off or an afternoon off, then that would be acceptable as long as you make the time up.

Charity, 1 child (6), partner not working

In particular, people who tend to work alone or who manage their own daily schedule appear to be quite satisfied that they can take time off during their working day, particularly those who usually work far more than their contracted hours. However, many fathers seldom take advantage of this flexibility, and most say it would not be tolerated if an employee was seen to be taking liberties – for example, it would be noted if a father seemed to have more out-of-work commitments than is usual. This reflects the need for working fathers to demonstrate a sense of responsibility to their company or organisation.

It's letting the side down. If you're not there somebody else has got to do your job for you as well as their own job.
Private sector, HR Manager

It's frequency isn't it. It's the old 'cry wolf' syndrome. If it was every week, but if it was once every six months or once a year then it is OK.
Working full-time, partner works full-time (focus group)

Therefore, there may be pressure *not* to take time off when a child is ill. One father says, “*you feel like you're cheating*” when you take time off to look after a child. This sense of responsibility is particularly heightened for shift workers, because taking time off during their working day often requires another worker to change his or her working pattern in order to accommodate their needs. Shift workers tend to feel that they are able to take only a limited amount of time off for family commitments – that is, hours rather than days.

I can only talk about some very minor times when I have taken two or three hours off to be home at a certain time, i.e. when my wife has her regular Tuesday night sports evenings and then I am obviously home at a certain time.
Private sector, 1 child (0), partner not working

Fathers feel that taking time off for family commitments is weighed up by their employer against what is ‘reasonable’. Several fathers explain that tolerance for out-of-work commitments depends on an individual’s own sickness record. If an employee has taken more sick days than average, then he may not be trusted to use ad hoc concessions for childcare responsibly:

A guy will take all of his annual leave very quickly and it all coincides with the school holidays, and then when half term comes round he throws two days off sick. It is transparent what is happening.
Private sector, 1 child (8), partner works part-time

Depending I suppose on how much you used and how serious it was. If you were going to the doctor's every time she had a cold and you didn't really have to be there, I don't think they would be too

accommodating ... but if it was something quite serious or even something like appendicitis, then there wouldn't be a qualm about you being off. What it comes down to also is your sickness record ... If you have got somebody who is off themselves quite a lot over the year, then they are not going to be so happy when they are off with their children as well.

Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

Some fathers do suggest that if an employer is not accommodating then they may be forced to take a sick day themselves in order to meet their family responsibilities.

I guess if I wasn't allowed time off because they were sick, then I would be forced to go sick myself to be with them. And I wouldn't hesitate in doing that.

Charity, 2 children (12, 14), partner works full-time

One father in particular says the poor treatment he received from his company when he needed to have time off to care for seriously ill children has led him to believe that fathers would take sick leave themselves rather than ask for special leave. He feels that he was not allowed sufficient time:

When I was getting the oxygen fitted in the house I asked for a week paid leave, and they said you have your holiday spare, and I said I want that for when the kids come home, and they said they couldn't give me a week, but what about three days and two days holiday.

Private sector, 2 children (2, 2), partner working part-time

Whether or not an employer is seen as 'fair' depends on the level of flexibility expected by parents, and what is classified as an important family event for the father. For example, one mother felt that her husband should have been enabled to be present at all her scans while she was pregnant, while the company did not deem this to be an essential family commitment.

Overall, there is a degree of consensus among fathers over what is expected of employers. It is clear that different types of event lead to different levels of expectation. These range from time off in emergencies, which is almost universally expected, through events such as parents' evenings where some flexibility and understanding is desirable, to other larger changes to a father's working pattern.

4.2 Factors affecting fathers' ability to balance work and family

Overall, half of the fathers interviewed say it is currently quite easy for them to take time off or change their working pattern to accommodate out-of-work needs, while around a third of working dads say it is difficult for them to do so. Those who find it difficult include shift workers, and men for whom the nature of their job means that it is difficult to get away – this is a fairly broad spectrum of people, including those in

very senior positions who may have meetings with government ministers for example, which makes it very difficult to make last minute changes to their schedule. Types of workers who say they find it easy to take time off for family commitments include middle and senior managers in the private sector who are office-based, plus those working in the public sector who are able to make use of flexi-time.

There are a number of interrelated factors that affect fathers' ability to balance work and family, including an organisation's workplace culture.

Workplace culture

If a father works in an environment in which family commitments are acknowledged and accepted then this can make the task of balancing work and family life much easier. In contrast, in an environment that is entirely work-focused, driven by long hours, and where colleagues either do not have or do not talk about their family responsibilities, it can be very difficult for fathers who do have definite childcare commitments.

None of the case study organisations in this study has explicitly promoted itself as a family-friendly working environment. The workplace culture at the public sector organisation probably comes closest to this, because the organisation has policies that help parents, such as flexi-time and part-time working. However, workplace culture encompasses more than family-friendly policies, and includes issues such as how comfortable fathers feel discussing their family commitments in the office, and how acceptable it is to leave early in order to pick the children up from school or to spend time with them in the evenings. Therefore, workplace culture may be a barrier for fathers even where there are policies in place:

You sometimes wonder, even though they might have the policies in writing about how they are family-friendly, you wonder sometimes what their attitude would be like if you had a lot of needs and you had to be really flexible and in and out all the time ... You wonder whether it is just words.

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

Again, fathers' actual experiences of current workplace culture are very mixed, and it is difficult to generalise. Furthermore, a very work-focused culture may not be seen as problematic by some fathers who do not have a heavy involvement in childcare responsibilities. Many fathers say they do find their workplace culture accommodating of their needs:

I think people, when you've got younger children, they do understand that there are certain times that you've got to help out more at home because of illness or stress.

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner works part-time

However, in one organisation in particular, it is noticeable that almost all fathers describe the culture as very work-focused and results-driven, even ‘macho’, although some say it has changed over the past twenty years or so:

It focuses on getting the sales in by the end of the month. It focuses on doing the celebration – let’s go down the pub! It’s very competitive.
Private sector, HR Manager

The culture is, they always used to say that your family comes first. That wasn’t really the case. The job always came first ... Now they do appreciate that you have a life outside work ... and I don’t feel guilty about leaving work early to go and do family things.
Private sector, 4 children (6+), partner works part-time

One father mentions that the company has a ‘two minute rule’ – this seems to require that staff should try to spend two minutes each day talking among their colleagues about their families and their lives outside work. It does at least mean that colleagues are aware of any parenting commitments. However, employees also say the “work hard”, and “results are the be all and end all”, culture is accompanied by an expectation of long hours – these are seen as part of being a full team player.

It’s very successful but a very hard driven company, so I think probably any changes that might suggest a drop in hours or a change in things would certainly in [the company’s] mind have to be not accompanied by a drop in performance.
Private sector, 4 children (0+), partner works full-time

This attitude that long hours demonstrate commitment to the organisation is seen as a general trait of most companies:

I think most companies like to see you going that extra mile, don’t they, whether you need to or not.
Working full-time, partner works full-time (focus group)

The long hours culture is not only prevalent in the private sector, but also the public and voluntary sectors, where putting in the hours is seen as a symbol of commitment to the organisation. This may be a barrier (perceived as well as real) to career development for fathers who do have definite childcare commitments, and is also described as a nuisance or an unnecessary pressure by those who do not, but who do want to feel free to spend more time with the family.

Culture within organisations can be a pressure, and unfortunately local government still suffers from the old-fashioned culture of long working hours that is inherited from large business. They haven’t really caught

up yet, and just because somebody's in the office all hours doesn't actually mean they are productive.

Public sector, 3 children (5+), partner full-time student

There is a 'twilight zone' with people in work, where you know full well they should have gone home by now, but they don't because they are still working on something. It is self-esteem that you are seeking in your workplace, which is probably a bit out of date now.

Public sector, 5 children (18+), partner works part-time

You wonder about your long-term position in the organisation if you are physically not in the office as much as people on a similar level to you at the end of the day ... I have no particular grievance with my current employer, but you still feel it – if I am not around as much as other people doing a similar kind of job it will be noted.

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

Some fathers feel that they are actively struggling against the culture of long hours, and give the impression of being pulled in two different directions by their home and work commitments. Rather than a 'work-life balance' there is a constant tension.

If you're in a working environment where a long hours culture is almost expected, then you have to draw the line somewhere and you have to say, "I'm sorry, tonight I'm going to pick up my kids from wherever" and not feel guilty or beat yourself up about it either from the work perspective or from the home perspective.

Private sector, 2 children (8, 10), partner works part-time

Several feel very strongly that they would like to see things change in Britain in general, so that the focus is less on work and more on quality of life as a whole.

If employers want to have a long hours culture, I don't see how they can reconcile being family-friendly employers at the same time. There is a tension there. I would much prefer us to go down the European route.

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

I think the whole country works too many hours. We work more hours than anyone else in Europe. We need some sort of change in the way we work I think. We need to stop making work the focus of our lives. I think men are particularly victim to the long hours culture.

Public sector, 2 children (12, 15), partner not working

Those who do work long hours say it is difficult to know how this culture might change. One aspect of the workplace that can make a difference for parents is if other people, particularly senior figures in the organisation, also have children or childcare responsibilities. This then helps to create a culture where it is the norm.

My manager helps out with things like running his daughter to school at certain times, so he turns up at 10.00am. So that doesn't make me feel bad about doing things, which is good.

Public sector, 1 child (5), partner working part-time

One of the reasons that my own employer was very flexible was because women before me had laid the way for part-time working and flexible arrangements that showed it was possible. Perhaps the same thing will apply where fathers are concerned – people will see by example that, yes, it can be done. Things do not collapse because someone takes a fortnight off after the birth of a baby.

Partner, 1 child (5), works part-time

However, many fathers feel that, at present, while it may be seen as the norm for mothers to take advantage of flexible or part-time working, this is still not expected of fathers. This is because of different assumptions held by employers and society in general about men and women in employment who have children.

Assumptions about roles

Many fathers agree that employers assume that their female employees who have children will need to make changes to their working pattern while men will not. This is rooted in the expectations of society as a whole that mothers will take prime responsibility for childcare. Of course, some fathers themselves also hold this view. For example, one father assumes that the aim of family-friendly policies is to help women rather than men:

I think it's more on the woman's side in terms of job sharing and part-time working. Companies need to be more sympathetic.

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner works part-time

These assumptions mean that employers do not expect fathers to be 'on call' to schools and nurseries, or to respond to emergencies regarding the children, in the same way that it is expected of mothers:

If the phone were to ring and it was somebody's child that were ill, then that call would probably be for one of your female employees. You wouldn't necessarily assume that it is going to be for a male employee.

Private sector, 1 child (8), partner works part-time

Another effect of these assumptions is to make it more difficult for fathers who do want to be involved in their children's lives, because it is expected that their work will be the primary or sole focus of their attention. Men who do play an active role in childcare may feel that they are seen as somehow less committed to the organisation, or perhaps even less 'manly', than other male employees.

I think it's probably tougher for fathers because the sort of impression you get is that women are the people who go and take the kids to the doctor's, they pick them up from school. The mothers have to be more flexible than the fathers in doing that. So there's more pressure for the father to stay in the job, stay there and keep on working.

Private sector, HR Manager

I think the expectancy is always for the mother to be involved from everyone really, from work and school point of view. I think they automatically always feel the mum is taking more involvement than the father.

Partner, 4 children (2+), works part-time

There is a cultural acceptance that mothers will have the first call ... I think that unless you have got an organisation with a family-friendly culture, people sort of think a bloke going on about his kids is a bit of a wuss really ... it somehow shows that you are not quite committed to the organisation if you start to say, "I want to put my family first".

Partner, 2 children (3, 6), works full-time

However, partly because of traditional assumptions about the roles of mothers and fathers, men in general have not suffered from the same types of discrimination in the workplace that women have faced.

I think women have it harder with their careers, because of the sexist attitudes at work ... I think most employers would assume that it is the woman who does most of the care and responsibility ... Employers are not as worried about the fact that [men] are parents. They think that the blokes don't do as much.

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

Motivation

Linked to these expectations of parents' roles are fathers' own personal beliefs about achieving a balance between work and family. Their ability to balance the two is in part determined by their motivation, and their idea of what they should be doing as a father. Some fathers simply do not expect any flexibility or special treatment from their employer because the children are seen as their partner's responsibility.

I can't see a situation where my work has suffered at all. We've made arrangements where if I have to be somewhere then obviously my wife takes time off. If it has to be unpaid then it doesn't matter as she's in a position to do it.

Private sector, 4 children (11+), partner works part-time

Many fathers emphasise their own responsibility for managing the work-life balance, and stress that one of the most important factors is your personal desire to spend

more time with your children. There is a notion that each individual must decide how much they focus their attention on work, and how much on the family.

I do think far more is to do with your own considerations about the work-life balance, and if you really want to have more input in things at home then you have to do it yourself.

Private sector, 1 child (0), partner not working

I think you need to communicate with your partner or wife, organise yourself ... But that is nothing really that your employer can do. If you get it right at home, then a bit of tweaking at work is fine.

Private sector, 6 children (2+), partner works part-time

I think it's just a case of small amounts of compromise ... I think it's very difficult to be totally career focused without your home life suffering, and I think it's very difficult to be financially supportive without investing the time in your job.

Private sector, 1 child (1), partner works part-time

Shift work

For fathers who do shift work, being able to meet specific family commitments relies upon swapping shifts with a colleague:

You would have to get a swap with one of the lads. That is all the manager would say to you ... if you couldn't do it then you would have to take a day's holiday.

Private sector, 2 children (2, 2), partner working part-time

If I am working I can chop and change my days so instead of having Friday off I might have Thursday.

Private sector, 4 children (9+), partner works part-time

Shift work can be a barrier to spending time with the children, particularly if a father is working a lot of evenings and weekends and if it is difficult to swap shifts. The nature of shift work also means that fathers may not see their children for several days – there is a cumulative effect. In addition, one man says his company have a policy of calling workers in at short notice on Friday night or Saturday morning regardless of other family commitments, which means that trips with the family have to be cancelled at short notice.

Sometimes I can have a load of shifts together and not see my kids for four or five days. I've just done a set of nights just last week so I hardly saw them at all because they were at school during the day and then I'm at work at night. But this week I've got a week off so I will see them all week.

Working part-time/shift work (focus group)

When you do shifts and that, you don't get to see them a lot.
Private sector, 2 children (2, 2), partner working part-time

However, when the children are younger, working shifts can mean that a father is able to be heavily involved in looking after them, particularly where their partner is also working. For instance, if a father works an early shift and his partner a late shift, then childcare can be almost shared equally between the two. However, fathers who have personal experience of this say that their relationship with their partner suffered because of spending virtually no time together.

Seniority

A father's level of involvement in the family may depend on his seniority within the organisation, and the ability to determine his own schedule. With more senior employees there is a certain level of trust that they will not 'take liberties', and there is often more scope for other family-friendly solutions such as working at home.

It's relatively easy [to take time off]. I'm working at home today because one of them is going to have their eyes tested. For me it's just a question of letting them know what phone number I'm going to be on that day. As long as I've scheduled myself then I can do it.
Private sector, 4 children (1+), partner not working

Those who normally work long hours tend to be able to take the occasional afternoon, or even a whole day, without using up their annual leave, because there is an understanding with the employer that they will make up the time.

Lack of policies

A lack of family-friendly policies may be a barrier for fathers trying to balance work and family life, because it sends a message to employees that the organisation is not thinking about their out-of-work needs. However, many fathers in this research say they are happy to make informal agreements with their manager, rather than having policies that are set in stone.

For example, one father who has worked in both the public and private sector feels that the public sector was "almost too generous". He says in his present job he would feel perfectly comfortable in asking if he did need time off for a valid reason, although there are not the same formal provisions for parents.

I think the private sector here is a little more, it's not as generous as the public sector. It was incredibly generous really when you look back, you know. I mean, everything there was set down in policy ... it was really laid down in detail. I mean, I wouldn't know exactly what the policy was here but it's more general here, whereby if there was a

need, yes, you would get it, but they wouldn't go by the letter, and perhaps you would be expected to take some of your own time as well.

Private sector, 2 children (8, 10), partner works part-time

This is explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

4.3 Summary

- Many employers expect that work is the primary focus of a man's attention, leaving little room for them to accommodate family commitments. Some fathers are content with this and stress the importance of their own personal responsibility for arranging a satisfactory work-life balance.
- Workplace culture can have a great effect on fathers' ability to meet both their home and work commitments. Some fathers report a tension between the demands of work and home, and feel under pressure not to take time off when a child is ill, for example.
- Many working fathers value the flexibility of informal arrangements with their managers, and feel that formal company policies for fathers may be more restrictive.
- Fathers expect a degree of flexibility from their employer, to allow them to take time off for family emergencies, hospital appointments, and so on, but they generally expect to make this time up rather than take it as some form of leave. They are also conscious not to be seen as 'taking liberties'.
- Very few fathers had considered part-time or flexible working. In fact, there is a general feeling that although it is acceptable for mothers to take advantage of such family-friendly practices, it is still not accepted for fathers.
- Similarly, it is generally expected that mothers will make changes in their working patterns, while men will not. It is also accepted that mothers will be 'on-call' in times of emergency, or for schools and nurseries, whereas fathers will not.

5 THE ROLE OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES FOR FATHERS

This chapter addresses the key question of why fathers do not make greater demands of their employers in terms of access to and use of family-friendly policies. The first section looks at awareness of existing family-friendly policies, while the following section explores the current level of use of these policies by working fathers. Finally, the chapter asks, 'What do fathers want?' and considers the level of demand for a range of family-friendly policies and working practices.

5.1 Awareness of existing family-friendly policies

Many fathers are currently unaware of family-friendly policies in their workplace – around half do not know of any policies, while around half say that they do. Several fathers suggest that there are probably policies for parents in their company, but they have never asked about them and do not recall having been told. Others are aware of maternity leave and flexible arrangements for mothers, but are not certain what is available for fathers. Overall, almost no one was able to list what is currently available in their organisation to help fathers balance work and family life – in some cases this is because there are no policies.

One father who is a shopfloor worker raised the possibility of introducing family-friendly policies for fathers before being asked about this, demonstrating that there is some demand.

Obviously they have got more for women with maternity leave, but I think there should be things for fathers. Some of the Scandinavian countries, fathers there get a week or two off, paid leave. I think there should be a little bit more, even in the first 12 months of the kid's life.
Private sector, 2 children (2, 2), partner working part-time

In one company, a manufacturer, there is currently a lack of awareness of family-friendly policies and a feeling among employees that the management are poor at communicating to fathers what is available to them. Even one of the managers was unaware of any policies for fathers (although the company does have them):

I think it probably needs to be communicated from our end as a company what the policies are on parental leave, paternity, part-time working, because I'm not aware of it.
Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner not working

In another organisation, the HR Manager specifically says that although they have policies for parents, the company would not promote them. He also argues that there

is no obvious demand for policies for fathers despite the fact that they are available. However, perhaps part of the reason that fathers do not make use of family-friendly policies in his company is because they do not know that they exist.

I think, being truthful, we would not go out of our way to publicise it.
Private sector, HR Manager

In the smallest company involved in the research (fewer than 50 employees), there are no explicit family-friendly policies, and no expectation among fathers (including one 'fully involved dad') that there should be, given the size of the company.

However, there appears to be a different approach in the public sector organisation, where having such policies is part of the culture. Despite this, employees are not always aware of what is on offer to fathers.

I am sure there is one kind of policy, but we've got a policy for practically everything, information overload these days. I haven't time to read them.
Public sector, 1 child (5), partner working part-time

Similarly, in the voluntary sector, there is an assumption that any situations in which a father needed some flexibility would be dealt with sympathetically by managers, though there is little awareness of actual policies (other than one week's paternity leave).

A number of fathers assume that family-friendly policies would not be relevant to them, or are not aimed at the main breadwinner. Many in both the public and private sectors say that they simply have no need for them because they are happy with their current arrangements.

I've never really had to [ask about family-friendly policies]. My immediate boss is fairly flexible and allows me time off when I need it.
Private sector, 1 child (1), partner not working

I think probably I have never asked, but most situations have been dealt with quite well between myself and my line manager. So I have never had to go into official policies.
Public sector, 3 children (4+), partner full-time student

Therefore, it is clear that overall awareness of family-friendly and flexible working arrangements for fathers is low, and in part this is because fathers do not perceive a need for these policies, or because they simply do not exist in their workplace. Many are satisfied with ad hoc arrangements rather than formal policies.

HR Managers' views

Although only six HR managers were interviewed for this study, there was a general consensus, particularly between those in the private sector, that they would not promote family-friendly working for fathers. However, when asked about the disadvantages of such policies, some say that there are none. Others point out that occasional absences can be a temporary inconvenience, and there may be resentment towards fathers from employees who do not have children.

The only disadvantages that I see for it are that they single you out. And if you are matched up against someone who is single or married without children they may feel that they are beginning to be discriminated against ... They might say, "why should I be the last person here just because everybody else wants Christmas off to be with their children."

Private sector, HR Manager

HR managers also recognise that there are advantages for the organisation in having family-friendly policies, and identify the main advantages as being potential improvements in the recruitment and retention of staff.

We are experiencing difficulty recruiting for certain jobs. The fact that we have policies like these helps us to recruit and retain people.

Public sector, HR Manager

I think the advantage to the business is that you attract and retain more people because they don't see that they are being ground into the ground by it ... I don't think it's even to introduce the policies – it's just the way that people manage their business. It's the way that a manager deals with his team ... People begin to realise that you can't just bash people to keep achieving the high numbers because you end up with high turnover of staff.

Private sector, HR Manager

At one company, the perceived advantages are mostly based on experience of family-friendly policies for female employees, and it is felt that there is little demand for policies for fathers.

I am not sure that we get much benefit out of the male parent side of it, other than a little bit of kudos, and they know that if they have a real problem then we will be sympathetic.

Private sector, HR Manager

5.2 Use of family-friendly policies and flexible working

Given that many fathers are unaware of any policies in their workplace to help parents meet their family commitments, it is to be expected that the majority have not made use of such policies. For example, none of the fathers interviewed currently

have help with childcare from their employer, and none have made use of part-time working, a compressed working week, nor annualised hours.

Informal arrangements

For many fathers, informal agreements made with their manager are felt to be sufficient to meet their needs.

For example, employees working in a small business say there is ad hoc flexibility when necessary. Management are prepared to change shifts for family reasons on occasion, but generally not to shorten their hours. This ad hoc flexibility also applies in emergencies, such as when childcare arrangements fall through at short notice (if the mother is ill, or if a child is sick and the mother is unavailable), although the mother would usually be the first port of call. On the whole, fathers feel that the company is flexible enough in these situations.

Informal arrangements are also preferred by the public sector employees interviewed, even though their organisation does have formal policies to help parents (e.g. flexi-time, career breaks, job-share, part-time working and paternity leave). Employees report that they are happy to negotiate any time off with their manager, and do not tend to make use of actual policies.

My manager's always been pretty good. He always says relatives are the most important thing, and it helps that he's got a daughter as well, so sometimes he has to do the same. I've always found that managers with kids are far more sympathetic. I haven't had to go looking for any specific policies to quote back at him.

Public sector, 1 child (5), partner working part-time

However, managers are not always understanding of fathers' family commitments, and some fathers would like to see greater flexibility. In particular, it is felt that managers who do not have children themselves do not understand the importance of certain occasions for fathers, such as a child's first day at school.

I asked for a couple of hours in the morning because my boy was starting school that morning. I asked him the day before, and he said "no, can't you go the next day" ... and that comes from a male that didn't have children.

Private sector, 6 children (2+), partner works part-time

If they can let you go home early because your child is ill then they will do, but if it is going to lose them money then they will keep you there.

Working part-time/shift work (focus group)

However, there does not appear to be much evidence of inflexibility towards fathers that would not also apply to mothers who work. This can be a problem for any parent who works and also has childcare responsibilities. Several mothers – interviewed as partners – also relate stories of managers who have been unsympathetic towards their childcare responsibilities:

It is colleagues and managers. Mainly managers, they say, "When will you be back?" "Can't a grandparent look after your child?" "Can't your partner look after them?" And you are made to feel that it is not really acceptable to take time off when our child is ill, and that is very difficult.
Partner, 2 children (0, 3), works part-time

Furthermore, it was notable in the focus groups that, when an employer has been inflexible in an emergency, it is related by the father as a horror story, and is clearly seen by the rest of the group to be unreasonable. For instance, one father found his 'fast track graduate' manager very unsympathetic when his teenage daughter was arrested at a party in the middle of the night, and he needed to leave to sort out the situation while his partner looked after their other children:

And I am on a night shift and I get a phone call from my partner at 10.00pm who had a phone call from the Police. The Police had phoned our house saying they had arrested [my daughter] ... [My wife] thought that the Police had phoned because she was dead or something had happened or she was in hospital. So I phoned the duty manager and explained the situation and the duty manager said, "Well it is 10.00pm, what do you want me to do?" I said, "Well I need to get home, have I got permission to phone an agency to get somebody in or I'll ring somebody and maybe they can just cover for a few hours?" He said, "Well no, because we will have to pay them." ... He said, "Is it a death?" I could go home if it was a death.
Working part-time/shift work (focus group)

This research illustrates the strength of expectation that employers will be flexible on these occasions. The expectation of informal flexibility appears to have become the norm.

Flexible hours/Flexi-time

Flexi-time is not specifically aimed at parents with childcare commitments. However, the advantages can be particularly valuable to parents because it gives them the ability to work around definite commitments such as taking the children to school.

Several of the fathers working in the public sector make use of flexi-time, though it appears to be far less common in private sector organisations. Those who do use flexi-time are very positive about it.

Flexible working hours are a Godsend certainly. I probably would not be able to manage very well without them.

Public sector, 3 children (4+), partner full-time student

Without flexi-time, I have to say, without the ability to be that flexible, my wife probably would find it impossible to work because just being able to take certain times off when we need to is what makes her life that much easier.

Public sector, 1 child (5), partner working part-time

Mine is flexible, sometimes I take my son in with me in the morning ... And the way that I always set things up, is that everything always revolves around me, what I am going to do, how my day is going, I set that up. I have got certain things that I have got to do, and as long as I make sure that I have done those, or somebody else is doing them, that is fine. Sometimes I might go in and take my son in with me, and an hour later we are off home again or doing something else. I have had to go back in the evening to make up that, do something else, but that is the flexibility.

Working full-time, partner works full-time (focus group)

Home working

The ability to work from home depends to a large extent on the type of job that a father is doing. Clearly there are a great number of jobs which could not be done anywhere other than the workplace. However, especially with the development of communications technology, it is now possible for a number of office-based workers to do their work from anywhere, including the home.

A number of the fathers interviewed do make use of home working, including private and voluntary sector employees. For some, this is something they do for work-related reasons, because they find it easier to concentrate on getting a piece of work done away from the distractions of the office environment. For others, it is so that they can fit their work around certain childcare commitments. None of the fathers interviewed works from home all the time – it tends to be the occasional day here or there. Even those who have an office set up in the home tend to be away at meetings two or three days per week.

I think companies have become a lot more flexible in that respect. It is amazing the number of people who will now work one day at home ... and companies are happy with that as long as the work gets done.

Working full-time, partner works full-time (focus group)

One father who has an office set up in his home explains that this means that he can have a break for tea time and see the children, then carry on working later in the evening when they have gone to bed. Others work from home in order to take children to the dentist or doctor's for example.

However, there has to be a certain level of trust in an employee by their manager in order for them to be given the flexibility to work from home, and there may be a feeling that people will do less work away from the office.

Home working is growing ... but it's still the perception that people wouldn't do as much at home as they would do here.

Private sector, HR Manager

In addition, some fathers who do have the opportunity to work from home say that they would not want to, because the children would be too much of a distraction. This is especially true of those with pre-school aged children.

Paternity leave

Many new fathers have made use of the paternity leave offered by their employers, even though the government's policy of two weeks statutory paternity leave does not come into effect until April 2003. Very often, this is not a formal policy, but rather an ad hoc arrangement with their immediate line manager.

Employees in the voluntary and public sector case study organisations are offered one week's fully paid paternity leave, which appears to be one of the more generous policies. Some companies currently offer three days' paid leave to new fathers on top of their annual leave entitlement. Where this is offered, fathers invariably make use of it and many feel that it is fair.

I thought it was excellent. Very nice to have a few days off without eating into your annual leave entitlement.

Private sector, 4 children (0+), partner works full-time

I can't think of anyone that's taken more. We give three days' parental leave when the baby is born and I can't think of anyone that's taken longer than that. The last time I was off I was off for three weeks and it was considered a long time to be away. I just added two weeks holiday onto it. Again it's the macho image.

Private sector, 4 children (1+), partner not working

One company, a manufacturer, appears to have a different policy for managers than for shopfloor workers. Managers only are currently entitled to five days' discretionary paternity leave (fully paid), while other male members of staff must use up their annual leave. Fathers working at this company who have taken paternity leave assume that it is available to all staff, when in fact it is for managers only.

At the smallest company in the study, paternity leave is an informal arrangement of around a week's fully paid leave, 'on the nod'. Again, fathers are happy with this situation. The lack of formal policies means that the company is flexible to fit

individual circumstances, and one father was given two weeks leave when his baby was born premature.

Clearly not all fathers are currently offered paid paternity leave, and many have to make use of their annual leave in order to spend time with their partner and child. Many fathers feel that this is unfair.

I just used up two weeks [annual leave] being at home. It was a caesarean, so I was up and down to the hospital three times a day. That is not leave. I have not come back and felt that I have recharged my batteries at all. I have come back with no holiday left ... I have used all my holiday and I am still shattered.

Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

There was a company I did work for and when my second lad was born I said, I need a week off, and they said yes no problem, take the week. After I came back and I said, well thanks for letting me have the week off, they said oh no, it is coming off your holiday entitlement. So I didn't really get anything extra for it. And I thought they were being really, really nice.

Working full-time, partner works part-time (focus group)

The following section examines fathers' expectations relating to paternity leave and other family-friendly policies.

5.3 What do fathers want?

Fathers do not see themselves as one homogeneous group, and hence there is little demand for rights as a group. The workplace policies which fathers need from their employer vary according to their level of responsibility for childcare. Having said this, there are some general messages to take forward from the research, most notably the desire for flexibility and understanding from managers.

Informal arrangements

Some fathers are opposed to the idea of introducing formal policies for working fathers. In some instances this is because they feel the flexibility they are able to achieve currently is far better than anything that would be made into policy. For example, they worry that the ability to negotiate time off with their manager on an individual basis would be undermined by a policy under which everyone is treated the same. This is a fairly widespread view.

I sometimes think laws make it worse rather than better ... I think sometimes when you formalise things, they have to do it that way for everybody.

Private sector, 6 children (2+), partner works part-time

It appears that for many fathers, the fact that their manager is understanding of their own particular circumstances is more important than any formal guidelines for fathers in the workplace. Some fathers also emphasise that it is the responsibility of the individual employee to manage his own work-life balance, rather than expecting the employer to help him out.

I appreciate obviously you do have to have guidelines and policies, but I also like the idea that you can go to your boss, they trust you ... and you'll be able to say, "Look, these are the circumstances. Let's sit down and see if we can work out what would be the best solution."

Private sector, 2 children (8, 10), partner works part-time

I guess it is my own responsibility. I know what this job entails, and if I don't want to do the job then I could go and get something else to do ... If we formalise a policy on care leave, or something like that, then I don't think it would be any more flexible than what I have got at the moment ... I am reasonably happy that the particular person to whom I work, rather than the organisation itself, is sensitive to my life.

Charity, 2 children (3, 6), partner works full-time

Furthermore, almost all fathers are united in the view that time off in emergencies should be granted. However, they do not necessarily agree that this time off should be paid. Again, it is seen as an individual father's own responsibility to look after his family in an emergency, rather than the responsibility of the employer or government.

If you have got a genuine emergency, whereby you have got a child seriously ill in hospital, why should your employer pay for that? You should take the time off if need be, but you cannot expect your employer to pay for that, it is unreasonable.

Working part-time/shift work (focus group)

However, in contrast to the many who favour their current ad hoc arrangements over formal policy, there are some fathers who do believe that it is important to introduce policies in order to increase awareness and understanding of men's family responsibilities among employers.

I think the needs of fathers have been under-represented really. I am a great believer in equality of opportunity. I believe that women should obviously be supported in flexible working practices and childcare and maternity leave, etc, but sometimes I think that fathers are slightly ignored. They are just expected to carry on and work and bring in the money, and I think they deserve greater involvement with their children.

Public sector, 2 children (12, 15), partner not working

Flexible hours/flexi-time

Flexible hours are key to enabling fathers to manage their work-life balance. One of the main demands of fathers who currently work fixed hours is a little more flexibility

at either end of the day so that they are able to pick up children from school/nursery or drop them off without being 'late' for work or leaving 'early'. This is more important to fathers than any major adjustments in working patterns.

I don't think there is anything they can do for fathers any more than they do. Flexi-time is the key – to be able to take time off, change your hours each end of the days as you need to.

Public sector, 1 child (5), partner working part-time

In accordance with the findings of previous research among working mothers, working fathers also say that what they want is choice and flexibility.

Everybody's situation is different, and increasingly the world that we live in, choice and having flexibility is really the only way that we can cope.

Public sector, 1 child (5), partner working part-time

Flexibility for working fathers means essentially the freedom to come in a few hours late on occasions or to leave early in the evening, without it needing to be an 'emergency'. Those occasions that are classified as 'emergencies' (e.g. when a child is taken ill or childcare arrangements fall through) are already felt to be dealt with fairly well by most employers. However, working fathers would like a little more control over their own working day, and the ability to manage their own schedule to fit in with other commitments. Throughout this there is an understanding that they would make up the time for any occasion on which they arrived at work late or left early.

There are some things they could possibly do to have more of a flexible approach. You know, if you got in at 10am or 11am then that wouldn't be too much of an issue, and you wouldn't have to plan it two weeks in advance ... Or if I could have, even if it was one day a week, where I was out of here at 4pm to be home by 5pm, then I think that would be great.

Private sector, 1 child (1), partner works part-time

I would like to see flexi-hours, flexi-time ... The children can wake up anywhere between 4.30 and 6.00, so my body clock is geared to early starts and early to bed. I am quite happy to get up about 4am or 5am and finish earlier in the afternoon.

Private sector, 3 children (0+), partner not working

To be honest I think it's ridiculous that we have set hours ... Why can't someone work from 8.00am until 4.00pm if that was best for them?

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

I personally think that possibilities of being more flexible with your working week ... having some time at home to do something with your

family and still being able to do the work, take a computer home and finish some work after dinner, or come in three or four hours later and work a little bit longer because you go to the dentist with your kid ... I think this flexibility could give far more benefit than in general this X weeks of leave ... The real challenges come later I think, when you go into the routine of day to day family management.

Private sector, 1 child (0), partner not working

Home working

There are mixed views on working from home. For many, the nature of their job means that this is not possible. Some fathers do feel that it is a great way to help balance work and family, enabling them to fit their work around the children's day. However, others say either that they would not be able to get much work done because of the demands of young children, or that they feel they were missing out on the benefits of the office environment.

If I work from home, my kids are at school and I miss out on the interacting with people from different walks of life. What benefit is there? It saves me the half an hour drive.

Private sector, 6 children (2+), partner works part-time

I couldn't work from home. I like the idea of working from home, but I have intentions of taking work home and when I get home and the children are there they get all of my attention. It's absolutely physically impossible to do any work.

Charity, 2 children (0, 3), partner works part-time

Although that sounds like a very easy solution to spend more time with your family, I actually find it easier to split them. You know, come in and work, and then go home and spend time with my family.

Private sector, 4 children (0+), partner works full-time

On balance, we interviewed more fathers who are negative about home working as a viable solution than are positive. However, several would like to have the option to choose to do so.

End to long hours culture

Some fathers accept the long hours culture as simply an inevitable part of their job, particularly those who could be classified as a 'weekend dad', and who have little contact with their children during the week. Others suggest that organisations could develop a culture where it is the norm to work only your contracted hours, then this could help take the pressure off many working fathers.

Several fathers feel very strongly about the need to end the long hours culture in Britain as a whole. There is widespread awareness that workers in this country work longer hours than elsewhere in Europe, and some parents say they would be happy

to see Britain follow the European model. Some also believe that the government has placed too much emphasis on work at the expense of other aspects of life.

I think we need to change the whole culture and to change the balance of lives. Because it is weighted far too heavily in terms of work.

Partner, 2 children (0, 3), works part-time

I think the current government is obsessed with work and there is more to life than work, and you do not get that message from the government.

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

More annual leave

One demand in the smaller company is for a more generous annual leave entitlement for everyone, rather than specific policies for fathers. Employees currently receive twenty days per year, and they say they would rather have an extra week's annual leave, to be taken as they please, than any other specific measures for parents.

It is just that it is not enough, 20 days is not. You take five days off for Christmas, which we do on a rota so I can do that once every second year or something, and with the two weeks off in the summer I am left with nothing. In the summer holidays Rachel might go to Alton Towers with my wife and family and friends and I cannot afford to take that day off. So it does not leave you a lot with only 20 days.

Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

Part-time working

For most full-time working fathers, part-time working is simply not an option that they consider. Most fathers say that it would not be financially viable for them to do so, because the expense of having children means that their income is needed more than ever at this time. As discussed above in Chapter 3, the gender gap in pay means that many fathers are earning the main family income, and so for a father to stay in full-time employment is a pragmatic decision.

Some fathers say they would love to have an extra day off per week if they could maintain the same level of income.

I would like to work less. I don't know how that would be possible in this environment. I don't want to take any less money.

Private sector, 4 children (6+), partner works part-time

I could take my daughter to school and pick my daughter up from school in the same day. I could actually cook her tea. I like cooking and I never ever get to do it. So family-orientated things like that. It's not as if I would want to have a day's golf every week.

Private sector, 1 child (8), partner works part-time

However, given that the salaries of two part-time workers are unlikely to equate to one full-time plus one part-time, it is generally seen as essential that at least one parent works full-time.

Many fathers have reservations about part-time working other than the drop in income. It is generally regarded as lower status, and part-time workers are seen as less committed by the organisation. Since so many fathers say their breadwinning role is important to their self-esteem, part-time working is not an option that they would like to explore.

I'm not sure that part-time workers are held in the same esteem as full-time workers, I'm not entirely convinced.

Private sector, 2 children (8, 10), partner works part-time

Others point out that employers do not offer part-time working that would fit in with their childcare needs. For example, children often go to nursery for half a day, yet employers rarely offer parents the option of working half days:

Ideally it would be great if she went to a school nursery for half a day and one of us could be there for the rest of the day, but it is just not possible ... Employers don't offer that facility really, to work a half day.

Partner, 1 child (4), works full-time

Compressed working week

For some fathers, a compressed working week offers a valuable solution. Several fathers have worked in jobs with fixed hours where the hours are slightly longer than is usual for nine days, and then the tenth day is either a half day or a day off. This is thought to work very well, although it would not be appropriate for many types of job.

Other fathers say they do not like the idea of compressing their usual hours into four days instead of five, because they would be unable to see their children on those four days of the week.

Oh no, because for four days I would not see them at all.

Private sector, 3 children (0+), partner not working

Help with childcare

Help with childcare can make an enormous difference to parents but it is not offered by any of the case study organisations in this research. However, several fathers had previously worked in other organisations where there was a workplace nursery.

Some fathers say that financial help with childcare is the ideal, while others would like a workplace crèche. Many fathers also recognise that this is an expensive option

for a company, and not one they would expect to be provided except in a very large organisation. Furthermore, many full-time working fathers in the focus groups said they would not want to take their children to work with them, because of the need for the workplace to be an 'escape' for fathers. They switch off from their family life while they are at work, and would not want to have their children physically present in the work environment.

Me and my partner have split up now, but it wasn't until she then became a single parent that she gets help with childcare. So then straight away my daughter was in nursery – which at the time with both of us working and being together, is something we couldn't afford to do. So I think if we could have had help with childcare things would have worked out better for us, if I had known our company helped us with childcare.

Private sector, 1 child (4), separated from partner

It would be great if there were some sort of crèche type of thing, from an emergency point of view ... possibly you could bring your child to work and a team of professional people can look after them ... But that is not a cheap option and not one that I think would ever get put into place. Having another means of childcare would be great, you know, if your wife is ill or whatever and you need to take the child to work.

Private sector, 3 children (0+), partner not working

One particular problem for parents who often travel with work is having to make changes to childcare arrangements for the time that they are away. It can be stressful for their partner if a father is not there to help with the children in the evenings, and fathers often feel that their employer is not understanding about this. Help with the cost of occasional overnight childcare would also be appreciated by fathers.

If both me and my wife were away overnight, we have to spend money on [the childminder], there is no scheme for childcare, and it is quite an expensive thing – it is what, £5 an hour or something like that, so it is £50 for an overnight stay and there is no support for it. But they have never thought about it.

Charity, 2 children (3, 6), partner works full-time

Sometimes he has to go off for weeks ... and it is quite hard for me to work and take Katie in and pick her up from nursery, and they are not understanding in that respect.

Partner, 1 child (4), works full-time

Parental leave

The research tested awareness of and attitudes towards the government's policy of parental leave, introduced in December 1999. Parental leave is unpaid, and is available to employees who are the parent of a child born or adopted after 15

December 1994, and have one year's continuous service. The total entitlement is thirteen weeks' leave, to be taken by the child's fifth birthday. Twenty-one days' notice is needed, and leave must be in blocks or multiples of one week; up to maximum of four weeks in a year for any individual child.

Most fathers are currently unaware of their parental leave entitlement. When told about it, many feel that it is a good idea or a 'step in the right direction', but say that the policy is unrealistic because in practice most parents of young children cannot afford to take unpaid leave.

If they paid it, yes, they would [use parental leave]. If money is no object, then yes, I can't see any problems. If I had loads of money, then yes, I'd use that.

Private sector, 4 children (9+), partner works part-time

Who on earth is going to do your work when you're off, and why have you got a full-time job if you can afford to do that anyway?

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner works part-time

Just one father feels he would like to use it, and said he was delighted to hear about the policy:

I'd love it! Where do I sign?

Private sector, 1 child (1), partner works part-time

He goes on to say that fathers may not take their full entitlement, but he feels many could use a week or so per year. He also adds that, in practice, he knows he would still be in touch with work on his mobile or laptop during the period of parental leave.

Others say that they cannot conceive of any circumstance in which they would personally use parental leave, but feel it is a positive development because it communicates to fathers that it is acceptable to have out-of-work commitments. It also reassures parents that they will not face losing their job if they do need to take time off.

I don't think they probably would [use parental leave] but I think it's nice to have it there in case of an emergency or a change in lifestyle. I think it's nice to know that you can do it without your job being at risk.

Private sector, 4 children (0+), partner works full-time

However, as well as the financial aspect, some fathers feel that parental leave is unrealistic from a work commitment point of view. Taking several weeks' unpaid leave may be taken as an indication that a father is not committed to the organisation, and also that he is not entirely indispensable.

Why would they want to take it? Most organisations tend to expect a certain amount of commitment, therefore I am not quite sure how that, on top of annual leave, would be perceived. It would mean that you are away from the business quite a lot to the point where covering you is very difficult. They would be questioning your usefulness, your role within the business, if you can be managed without for so long.

Private sector, 3 children (0+), partner not working

It could be detrimental to their standing in the company, and possible promotion. They could be downgraded, if you like.

Private sector, 4 children (15+), partner works full-time

It would be a black mark against you.

Working full-time, partner works full-time (focus group)

It's difficult to see how you could use it. With the first child we wouldn't have been able to afford to do that. With the second child we probably would have been able to afford to do it, but I don't think either of us would have been able to persuade our employers that it was a viable thing to do.

Charity, 2 children (0, 3), partner works part-time

Some fathers even say that men who take parental leave will be ridiculed, and several feel that men who make use of the policy would be viewed less favourably than women who do so. There was a general consensus in one focus group of full-time working fathers that they would not want to be the first to use the policy, but might consider it once it had become the norm.

I think it would be more accepted and people would understand to a greater extent if it was a woman.

Private sector, 3 children (1+), partner not working

It would depend on the circumstances. If it was because of illness, then that's a different thing altogether, but if he was taking four weeks off because he wanted to spend more time with his child, then I think he would be getting some strange looks.

Private sector, 1 child (1), partner not working

Even those who are favourable towards parental leave suggest that it may be unpopular among employees without children, who may feel that they are missing out on a benefit or a perk (even though the leave is unpaid).

The main factor that might encourage fathers to use parental leave – other than adding an element of paid leave – is thought to be the way in which organisations communicate the policy to their employees. This could demonstrate to fathers that it is an acceptable thing to do.

The company communicating that they're happy to offer it, and I think people starting to do it ... I think if management get behind these things and offer them, and then when they do happen continue to support them, then I think people will not feel threatened if they take advantage of them. I think people today would feel a little bit threatened and they might feel that their career opportunities might be diminished if they took advantage of this sort of thing.

Private sector, 4 children (0+), partner works full-time

I think internal communications should show that the company has a policy in writing that they are committed to it. So that staff are not intimidated or scared about their commitments and would actually do it.

Charity, 1 child (4), partner works full-time

I think a lot of it is cultural. It would need to be seen to be a positive thing to do.

Charity, 2 children (0, 3), partner works part-time

Fathers are not necessarily in favour of parental leave being paid, with some saying that this would not be a good way of spending government money. Again, many feel that it is the responsibility of the individual parent to manage their own work-life balance.

Should the government subsidise me to have children? ... I choose to have kids. I think there are other areas that money needs to be spent on.

Private sector, 3 children (0+), partner not working

Paternity leave

Paternity leave is warmly welcomed by almost all fathers, although views differ on the most appropriate length and the level of pay. The government's policy – to be introduced in April 2003 – is again seen by many fathers as a great step in the right direction, with the main reservations being over the financial implications of statutory paternity pay of just £100 per week.

There is a general consensus among fathers that some paternity leave is desirable, or even expected. Paternity leave is seen as particularly important after the birth of the first child, to enable fathers to be fully involved in childcare from the beginning and to help them learn the necessary skills. Some fathers point out that it can be equally important after the birth of a second child, because of the older child's needs.

You are in hospital and realise that you are now having to change nappies, and being there when the midwife was explaining to Laura how to do that kind of stuff for the first one was really quite important. I don't think it was quite as important to the process the second time around, because I knew how to change a nappy by then ... but it was

quite important for my son, who now had to deal with the fact that he wasn't going to get 100% attention ... It was equally important.
Charity, 2 children (3, 6), partner works full-time

Many fathers feel that men will not take statutory paternity leave at £100 per week, because most families cannot afford a drop in income at this important time. Furthermore, the policy is seen as a step backwards by those who currently receive a week's fully paid leave 'on the nod' from their employer, and who worry that the company will now have to comply with the government policy on paternity leave, which is less generous. Several days' fully paid leave is thought to be preferable to two weeks at £100 per week, because fathers can top it up with a week's annual leave and still have no drop in income.

I don't think it would make a great deal of difference to me because £100 wouldn't go anywhere in terms of paying for the nappies. If it was two weeks' salary and the ability to take two weeks' parental leave then I would jump at it, but it's a financial thing at the end of the day.
Private sector, 4 children (1+), partner not working

What is £100 per week when you have got to pay your mortgage that month? I seriously think that fathers should be allowed to have two weeks fully paid.
Private sector, 2 children (0, 4), partner on maternity leave

When you first have a child the drain on your resources is huge. I think people will be quite wary of taking a drop in salary at a time when to be honest you need it more than at any other time.
Private sector, 1 child (1), partner works part-time

Fathers' views on the most appropriate length for paternity leave vary according to their own experiences. Those who received three days' paid leave tend to be satisfied with this because there is no expectation of a longer period. This reinforces the notion that fathers currently have no sense of having 'rights' as a group. Many fathers welcome the introduction of two weeks statutory leave as creating an expectation that fathers should be taking at least this amount of time at the birth of a child.

[Two weeks paternity leave] will set an expectation amongst employers that this is the thing to do. And also amongst employees. The expectation for me, because it was part of our policy, was that I would take a week. If I had rights to two weeks I would have probably taken that. But I took what was kind of expected.
Charity, 2 children (3, 6), partner works full-time

Probably if you had to go for a figure I think two weeks would be better than one week. Whereas three or four weeks starts getting a bit too long, I think two weeks is probably a good length just for that initial first

stage where you are trying to run a house and get everything shipshape and ready for the future.

Private sector, 2 children (14, 16), partner working full-time

I think two weeks is a good time, because I think it is a very fraught time ... And with young kids and stuff it's all about establishing that routine, and I think two weeks is probably a good time to do that, and to start to enjoy it. You know, it's supposed to be fun after all. When you do come back after three days you are constantly on the phone, you're worried.

Private sector, 1 child (1), partner works part-time

However, some fathers feel that two weeks is too short, and say that three or four weeks would be preferable. One suggestion is that fathers should have two weeks when a baby is born, and then a further two weeks later on during the first year.

I would have liked paternity leave, but when my kids were born it wasn't a thing that was available. I took two weeks' annual leave, but I did feel it wasn't long enough ... I would have thought the first month would have been just about right.

Private sector, 4 children (6+), partner works part-time

I don't think the length is long enough. I think it is good in coming in. I think it is the sort of thing that good employers do anyway ... but I think it should be longer and I think paternity pay should be higher. Because we found this ourselves on the maternity pay side – you suddenly have this great drop in your income, at the time when your costs are really quite high.

Charity, 2 children (3, 6), partner works full-time

I think it would be fantastic for fathers to have two weeks off after the birth. Then perhaps it would be great to have another two weeks at some point during the child's first year of life that they could take in a discretionary way, and just be part of their child's early days. Children change so much and fathers miss out.

Partner, 2 children (0, 3), works part-time

Finally, a minority of fathers interviewed feel two weeks is too much time off work:

The wife wanted a bit of time for herself, rather than me hanging around.

Private sector, 4 children (9+), partner works part-time

Therefore, overall views on paternity leave are fairly consistent. Fathers are very positive about statutory paternity leave, and even expect that it should be offered by employers on top of annual leave. However, there are concerns that the government policy is less generous than companies currently offer, and it seems key that paternity leave should be fully paid (or almost fully paid). Two weeks is felt to be a

reasonable length of time by many fathers, although there are a minority who would like the option to take more in order to be fully involved at the time of a child's birth.

5.4 Summary

- Fathers' awareness of the types of family-friendly policies available to them within their organisation is generally poor.
- There is evidence that some organisations communicate these benefits poorly and that others are reluctant to actively promote such policies for fathers, although there is an understanding that they could assist in the recruitment and retention of staff.
- Many fathers assume that family-friendly policies are not something that is available to them, or are not aimed at the main breadwinner.
- Fathers value flexibility and understanding from their managers, and for many this relationship is more important than having formal company policies in place, which could in fact be more restrictive.
- While part-time working is simply not an option for most fathers for financial reasons, they also voice concerns that part-time work is viewed as lower status and may suggest that someone is less committed to an organisation.
- Parental leave is seen as unrealistic because it is unpaid, although it is broadly welcomed by many as a step in the right direction. As with part-time working, fathers feel that it may also send the wrong messages to their employer about their commitment to the organisation. Apart from adding pay, one way of increasing take-up could be by organisations communicating the policy to employees more positively.
- Statutory paternity leave is welcomed, but not the statutory pay of £100 per week. Some fathers see this as a backward step and would rather receive shorter leave on full pay.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is important to bear in mind the exploratory nature of this research and that the fieldwork is necessarily limited in scope. The project set out to examine the views and experiences of fathers in the workplace, but does not take account, for example, of 'full-time fathers' or 'househusbands', nor did it involve interviews with any single parent fathers or fathers in same-sex relationships. Similarly, while the research did include some fathers from different races and religions, the numbers are too few to draw conclusions regarding any differences in attitudes, and the views expressed are predominantly from a white British cultural perspective. Further research would be needed to understand the views of all of these fathers. However, within these limitations, it is clear that a number of conclusions be reached from the research.

While the **breadwinner role** continues to be important for some fathers, many also emphasise the importance of '**being there**' for their children. To some extent there is a tension between these two demands. However, most fathers say they are satisfied with their current level of involvement in the family.

There is clear evidence of widespread acceptance of **traditional gender roles in parenting**. That is, the father provides financially while the mother looks after the children and home. For a significant minority, these roles are seen to be rooted in the 'natural' abilities of men and women. However, many fathers suggest that any perceived differences in parenting skills between women and men are due to a lack of experience on the part of fathers, rather than a natural mothering instinct in women. There is also evidence of a desire among some new fathers to acquire these skills, and some suggest the need for more advice for fathers, or even parenting classes.

Many **fathers do want to be involved in the family**, although they have different perceptions of what constitutes 'involvement'. It is possible to identify four different typologies of working father:

- 'enforcer dad' who takes an overview role in the family and has prime responsibility for discipline;
- 'entertainer dad' who is involved with their children mostly in terms of play and leisure activities;
- 'useful dad' who performs many childcare tasks but generally as a 'helper' to their partner;
- 'fully involved dad' who takes the lead in childcare and the tasks associated with it for substantial parts of the week.

Most working fathers appear to fit into the middle two ‘types’ of dad (either ‘entertainer’ or ‘helpful’). Many can also be described as ‘weekend dads’ – that is, they hardly see their children at all during the week, but deliberately set the weekend aside as ‘family time’.

Although many fathers say that fatherhood has changed their attitude to work and it makes them feel more responsible, there is limited evidence of any practical change. Only a very small minority of fathers have made major changes to their working patterns which enable them to be more involved in family life, while, in contrast, a majority of mothers make significant changes to their working lives.

Key reasons why mothers take prime responsibility for childcare are the **gender pay gap** – both their lower current earnings and future earnings – combined with the **high cost of childcare**. In the absence of equal pay, then ‘common sense’ will continue to dictate in most families that the father becomes the main breadwinner while the mother is the main carer. There is currently a clear sense that parenthood and a career are largely incompatible, at least for one parent.

The research also suggests that **men want to work** – very few wish to reduce their hours or stop work altogether. In families where the father has greater involvement in childcare this is often a result of circumstance rather than choice, although for some ‘fully involved dads’ it is a conscious decision. If a father is working shifts that mean he is at home for significant parts of the day, or if his partner is out at work at key times, then his level of involvement in childcare might be higher than for other working fathers. Many fathers do not even think about the options, hence a mother’s desire or ability to choose her role can be a determining factor.

Workplace culture can have a great effect on fathers’ ability to meet both their home and work commitments, and often puts pressure on employees to work long hours. Many employers expect that work is the primary focus of a man’s attention, and it is also accepted that mothers will be ‘on-call’ in times of emergency, or for schools or nurseries, whereas fathers will not.

Furthermore, because mothers tend to have greater flexibility in their jobs (which generally provide a ‘second income’), **fathers often do not perceive that there is a need for major changes in their own working patterns**, particularly given their status as the main breadwinner.

Most fathers are unaware of the types of family-friendly policies available to fathers within their organisation – many assume that family-friendly policies are not available, or are not aimed at the main breadwinner. This may be because such

policies do not exist within their organisation, or because organisations are reluctant to actively promote policies for fathers.

The key thing that fathers request is flexibility and understanding from employers. Many working fathers report that they are happy to make informal arrangements with their managers rather than to see formal company policies in place. Fathers expect flexibility to allow them to take time off for family emergencies, hospital appointments, and so on.

Part-time working is simply not an option for most fathers for financial reasons. Fathers also voice concerns that part-time work is viewed as lower status and may suggest that someone is less committed to an organisation.

Parental leave is seen as unrealistic because it is unpaid, although it is broadly welcomed by many as a step in the right direction. As with part-time working, fathers feel that it may also send the wrong messages to their employer about commitment to the organisation. Apart from adding pay, one way of increasing take-up could be by organisations communicating the policy to employees in a positive way.

Statutory paternity leave is welcomed, but not the statutory pay of £100 per week. Some fathers see this as a backward step and would rather receive shorter leave on full pay.

Policy implications

The fact that almost all fathers talk about the importance of ‘being there’ for their children is significant. The challenge is to enable more fathers to be confident about the kind of ‘being there’ which is often demanded at short notice (such as illness) or perceived as hard to raise in the workplace (for example, a school sports day).

This means enabling flexibility in the choices that fathers make about how to be involved in the family. The fathers interviewed support greater control over their own working day, through flexible working and flexi-time, so that a father who drops his children off at school/nursery or picks them up is not coming in ‘late’ or leaving ‘early’. Then perhaps in the future fathers may start to move in and out of different ways of working just as women do, and employers may need to deal with fathers who need different types of flexibility within the same workplace.

- In order to increase choice for fathers to manage their work-life balance, there needs to be a change in workplace culture, and the notion that ‘working harder’ is ‘working longer’. The long hours culture is prohibitive for fathers who wish to succeed in their job or career and also have childcare responsibilities.

- The experience of paternity leave demonstrates that practice drives expectations, and that policy can also do so. Fathers' current expectations of what is reasonable depend on the paternity leave offered by their employer. Therefore, the introduction of statutory paternity leave is broadly welcomed. However, the level of paternity pay set at just £100 per week is prohibitive for fathers who cannot afford a drop in income.
- Similarly, parental leave could help bring about a culture in which it is acceptable for fathers to take time off to spend with their family. However, the fact that it is currently unpaid means that most fathers would not even consider it.
- Help with childcare could benefit many families, and again enable greater choice of parenting roles. The current high cost of childcare perpetuates traditional gendered roles by making it uneconomic in many families for both parents to work.
- Some fathers suggest that there should be courses for new fathers, or at least a greater acknowledgement that fathers want to be involved, and that men also need the opportunity to learn new skills after the birth of a child. This could help increase fathers' confidence in childcare skills, and hence encourage them to play a greater role in looking after children.
- One of the most important factors in increasing choice of roles for both mothers and fathers is the gender gap in pay. Men currently earn more than women on average, which encourages the traditional parenting roles of mother as carer and father as breadwinner to be the norm, and makes it difficult for parents to even consider taking a different role.

APPENDIX 1

Fathers' depth interview topic guide FINAL, 01/05/02

1. Introduction

- Thank and give brief introduction to the research – looking at fathers at work and at home
- If telephone interview, check they're somewhere where they can speak freely
- Reassurance of confidentiality. We may use quotes from the interviews in our final report, but it will not be possible to identify the company or individuals.
- Ask permission to tape-record

2. Current situation in the home

- Number and ages of child/ren
- Living arrangements – how many people in household in total? Who? Married/Cohabiting?
- Age of respondent and partner

Partner

- Does your partner/wife work?
- IF WORKING PROBE FOR DETAILS: e.g. type of work; number of hours; days per week; location; regular/flexible
- IF NOT WORKING: Was she working before having children? Where? When did she stop working? Thinking of returning to work?
- PROBE FOR MAIN WAGE EARNER

Involvement

- How would you describe your level of involvement in looking after your children? PROBE FULLY BUT DO NOT PROMPT.
- What are the main commitments you have as a father? PROBE FOR SPECIFIC TASKS. MAY BE USEFUL TO ASK ABOUT A 'TYPICAL' WEEK
 - o Which are the most important 1 or 2?
- What are the main commitments that your partner has as a mother?
 - o Which are the most important 1 or 2?

Childcare

- What are your current childcare arrangements? PROBE FOR FORMAL AND INFORMAL ARRANGEMENTS (E.G. CHILDMINDER, GRANDPARENTS)
- Do they work well? For your child/ren? For you? For your partner?
- How are decisions over childcare arrangements made?
- IF BOTH WORKING: Who takes time off work if the child/ren are sick? Why?
- Who is usually with the children in the evenings and at weekends?
- And who does what at home in terms of the running of the home and family? PROBE FOR SPECIFIC TASKS: e.g. household chores (incl. garden), car, finance, leisure activities, etc.

3a. Work generally

Before I ask you about your own situation at work, I'd like to ask you some questions about your views on being a father.

- What aspects do you think are important to being a good father?
- How important to being a good father is going out to work and being a breadwinner?

- o What aspects of being a father are more/less important than this?
- Do you think that, naturally, mothers and fathers are equally capable at caring for children? PROBE FULLY
 - o Are there any specific tasks (to do with parenting) that are suited to a particular sex?
- And do you think mothers and fathers are equally capable of working or having a career? IF NO: Why not?

3b. Current situation at work

- Job title and type of work
- Do you manage people? (PROBE: Project manager/Line manager) How many?
- How long have you been working there? (PROBE for link between when they joined the company and ages of children)
- Reasons for choice of job/career
- Actual hours worked, and pattern of working week (PROBE FOR: days per week; location; regular/flexible; length of commute/travel time)
- How easy or difficult is it for you to take time off or change your working pattern to accommodate out-of-work needs?
 - o PROBE FOR EXAMPLES OF WHEN THEY HAVE DONE THIS, AND HOW OFTEN
- How much do you stay in contact with your partner and child(ren) while you are at work, if at all? IF THEY DO: How do you do this?

Workplace policies

- Are you aware of any specific policies in your workplace to help parents meet their commitments? PROBE FOR EXAMPLES Any others?
- IF NO: Do you think this is this because the organisation doesn't have policies to help parents? Or because you have never asked about them?
- IF YES: Are these policies aimed at women, men or both?
- Which policies have you personally made use of, if any? (CAN INCLUDE PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT)
 - o What do you think of them?
 - o IF NONE: Would you have liked to? Why/Why not?

4. Change at home and at work

- Has being a father changed the way you think about work? PROBE FULLY
- What changes have you made to the way you work, or to your job, since becoming a father? How do you feel about these changes?
- What are the main changes you have made to your home life or social life? How do you feel about these changes?
- What changes has your partner made at work? And at home?
- REFER TO CHECKLIST OF CHANGE STAGES
- How easy or difficult is it to meet both your work responsibilities and your other commitments as a father?
- IF DIFFICULT: What particular problems have you experienced?

- Can you think of any specific examples of situations when you have felt that:
 - o Your work has suffered, or benefited, as a result of your family commitments?
 - o Your role as a father has suffered, or benefited, because of work commitments?
- What would be your ideal lifestyle regarding work and family... PROBE FULLY
 - o ... within your current financial circumstances?
 - o ... if money was no object?

5. Enabling/limiting factors towards flexible working

- Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the amount of involvement you have in your family life? Why? PROBE FOR VERY/FAIRLY
- Would you like to be more involved in your family life, or not really? Why?
- IF YES, ASK: What prevents you from being more involved, if anything?
 - o At work?
 - o At home? AIM TO PICK UP PARTNER'S ATTITUDE
- What could help you to become more involved? PROBE FULLY:
 - o How likely is this to happen?/How realistic?
- Would you like to see changes within the company/organisation in order to help fathers to meet their family commitments as well as their work commitments? Why/Why not
 - o IF YES: What sort of changes? REFER TO CHECKLIST OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES, AND PROBE FOR REACTIONS TO EACH.
- Do you think that fathers on the whole would like to see more policies (like these) to help them meet their family commitments? Why/Why not?
- How openly do men discuss their families and children at work?
- Are there any men in senior positions within your company/organisation who make use of policies to help parents meet both family and work commitments?
- Overall, how would you describe the organisational culture where you work?

Parental leave

(SEE CHECKLIST FOR DETAILS OF THE POLICY)

The government introduced a policy in 1999 entitling mothers and fathers to 13 weeks' unpaid parental leave per child, which can be taken up to the child's 5th birthday, with a maximum of 4 weeks per child being taken in any one year.

- How do you feel about this policy?
 - o PROBE: Do you think it's a good or a bad idea? Why?
- Do you think fathers would make use of parental leave? Why?/Why not?
 - o How would fathers who take parental leave be viewed?
 - o What factors might encourage fathers to take parental leave?

Paternity leave

There is currently no statutory paternity leave, there's only what employers choose to offer. However, from April 2003, fathers will be entitled to 2 weeks' statutory paternity leave, with statutory paternity pay of £100 per week.

- How do you feel about this policy?
PROBE FULLY FOR REACTIONS TO LENGTH OF LEAVE AND PAY
- Do you think fathers would make use of paternity leave? Why?/Why not?

Other ideas

- What else could be done to help fathers who work to become more involved in family life (if anything)?
- There are more examples these days of couples where both parents work part-time, so that they can share the childcare equally.
 - o What do you think about this, in general?
 - o Is it something you would personally consider (IF YOUNG CHILDREN)?
Would you have considered this when your children were young?
 - o Why?/Why not?
- In some places in Scandinavia, parental leave after the birth of a child can be taken by *either* the mother or father – or shared equally between the two.
- What do you think about this, in general?
- Is it something you would do, or would consider, if available?
Why?/Why not?

6. Conclusion

- In conclusion, what advice would you give to new fathers?
- Do you have any final thoughts or comments to add?

(IF TELEPHONE INTERVIEW, CHECK IS THERE ANYTHING THEY FELT THEY COULDN'T SAY BECAUSE THEY'RE IN AN OFFICE?)

ASK PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW HIS WIFE/PARTNER

Thank and close

EOC – Fathers in the Workplace**Interview summary grid**

Name and job title of respondent:

Organisation:

Home**Ages of children:****Age of respondent:****Age of partner:**

Full-time

Part-time

Not working

Partner's work status:**Partner's type of work:**

.....

Work**No. of people managed:****Hours worked per week:****Is this:**Regular
office hoursFlexible/
shift work**Aware of family-friendly
policies in workplace?**

Yes

No

**Made use of family-friendly
policies? (INCLUDE
PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT)**Parental
leaveTime off for
dependantsFlexible/
part-time
workingOther
(WRITE IN)**Easy/difficult to take time off to
meet family commitments?**

Easy

Difficult

Never asked/
not applicable*Attitudes/Assumptions***Satisfaction with involvement
in family life**

V satis.

F satis.

N/Nor

F dissat

V dissat

**“Mothers and fathers are
equally capable of caring for
children”**

Agree

Disagree

Don't know

**“Mothers and fathers are
equally capable of working or
having a career”**

Agree

Disagree

Don't know

**Who takes time off when
children are sick**

Mother

Father

Both
equallySomeone
elseN/A
(mother not
working)**£20 INCENTIVE**

Paid

To be posted
(WRITE IN ADDRESS)

APPENDIX 2

Focus group topic guide

Final, 17/06/02

1. General introduction (moderator)	5 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce self, MORI – independent research organisation • Introduce research project – research among fathers • Explain how the discussion will work – no right or wrong answers, an informal discussion about their views and opinions. No particular expertise/knowledge needed at all • Reassure about confidentiality • Ask permission to tape record 	Introduces the discussion
2. Fathers' introductions	5-10 mins
<p>Each participant introduces themselves to the group, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name • Type of work you do • Marital status • Ages of children • Plus one interesting thing about your child or children 	Introduces the group to each other; breaks the ice
3. General thoughts on being a father	10 mins
<p><i>(Use sentence completion technique to explore this: "Being a father these days is ...")</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it mean to be a father? PROBE FULLY • What is a father's role in the family? • How does it differ from a mother's role? 	Explores attitudes towards being a father
4. The ideal father	15 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the ideal father do? PROBE FULLY • Describe fully what he is like (encourage them to conjure up a mental image of the ideal father and describe it to the group) • What is he interested in? • What is his typical day? • What makes him the ideal father? • What is his relationship with his children like? • Where does the mother fit in? What is his relationship with her like? • What sources do you think influence your perceptions of 	Explores the ideal image of 'dad', bearing in mind the 4 models: Enforcer, entertainer, helpful dad; fully involved dad.

the 'ideal father'? Where does the image come from?	
5. Ideal vs. reality	15 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How realistic is this model of the ideal father? Why? How does it apply to your lives? Would you like to be an 'ideal father'? Why?/Why not? EXPLORE BARRIERS TO BEING AN 'IDEAL FATHER' What could help you (or other fathers) to become the 'ideal father'? PROBE FULLY 	Beliefs vs. reality of behaviour
6. Fathers at home	10 mins
<p>Thinking about the reality of being a father...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How involved are you in looking after your children? Satisfied/dissatisfied with level of involvement? How easy or difficult is it to be involved? Why? PROBE FOR BARRIERS PROBE FOR LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR TASKS AROUND THE HOME – e.g. cooking, cleaning, washing, garden, car, finance, etc. Level of satisfaction with current arrangements? 	<p>Balance of responsibility between mother and father.</p> <p>Perceptions of what is involved in childcare (i.e. easy/difficult)</p>
7. Partner's role	10 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EXPLORE PATTERNS AND TYPES OF WORK OF THEIR WIVES/PARTNERS How does this affect what you do as a father? How are decisions about work and childcare made? EXPLORE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ROLES OF FATHER AND THEIR PARTNER How important was it to your wives/partners to return to work after having children? 	Impact of partner's work

8. Fathers at work	10 mins
<p>Now moving on to think about <i>your</i> work...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you ‘live to work’ or ‘work to live’? • How important is going out to work – i.e. the breadwinner role • How has your attitude to work changed since becoming a father? • What actual changes have you made to the way you work or to your job since becoming a father? • How does work either help you to be involved or prevent you from being involved in your family? PROBE FULLY • How could your work change to help you become more involved in family life? Would you like it to? 	<p>Explores attitudes towards work; changes since becoming a father</p>
9. Workplace policies	10 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How easy or difficult is it to get time off work for family commitments? PROBE FOR FORMAL POLICIES/ INFORMAL AGREEMENT • Have you made use of workplace policies to help parents meet their family commitments? • Would you like to make use of any policies? Which? • Do you think fathers on the whole would like more workplace policies to help them meet their family commitments? PROBE FULLY • BARRIERS TO TAKE-UP OF WORKPLACE POLICIES, E.G. PARENTAL OR PATERNITY LEAVE? • Workplace culture • Do men talk about their families at work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Attitudes of colleagues and managers o Does the workplace culture help or hinder fathers who want to balance family life and employment? o Is there a long hours culture? 	<p>Explores why fathers do not demand more policies to help manage the work-life balance</p>

10. Interchangeable mother/father roles	(If time left)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are examples these days of couples who both work, and share the childcare and domestic duties equally. PROBE FOR REACTIONS – WOULD THEY CONSIDER THIS? WHY/WHY NOT? • In some places in Scandinavia, parental leave after the birth of a child can be taken by <i>either</i> the mother or the father, <i>or</i> shared equally between the two. • Or in some countries, the parental leave belongs to individuals – so that if fathers don't take it, they lose it. PROBE FOR REACTIONS 	How far would fathers go towards taking on what is traditionally a mother's role?
11. Summing up	5 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice for new fathers? • Any final thoughts or comments? 	