



Cash or carry?

Fathers combining work and care in the UK

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Executive Summary

This document highlights some of the research evidence from our Full Report into fathers, work and care in the United Kingdom. Unless otherwise specified, all the research cited here is derived from studies carried out with UK samples. More detail, discussion and the full references/bibliography can be found in the Full Report.

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'British values' sideline fathers

The wider British culture is not, in the main, supportive of couples who want to 'do things differently' by sharing earning and caring more equally. Wide ranging research has found parenting guides (Gregory & Milner, 2008) and magazines (Sunderland, 2000, 2006), official parenting advice (Clapton, 2014), TV advertising (ASA, 2017), computer games (Lucat, 2017) and children's books (Adams et al., 2011) mainly representing fathers as not engaged in intimate caregiving; or, when engaged, as bumbling and incompetent. Conversely, mothers are almost universally depicted as 'chief' parents and 'natural experts'. And while some involved celebrity fathers (notably David Beckham) are rewarded with praise and admiration, the fatherhood of 'serious men' (such as politicians or business leaders) tends to be ignored or ridiculed in the media (Locke, 2014).

What do 'the People' think? A large European survey found Britons increasingly receptive to the idea that fathers are just as capable as mothers of caring effectively for young children; and only 13% of the British population now say they believe it is the 'man's role to earn and the woman's to care' (Scott & Clery, 2013). African Caribbean men hold the most egalitarian attitudes (Kan & Laurie, 2016); and in Bangladeshi Muslim and Pakistani Muslim (among other BAME) communities there is now strong support by both sexes for high levels of early father-involvement (Chowbey et al., 2013). Nevertheless, across the population as a whole, almost everyone (95%) believes that if the mother of a pre-schooler works full-time, her child will be 'damaged' (Scott & Clery, 2013); and when asked to 'rate' alternative care, the home-dad care-option is considered, by the public at large, to be the worst possible option - inferior not only to nursery care, but also to care by other (unspecified) relatives (Barnes et al., 2006) (Scott & Clery, 2013).

Parents' own attitudes may also be mixed. In contemporary Britain, fathers are more likely than mothers to say very young children need their mother above anyone else (Crompton & Lyonette, 2010). However, British mothers are more likely than fathers to say they should be the parent to stay at home, even if they earn more than their child's father (EHRC, 2009).

Attitudes evolve, of course. British men today value 'providing financial support for family' (51%) barely ahead of 'parenting abilities' (49%) and 'providing emotional support for family' (46%) (JWT, 2013). Attitudes among less-well-educated fathers have been evolving especially quickly. Twenty years ago, low-income fathers were more likely than managerial/professional fathers to say young children needed full-time mother-care. Today they are less likely to endorse this idea than more privileged men – or than their own partner (Crompton & Lyonette, 2010). But, within their family, a father's beliefs may be less influential than their partner's: the stronger a woman's mothering 'identity', the more hours her baby's father spends working (Gaunt & Scott, 2014; Norman et al., 2014). However, when new fathers took up Shared Parental Leave, parents agreed that the 'leader' in that decision had been, primarily, the man (O'Brien & Twamley, 2017).

British institutions sideline fathers

Legislative frameworks and institutional practices also impact on the ‘choices’ mothers and fathers make in terms of earning and caring. For example, employed fathers are almost twice as likely as mothers to have requests for flexible working turned down (Olchawski, 2016), and to fear that asking to work flexibly will damage their careers (Working Families, 2017).

Similarly, inequality in Maternity/ Paternity leave entitlements (52 weeks for mothers, two weeks for fathers) defines British mothers as carers and fathers as breadwinners. And inequality in Maternity/ Paternity/ Parental Pay confirms this: employers are more likely to ‘top up’ Maternity Pay levels than Paternity or Parental Pay levels (Sharp, 2017), making it more likely that mothers, rather than fathers, will take leave. In addition, the Gender Pay Gap (men earning more than women) makes it difficult for fathers in most families to work shorter hours or take leave for parenting, as the family income is more likely to be compromised when they do.

Father-care: trends

Research has found British fathers’ care of their children increasing by 15-20 minutes per day every decade since the 1970s (Altintas, 2016). This starts at the birth, with 95% of working fathers now taking time off, including 75% of those who are entitled to paid Paternity Leave (Chanfreau et al., 2011). Almost all fathers who do not take Paternity Leave would have liked to do so; and where they use Annual Leave instead, this is because they are not eligible for paid Paternity Leave, or because their Annual Leave is better paid.

For every hour a mother spends looking after a preschooler, a British father now spends, on average, almost half an hour (ONS, 2016). This is a remarkable shift given fathers’ continuing responsibility for breadwinning: in only 22% of families in which at least one parent works (and in one third of families with two working parents), does the mother bring home even half the family income (Cory & Stirling, 2015). Research shows that during the week, fathers of young children put in an average 50 minutes per day more than mothers on earning and caregiving combined - a position that is reversed at weekends (Hurrell & Davies, 2005).

Today’s fathers are spending as much time engaging directly in the care of very young children as mothers were in the 1960’s (Altintas, 2016). To achieve this, contemporary fathers are working slightly fewer hours and more flexibly, and are cutting down on sleep and personal leisure (Fox et al., 2011).

Father-stress

In Britain, only one full-time working father in five now has a full-time at-home partner. Almost one in three has a partner who, herself, works full-time 2013 (Aldrich et al., 2016). Fathers with full-time ‘at home’ partners actually experience more stress than men whose partners are in paid work (Crompton & Lyonette, 2008), possibly because these families tend

to be poorer. Nor is involved fatherhood a middle-class pastime: lower earning fathers undertake more childcare than managerial/ professional dads (Hook & Wolfe, 2012).

British fathers used to work the longest hours of all European fathers but that is no longer the case. Nevertheless, they report the highest work-to-family conflict in Europe – and the highest family-to-work conflict. Findings that should concern employers include 32% of employed British fathers reporting that family responsibilities ‘often or always’ prevent them from devoting adequate time to their work; and 38% reporting ‘often or always’ experiencing disrupted concentration for the same reason (Speight et al., 2014). According to a recent study, 48% of employed fathers aged 26-35 have faked being sick to meet family responsibilities and 58% have made up other excuses (Working Families, 2015). Fewer than 10% of fathers of disabled children have told their boss about their disabled child, mostly from fear of it affecting their careers (Flamingo Chicks, 2017).

Evidence is beginning to emerge of hidden ‘father-churn’: fathers or expectant fathers changing employment because they cannot reconcile family/ work obligations, and possibly not explaining this to their employer, although more research is needed on this. Fathers with access to flexible working seem to be more satisfied with work/ family balance and to be less likely to consider changing employer (Burnett et al., 2011).

Father-care: outcomes

What are some of the perceived effects of fathers’ increasing involvement in direct care of children? In general, the evidence suggests that the greater the father’s contribution to housework and childcare, the more satisfied BOTH parents are (Forste & Fox, 2012; Schober, 2012) and the more stable their relationship. In addition, a recent study found that when a father works flexibly and shares the childcare, his children’s mother is almost twice as likely to progress in her career as when he works inflexibly and does little childcare (Frith, 2016). ‘Solo’ childcare by fathers (caring for their child alone, usually while their partner is at work) seems to deliver particular benefits, according to a number of studies: increased skills and self-confidence among the fathers (O’Brien & Twamley, 2017); higher quality father-child interactions (Lewis et al., 2009); better child outcomes (Twamley et al., 2013) and lower depression rates in mothers (Washbrook, 2007). However, as with all research findings, it is important to remember that an association between two factors does not guarantee, or even imply, that one caused the other. For example, mothers who felt happy for their child’s father to undertake a lot of care may already have been less depressed than mothers who undertook the lion’s share themselves.

Today, 50-60% of fathers in couple families, including in ethnic minority families, undertake regular ‘solo’ care (so almost one-half never or rarely do so) (Calderwood et al., 2005). Black African fathers are the most likely (75%) to look after their nine-month-old children alone ‘several times a week’ (Calderwood et al., 2005) and low-income fathers undertake more solo childcare than managerial/ professional fathers (Hook & Wolfe, 2012). Among separated fathers, the data we have suggests that more than half share care equally with their child’s

mother, or take primary responsibility for their child or children for at least part of every week (Peacey & Hunt, 2008). More research is needed.

Full-time 'solo' father-care (the 'home-dad' option) may have different characteristics and outcomes. Contrary to popular belief there has been no recent increase in the percentage of fathers who are home-dads; and today only 3.8% of full-time at-home parents of preschoolers are men (ONS, 2014a). Full-time home-dads are more often found in low-income families, so poorer child outcomes would be expected – not necessarily associated with the father's care, but with the families' inherent socio-economic disadvantage. And indeed, on average, the cognitive progress of three-year-olds cared for full-time by their dads, has been found to be slightly below that of three-year-olds cared for full-time by their mothers (George & Hansen, 2007). However, bucking this trend, preschool girls in one large UK study were found to do slightly better from full-time father-care than from other types of care, including from full-time mother-care (Washbrook, 2007).

Across the studies reviewed, a common theme to emerge was that of associations between fathers' low input at home, early on, and negative child outcomes. For example, one study found that when mothers do all the childcare, children's behaviour and development are, on average, more negative (Dex & Ward, 2007); and a number of other studies found an association between fathers' long-hours-working and child behaviour problems (Opondo et al., 2016) although, again, one must not jump to the conclusion that it was the fathers' long-hours-working, alone, causing the children's difficulties. A perhaps surprising finding, is that children of self-employed fathers report poorer relationships with their dads, than children of employee fathers (Parkes et al., 2017). This may be in part associated with lower incomes in these families; and/ or with the finding that self-employed dads undertake less housework-and-childcare than employee dads (Bird et al., 2014). Why this is, is not known.

Our Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: Fair Jobs for Fathers

The Gender Pay Gap prevents many fathers from taking time off work for parenting, since family income is more likely to be compromised when they do. We call on the Government to strengthen current efforts to eliminate the Gender Pay Gap by 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Employers to provide parity in paid leave entitlements to mothers and fathers

We recommend employers who wish to benefit fully from the loyalty and commitment of fathers in their organisation to, by 2020, automatically schedule both well-paid Paternity and Parental Leave for their employees, to be taken during the first twelve months after the birth. Fathers who do not wish to take these leaves up could opt out.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Require employers to publish 'care equity' information

Large UK employers are now required to publish 'pay equity' data. Such employers should also be required to publish 'care equity' information: take-up of Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave; flexible working 'for family reasons'; employer responses to flexible working requests.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Redesign the UK's parenting leave system

Eligibility for Paternity Leave should be brought into line with eligibility for Maternity Leave; and ineligible fathers should be able to apply for a Paternity Allowance equivalent to Maternity Allowance. Shared Parental Leave (SPL) should be abolished and replaced with a non-transferable 13-week leave ('Father's Quota') to be taken in the first twelve months. Statutory Pay for employed fathers should be @ 100% of salary (with a 'cap') for attendance at two antenatal appointments, and at 90% of salary (with a 'cap') for the Statutory two weeks' Paternity Leave and for the first four weeks of the 'Father's Quota'. The remaining nine weeks of the Father's Quota should be paid at income support level (currently £140.98 per week) with the ambition to increase this, and Maternity Pay, over time until both parents qualify for six months' well paid, non-transferable, leave in the first year. Maternity Pay should be 'capped' at an equivalent level to Paternity/ Father's Quota pay.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Redefine sex discrimination to encompass negativity towards male caregiving

Discounting, mocking and failing to protect men's/ fathers' caregiving amount to sex discrimination. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission should, in the next edition of the Equalities Act Guidance, name and respond to this. Gender equality/ unconscious bias training, gender equality impact and risk assessments and related activities and guidelines should also name and address this issue.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Require publicly-funded publications and initiatives to be 'father-proofed'

Government and Local Authority commissioned/ promoted research, policy, resources, tenders and guidelines relating to work/ life balance and other aspects of child and parental health, education and family life should be 'proofed' for father-inclusion by experts before publication.

For the more detailed Recommendations, and the Full Report, visit: <http://wp.me/prbEpu-1Ai>

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