



UK fathers in their first year: Factsheet 3

New dads' involvement matters to their children

Research has identified many benefits that fathers' positive involvement can bring to their children across their lifetimes, including in terms of their health, educational and emotional development and social mobility. And such involvement has been shown to have impact from the first year onwards.

Two-year-olds' cognitive development is better (Malmberg et al., 2016) and they display fewer behaviour problems when their father's early caregiving or play has been frequent, regular, positive in tone *or* engaged and active (Butler, 2012; Malmberg et al., 2007; Flouri & Malmberg, 2012).)

Conversely, toddler problems are greater when their father has been disengaged, remote or critical in face-to-face interaction with them early on (Butler, 2012; Ramchandani et al., 2013).

Socio-economic disadvantage in new fathers is strongly correlated with the men's poor mental and physical health (Dex & Ward, 2007); we know that depressed fathers are more likely to behave negatively towards their infant, and that fathers' early depression is associated with:

- poorer infant development (Wanless et al., 2008)
- more problematic behaviour in their pre-schoolers (Butler, 2012; Ramchandani et al., 2005)
- greater risk of children's psychiatric disorder at primary school (Opondo et al., 2017; Opondo et al., 2016)
- lower educational achievement at secondary school (Psychogiou et al., 2019).

Almost one new father in five is a smoker (Harrison et al., 2020) and mainly smokes in the home (Blackburn et al., 2005). Infants of fathers who smoke are more likely to develop wheeze, asthma, lower respiratory illness, chronic middle ear disease, stunted growth and to fall victim to sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) (Burke et al., 2012; CDC&P, 2006; Washington, 2017);

International research shows infants and mothers at substantial risk from fathers' misuse of alcohol and drugs (Allen & Donkin, 2015). No research in the UK has investigated this issue.

In the UK, 24% of children of obese fathers are obese (National Statistics, 2017).

*These facts and insights are drawn from **Bringing Baby Home**, the Fatherhood Institute's evidence review about first-year fatherhood in the UK, funded by the Nuffield Foundation. For references and to read the full report, executive summary and recommendations, visit <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2022/contemporary-fathers-in-the-uk/>.*

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