What makes fathers involved in their children’s upbringing?

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‘Fathers and Care: are the odds stacked against them?’

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Presentation outline

• Introduction
  – How work and care is divided in the UK

• Work-family policies in the UK
  – Shared Parental leave, childcare, flexible working

• Our project: Which fathers are involved in looking after their children?
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  – Project partner: Working Families

• Conclusions
How work and care is divided in the UK

- Men are doing more childcare and housework than they used to, but still do much less than women.
- Ideas about what it means to be a ‘good’ father have shifted to include being involved in childcare, but being the (main) economic provider remains a central feature.
- Women usually switch to part-time employment after having children.
  - Employment rate for mothers with dependent children (aged <5) = 61% in 2014. Of those in employment, 54.3% worked part-time (ONS, 2014).
- Mothers with a pre-school child are more likely to work full-time if they are in a well paid or manager/senior professional position.
- This ‘one-and-a-half earner’ family model is perpetuated by public policy and widespread beliefs that children suffer if their mothers are employed full-time.
Work-family policies in the UK

- Long maternity leave
- Short period of paternity leave
- Parental leave – recently reformed to facilitate take up amongst fathers
- Pre-school childcare
- ‘Right to request’ part-time or flexible hours

But do these policies help mothers and fathers strike a satisfactory balance between work and care?
Shared Parental leave (SPL)

- SPL is a new right for parents with children born or adopted after 5 April 2015
- Eligible parents can share 50 weeks' leave and 37 weeks' pay available to the mother
- Benefits:
  - More flexible – leave can be taken in one week blocks
  - Parents can take leave simultaneously

However, so far take up has been low...

0.6% of eligible fathers took Additional Paternity Leave in 2011-12
2-8% of fathers estimated to take up SPL
1% of male employees, out of 200 organisations surveyed, took SPL in 2015 (My Family Care, 2015)
Working Families’ assessment of SPL

• SPL is an important step in the right direction
• Sends out a message that father involvement in childcare is important
• Although only 1% of fathers surveyed by My Family Care had taken SPL in 2015, many were positive about using it in the future
• WF 2015 survey found most employers to be supportive of SPL:
  • Positives – concerns about staff taking leave in discontinuous periods have not materialised
  • Negatives – complexity of SPL and cultural barriers remain. Mothers are often reluctant to give up part of their maternity leave
• SPL should be an individual right and properly paid

Sources:
Working Families (2016): SPL: the perspective from employers, WF Briefing
S. Jackson (8 April 2016): SPL: behind the headlines, WF blog post
S. Jackson (5 June 2014): SPL: the beginning of a quiet revolution?, WF blog post
Childcare

• Free, part-time early education for all 3-4 year olds (and extended to 40% of disadvantaged 2 year olds in 2014)
• Tax free childcare (from 2017)

Source: OECD, 2011
Flexible working

  - In 2011, 28% of employed women and 17% of employed men made a RTR.
  - Most requests were accepted (approx. 60%) but men were more likely to have their requests declined (18%) compared to women (10%).

What influences father involvement?

What do we know from previous research?

- Earnings/income
- Employment (e.g. hours/schedules)
- Confidence/motivation
- Age
- Other children
- Attitudes about gender roles
- Partner’s employment
- Race/ethnicity
- Education/class
- Family/friends
- Partner’s employment
Which fathers are involved in looking after their children? Identifying the conditions associated with paternal involvement

• Research questions:
  ➢ What influences father involvement in childcare at different time points of a child’s life? (i.e. 9 months, 3, 5, 8 and 11 years old)
  ➢ Does a father’s childcare and employment behaviour in the first year of a child’s life affect how involved he is when the child is older?
  ➢ Does paternal involvement impact on the stability of the relationship between the mother and the father?

• Data:
  ➢ Longitudinal analysis of information at 5 points in a child’s life (at 9 months, 3 years, 5 years, 8 years and 11 years old) from the UK’s Millennium Cohort Study (2000-2012).
What influences dads to be involved?

Focus for today

• Fathers’ involvement when the child was 9 months old (2001/2) and subsequently when the child was 3 years old (2003/4) in two-parent heterosexual households.

• >9,000 households across the UK

What % of dads are involved?

• When the child was 9 months old:
  – **35.8% fathers shared childcare roughly equally**; 63.7% fathers did the least and 0.5% fathers did the most.

• When the child was 3 years old:
  – **25.9% fathers shared childcare roughly equally**; 74.1% fathers did the least.

Sources: Norman, Elliot and Fagan (2014); Fagan and Norman (2016)
What makes dads involved when the child is aged 3?

Father involvement when the child is 3 years old is...

1. **Shaped by the parents’ family and work-time arrangements when the child is 9 months old.** The father is more likely to be involved when the child is aged 3 if....
   - He shares childcare when the child is 9 months old
   - The mother works full-time (31 hours + p/week) when the child is 9 months old;
   - He works standard (30-40 hours p/week) rather than long full-time hours (48+ hours p/week) when the child is 9 months old.

2. **Shaped by the couples’ work-time arrangements when the child is aged 3 years old.** The father is more likely to be involved when the child is aged 3 if....
   - The mother is employed full-time (31 hours p/week or more);
   - The father works standard (30-40 hours) rather than long full-time hours.
Conclusions

A more supportive infrastructure could be achieved by:

1. **Helping fathers to balance their work and family roles in the first year of parenthood**
   - Parental leave that is well paid and has a period reserved specifically for the father
   - Limits to long hours working
   - Promotion of flexible working to men

2. **Supporting mothers back to work after having children**
   - Good quality, flexible and affordable childcare
   - Quality part-time employment
   - Closing the gender pay gap
References


- Norman, H. (2015): Paternal involvement in childcare: how can it be classified and what are the key influences?, Families, Relationships and Societies, 4(3)
