Fatherhood is changing: time

Higher involvement: UK fathers carry out 25% of childcare related activities during the week, and one-third at weekends. More where both parents work full-time *(EOC 2003)*

Broader expectations: 70% of men & women want fathers to be more involved *(Twenty-first Century Dad; EOC 2006).* 58% of men and 62% of women reject the male breadwinner role *(Dads and their babies; EOC 2005)*

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Fatherhood is changing: satisfaction

In Sweden, high take up of parental leave by fathers is linked to lower rates of separation /divorce, as is parents' more equitable sharing of earning and caring roles (Olah, 2001)

In Australia, the father doing more at home and the mother working more outside the home are linked with greater satisfaction for both (Craig & Sawriker, 2006)

Both parents' beliefs that father-involvement is important plus fathers' actual involvement predict relationship stability (Hohmann-Marriott, 2006).

The most stressed parents tend to be parents who operate traditional and unequal family and work roles (Cowan & Cowan, 2003)

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Fatherhood is changing: “absence”

- At the time of the birth, 86% of couples are married or living together (and 93% of these dads attend the birth)

- Among the 14% of couples who live separately at the time of the birth:
  - one third say they are a ‘couple’ (and 29% of these move in together within 9 months)
  - one third say they are ‘friends’
  - one third (4.4% of the whole – i.e. just 1 in 20 of all couples) say they are ‘not involved’. However, even among these:
    - 10% of the fathers attend the birth;
    - 25% sign the birth certificate
    - 25% are still in touch with mother/infant 9 months later

(Kiernan & Smith, 2003)

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Fatherhood is changing: “absence”

- Once “absent” doesn’t mean forever absent: among fathers described (by the mother) as “not involved” at the time of the birth, 29% are described as “involved” 3 years later (Kiernan & Smith, 2003)

- All over the developed world, separated fathers are less likely to become “absent” than ever before – and see more of their children when they live apart. e.g. between 2004 and 2008, father-absence in the US dropped by 5%, with two million more American children living with their fathers than in 2004 (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2009)

- In the UK, 1 in 10 couples share the care of their children almost equally after separation; and among the rest 1 in 3 children see their fathers AT LEAST weekly (Peacey & Hunt, 2008)

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SOME FATHER-SPECIFIC POLICY / LEGISLATION

- The National Service Framework (NSF) (DH/DfES, 2004)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)
- The Equality Act (2006)
- Maternity Matters (DH, 2007)
- The Children's Centre Practice/Planning/Performance Management Guidance (DfES/DCSF, 2006 - 2008)
- Every Parent Matters (HM Treasury, 2007)
- Aiming High for Children (HM Treasury/DfES, 2007)
- Teenage Parenting Strategy & Guidance (DCSF, 2007-2009)
- The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007)
- The Child Health Promotion Programme Update (DH, 2008)
- The Childcare Strategy (DWP, HM Treasury, DCSF, Cabinet Office, 2009)
- Healthy lives, brighter futures: the strategy for children and young people's health (DCSF, DH, 2009)
- Getting maternity services right for teenage mothers and young fathers (DH, DCSF, 2009)
- The Welfare Reform Act (2009)
- Support for All (Green Paper on families) (DCSF, 2010)

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For full detail on policy and legislation go to:

http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=0&cID=711

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A Review of How Fathers can be Better Recognised and Supported Through DCSF Policy (DCSF 2008) found that implementation of father-inclusive policies by children's services was patchy and that key barriers included:

- **strategic approach:** absence of systematic, routine engagement with fathers.
- **workforce**: lack of training & skills for managers & workers
- **marketing to fathers:** many fathers think children's services are 'not for them', and do not feel included by communications aimed at generic 'parents'

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fathers think

- DCSF-initiated campaign now led by Fatherhood Institute - key information hub for policy and practice development
- Three overall goals:

1. **Father-inclusive children's services** - which systematically engage with fathers and support father-child and parental relationships
2. **Father-inclusive approaches at work** - e.g. flexible working and leave arrangements which take account of fathers' roles in bringing up children
3. **Public understanding and debate** about fatherhood and the importance of fathers' positive involvement in their children's lives.

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- **Think Fathers Guide** - practical know how for services
- **Think Fathers Champions** - services, commissioners, policymakers, employers etc who are committed to supporting father-child relationships. Register by emailing champions@fatherhoodinstitute.org
- **Dad Test** - self assessment framework
- **Champions Plus subscription service**, including detailed online Dad Test Logbook, support from Regional Development Officers, 10% discount on all products & services

The Six Dad Test Commitments

- Leadership
- Team
- Environment
- Marketing and communication
- Recruiting fathers
- Monitoring and evaluation

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Please register as a Champion:

champions@fatherhoodinstitute.org

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Fathers affect children: obesity

Fathers' **(but not mothers')** parenting styles have been found to predict children's Body Mass Index (BMI): permissive or disengaged fathering is linked with higher BMI children; and consistent/authoritative fathering with lower BMI children (Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2007)

Obesity in children is powerfully linked to obesity in the same-sex parent, with no genetic link: obese fathers are six times more likely than other fathers to have obese sons (Perez-Pastor, 2009)

Fathers' modeling of physical activity has been found to be the strongest predictor of their teenagers' physical activity (girls' as well as boys'), predicting 13.5% of the total variance (Raudsepp, 2006).

In a pediatric obesity treatment programme, father acceptance (and positive change in father acceptance) accounted for 20.5% of children's overweight decrease over a 12 month period (Stein et al, 2005).

Fathers affect mothers

- Teenage mothers parent better when their baby's father gives them good support (Unger & Wandersman, 1988). And as the father disengages, the young mother's stress increases (Kalil et al, 2005)

- Whether (and how much) a mother smokes is more powerfully affected by her partner's smoking than by anything else (Bottorff et al, 2006)

- Post-natal Depression in mothers is strongly linked with a poor relationship with her baby's father and negative behaviour by him. But when he is positive and supportive, she is less likely to become depressed, and more likely to recover quickly (Fisher et al, 2006).

Fathers affect mothers

- When a father is an active participant in the decision to breastfeed, has a positive attitude towards it and fully understands the benefits, mothers are more likely to start breastfeeding and continue for longer (Swanson & Power, 2005)

- Fathers who have been taught well to help during the birth tend to do more - and their partner's birth-experience tends to be better (Diemer, 1997)

- Most mothers are disappointed with their experiences with midwives, but are happy with their partner's presence and support during the birth (Diemer, 1997)

Fathers affect mothers (and infants): alcohol

- Expectant mothers are almost four times more likely to have consumed alcohol, and over twice as likely to have used drugs, if the father has drug and alcohol related problems (Teitler, 2001).

- Heavy drinking by a father is associated with double the risk of an insecure attachment between a mother and infant (Eiden & Leonard, 1996)

- Fathers' drinking is also linked with relationship conflict - and this is linked to mothers' drinking (Frank et al, 2002)

- One of the most of the significant predictors of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in infants is the father's drinking (May et al, 2008).

GOOD-ENOUGH DADS

Children with highly involved fathers tend to have:

- better friendships with better-adjusted children
- fewer behaviour problems
- lower criminality and substance abuse
- higher educational achievement
- greater capacity for empathy
- non-traditional attitudes to earning and childcare
- more satisfying adult sexual partnerships
- higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction

(for reviews see Flouri 2005;
Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004)

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FATHER – AS – 'BUFFER'

e.g. . . .

- If fathers do lots of infant care, babies whose mothers work full time are unlikely to suffer any disadvantage (Gregg & Washbrook, 2003)

- Children tend to be affected by their mother's poor mental health (including Post Natal Depression), but a good and close relationship with their father tends to protect them from the worst effects (Hall, 2004)

- Children in families suffering from multiple disadvantage talk and learn better when their fathers or father-figures are satisfied with parenting, provide financial support and engage in nurturant play (Black et al, 1995)

TO SUM UP . . .

- a ‘good-enough’ father-child relationship is of enormous value to children and is a significant protective factor in the face of other disadvantage

- this may be most particularly the case in vulnerable families – e.g. when the mother is young or father is unemployed

- this is true, whether or not parents live together

- and father-figures matter too: e.g. one study found that stepfathers have a greater impact on children’s self-esteem than biological fathers *or mothers*

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BAD DADS

Children tend to do badly when their father's parenting is poor: **e.g.**

- Behaviour problems in children are strongly associated with father-child conflict, or with the father being harsh or neglectful (Flouri, 2005; Phares,1999)

- Harsh parenting by fathers is linked with more aggression in children and adolescents than is harsh parenting by mothers (Flouri, 2005; Phares,1999)

- Getting on badly with EVEN ONE PARENT more than doubles the likelihood of a young person engaging in anti-social behaviour (Wood, 2005)

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BAD DADS

- ***Low*** interest by a father in his child's education (particularly boys') has a very, very negative impact on their achievement (Blanden, 2006)

- Antisocial personality disorder in fathers is associated with their children's and teenagers' behaviour problems and aggression - and the more these young people see of their fathers, the worse the impact (Jaffee et al, 2003)

- When fathers have been clinically depressed in the post-natal period their children (particularly boys) still tend to show behaviour problems and other difficulties many years later (Ramchandani et al, 2005/2008)

- It is important to remember that negative mental health/ behaviour by mothers is just as damaging to children as fathers'

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NO DADS

When children rarely or never see their fathers, they tend to:

- demonise or idealise them
  (Kraemer, 2005; Gorrell Barnes et al, 1998)

- blame themselves for their absence
  (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001)

- suffer substantial distress, anger and self-doubt (this is still found in young adults who 'lost' their fathers years before)
  (Fortin et al, 2006; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 1998)

- go through similar stages of grief as children who lose their father through death; this also applies to children whose fathers go to prison, are servicemen etc.(Guterman & Lee, 2005)

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Some research summaries on the Fatherhoood Institute website:

Fathers and Smoking
http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=2&cID=579

Fathers and Breastfeeding
http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=2&cID=581

Fathers and Postnatal Depression
http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=2&cID=580

Young Fathers
http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=13&cID=575

Main Research Summary: 'The Costs & Benefits of Active Fatherhood'
http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=0&cID=586

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FATHERS AND PARENTING INTERVENTIONS

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Fathers' Information and Support Needs

Largely due to differing socialisation & circumstances, men usually have (relative to women):

- less EXPERIENCE & KNOWLEDGE of infants / children
- less appreciation that good parenting requires SKILLS
- greater ISOLATION as a parent
- different CHALLENGES with children – e.g. discipline; greater need to spend time with them
- less AWARENESS about and WILLINGNESS to access SERVICES

Men and women often BOTH ASSUME:

- fathers have relatively marginal impact on children's lives

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The Impact of Parenting Interventions on Fathers

- Parenting interventions with fathers have been found to lead to
  * improved behaviour and parenting style;
  * increased knowledge and understanding of child development;
  * increased confidence in their parenting skills;
  * more sensitive and positive parenting
  * greater involvement in infant and child care
  * greater interaction with children

  (for review see O'Brien, 2004).

- In 24 highly vulnerable families in which professionals engaged with the fathers on parenting and relationship issues, only one father was unable to reflect usefully on his identity as a man, a father and a partner

  (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004).

- Expectant low-income fathers given just two pre-natal sessions on infant care, bonding and development had retained much of the information 4 weeks after the birth, and interacted more (and more positively) with their babies than fathers who had not experienced the intervention (Pfannenstiel & Honig, 1995)

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Including fathers in parenting Interventions: the impact on mothers

- Intellectual gains in six month old infants were greater when BOTH mothers *and fathers* were trained in infant-communication *(Metzl, 1980)*

- Parent education can be delivered equally effectively to mother or father (i.e. fathers can be as effective change agents within families as mothers) (*Firestone, Kelly & Fike, 1980; Adesso & Lipson, 1981)*

- Delivering a parent education programme to both parents is "significantly more effective" than delivering it to just one *(Bakernans-Kranenburg et al, 2003)*

- Each individual parent's sensitivity towards their child (and their child's attachment to them) is enhanced when both parents are included in the intervention *(Bakernans-Kranenburg et al, 2003)*

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SIMPLE CHANGES CAN BE EXTRAORDINARILY EFFECTIVE!

In Australia, Fletcher (1997) reports fathers almost flooding into schools when specifically invited

In Grantham, Lincolnshire (2009) two health visitors conducted a comparative study in which one continued to use the standard letter about the primary birth visit ("Dear parents") while the other used a new father-inclusive version ("Dear new mum and dad"). With the standard letter 3 out of 15 dads attended' with the father-inclusive letter 11/16 dads attended.

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