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Symposium

**Fathers and Families in Europe: insights and policy challenges**

10 July 2013, Sheffield

**Convenors: Margaret O'Brien (University of East Anglia) and Svetlana Speight (NatCen Social Research)**

**Introduction**

In the UK and elsewhere in Europe, there is a renewed policy emphasis and concern about the role of men in families. However, research has not kept pace with policy innovation for employed fathers, the evidence base for the effectiveness of father work-family policy measures is limited, and greater understanding is needed on how maternal and paternal policies and practices work for families. Similarly, whilst there is growing awareness of the significance of what men do in and around their family in terms of child well-being (Lamb, 2010) and gender equality (Haas and Hwang, 2008), there is still a dearth of knowledge about specific groups such as young fathers.

This symposium presents new evidence on how European fathers are negotiating work and family life. It highlights the importance of understanding the increasingly diverse contexts in which men navigate fatherhood over the life course as their roles become more complex and fluid. Four papers drawing on qualitative and quantitative data from two ESRC and one EU funded studies are proposed including: stakeholder and young father interviews and evidence from comparative analyses of large-scale survey series- European Labour Force Survey (ELFS), European Social Survey (ESS) and the European Union Study of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). The symposium will contribute to a greater understanding of men's diverse family and work roles and inform the development of innovative work-care policies and practices.

***Is the male breadwinner really declining in Europe? Trends in European fathers' working practices***

**Sara Connolly, Margaret O'Brien, Matthew Aldrich, Svetlana Speight and Eloise Poole  
– University of East Anglia and NatCen Social Research**

The scale and size of Europe, with its diverse set of languages and cultural traditions caution against developing a single or homogeneous European fatherhood model and set of behaviours. Indeed distinctive “fatherhood regimes” are already emerging reflecting the diverse ways in which governments and civil society promote and regulate fatherhood obligations, fatherhood rights and male involvement in family life (e.g. Gregory & Milner, 2008). Central to current debate about changing fatherhood norms is an underlying assumption that the male breadwinner employment model has declined (Lewis, 2001; Lewis et al 2008). Indeed, it is argued that the growth of maternal employment enables men with children to share more economic provisioning with partners – allowing a dual earner employment model to emerge (Gornick, & Meyers, 2003).

Using data from ELFS 2000-2011 this paper presents some early findings of the ESRC-funded study “*Fathers, work and families in twenty-first century Britain: beyond the breadwinner model?*”. It compares trends in couple fathers’ and mothers’ working practices (employment status, total usual hours worked per week in their main job, including overtime and second jobs) across the 27 member states (including Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) to assess to what extent the male breadwinner employment model has indeed declined. Patterns of fathers’ paid work (whether they work, how many hours) are analysed by selected *individual* characteristics (educational attainment, socio-economic group), *partners’* characteristics (educational attainment, socio-economic group, employment status and hours worked) and age of the youngest *child*.

While there is evidence in some countries, for example Britain, of a decline in fathers’ long/excessive weekly working hours, we find considerable variation. Furthermore, as the economic downturn has deepened, we observe higher levels of work intensity for some fathers. Challenges for consolidating active fatherhood norms and practices are discussed.

## **Fathers’ wages and working hours and childcare realities across Europe**

**Alison Koslowski and Ingela Naumann – University of Edinburgh**

Families across Europe manage their childcare needs in multiple ways (Scheiwe and Willekens, 2009; Pfau-Effinger and Rostgaard, 2011). As part of an ongoing EU funded project, we undertake comparative analysis using stakeholder interviews and secondary data analysis of the ESS and EU-SILC, on ‘care realities’ - the diverse and socio-economically stratified care arrangements in 6 European countries (Estonia; Germany; Hungary; Italy; Sweden; UK). Previous explanations have largely focused on broad differences in welfare state and labour market structures, which shape incentives for mothers and fathers to work part-time, full-time, or not at all, within and across the EU (e.g. Kamerman and Moss, 2009; OECD, 2011a; b). There are also likely to be differences in the availability, quality and affordability of public, commercial, employer-based, familial and voluntary sector provision, which will further shape the complex incentive structures for parents’ labour market activities (Freeman and Schettkat, 2005; Kroger and Sipila, 2005; Family Platform, 2011, Saraceno (as part of Multilinks FP7 project), 2011). As part of this broader project, this paper specifically aims to explore using regression-based techniques the association that the various sources of childcare have with fathers’ labour market outcomes (in terms of income and hours worked). The paper also aims to explore differences in the maternal and paternal survey data reports of childcare use.

Childcare is not only delivered by public funds, but via multiple sources of provision. It is not unusual for comparative work to focus on statutory provision, in part due to ease of data availability. However, to do so in this policy area neglects other sources of childcare and thus hampers our full understanding of how best to support the wellbeing of families with regard to care and employment. Five analytically distinct *sources* of childcare can be identified: state; market; voluntary sector; employer-based; or familial. The latter category can be divided into maternal and paternal care and care provided by another family member or friend. Many of these forms can be either formal or informal. Our knowledge is not evenly spread across these various sources. *Sources* of childcare are distinct from *forms* of childcare, and the association between sources and forms of childcare is also under-researched. Much less is known about the role of the realities of multiple provision and their match or mismatch with policy on national and EU level, and the association this might have with the labour market participation of carers and the transmission of social and gender inequality and disadvantage. This paper begins to address this gap in our knowledge.

## **European fathers' experience of work-family conflict: a cross-national comparison**

**Svetlana Speight, Margaret O'Brien, Eloise Poole, Sara Connolly, Matthew Aldrich – NatCen Social Research and University of East Anglia**

The paper presents some early findings of the ESRC-funded study “*Fathers, work and families in twenty-first century Britain: beyond the breadwinner model?*”. It uses data from the ESS, round 2 (2004-05) and round 5 (2010-11), and compares the UK with five other purposively selected European countries. The focus of the analysis is on working fathers with dependent children and their experience of the work-family conflict (WFC). We build on the work by Gallie and Russell (2009) and by Scott and Plagnol (2012) and try to understand how individual-, household- and societal-level factors affect fathers' experience of WFC. For example, we explore which groups of fathers are most likely to feel that their job prevents them from giving the time they want to their partner and family. We also compare the level of WFC among British fathers with those in other European countries, as well as drawing comparisons with mothers. The paper discusses policy implications of these early findings in terms of work-family reconciliation policies in the UK.

It will be suggested that developing effective work-family policies requires sensitive meshing with gender equity policies (Lewis & Plomien, 2009; Gornick & Meyers, 2009). Central to this ambition is a more father or male-kin inclusive approach to work-family reconciliation. Expanding national policies and programmes to promote a stronger engagement of men in family care activities through the life course will help modernize work-family policies to catch up with the changing role of women.

## **Following young fathers: a consideration of policy and practice**

**Laura Davies - University of Leeds**

The ESRC funded *Following Young Fathers* project (2012-2015) aims to develop our understanding of the experiences and support needs of young British fathers. Young fathers are defined as those who enter parenthood under the age of twenty five with a quarter estimated to be in their teens (Fatherhood Institute 2010; Swann *et al* 2003). The study is tracking a sample of twenty five young men over time, including fathers in their teens as well as those in the early years of adulthood. Further strands of the research include a case study evaluation of local service provision and a secondary analysis project which aims to extend existing qualitative evidence. The research is currently at an early stage building upon earlier work undertaken as part of *Timescapes*, the ESRC funded Qualitative Longitudinal Initiative (see Neale and Lau, 2011). *Following Young Fathers* aims to develop a rich longitudinal dataset on young fathers and on service provision development and evaluation.

This paper tracks developments in policy and practice following the implementation of UK's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (1999), which aimed to reduce teenage pregnancy by 50 per cent and increase the participation of teenage parents in employment, education and training by 60 per cent (SEU 1999; Office for National Statistics and Teenage Pregnancy Unit/TPU 2010). The paper argues that the experiences of young fathers remain neglected in both research and policy making with young fathers reporting feeling excluded by professionals (Paranjothy *et al* 2009) and this has contributed to the failure of Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (1999). This paper explores the ways in which young fathers remain marginalised by mother-centred

policy making and considers whether a more inclusive approach could be more effective. Some key examples of emerging service developments are identified which have the potential to better support young fathers to develop and retain an active involvement in their children's lives.