

What do we know about non-resident fathers?

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Since the 1970s increases in family breakdown and remarriage/repartnering have changed the demographics of families and especially so for fathers. In the UK the proportion of single parent households has tripled in the past 30 years. Estimates suggest that around 97% of parents with primary care for children are mothers¹ (Office for National Statistics, 2013a; Department for Work and Pensions, 2010). All this means that there is a growing number of fathers who don't live with their children.

Although there has been an increase in interest in men who live with their children (resident fathers) and those who don't (non-resident), data on men is not systematically collected (Kiernan, 2006). This means that there are big gaps in our knowledge and inaccurate proxies have to be used to estimate the number of men in different relationships with their children. For example, rates of lone motherhood are often used as a proxy for non-resident fatherhood (O'Brien, 2011).

To fill this gap we use data from the UK-wide survey Understanding Society (2009-11) to try and answer the question 'what do we know about non-resident fathers?' Uniquely, the data in Understanding Society is collected from men including those who don't live with their children. This means that we can put together a nationally representative profile of who non-resident fathers are and the relationships they have with their children who do not live with them.

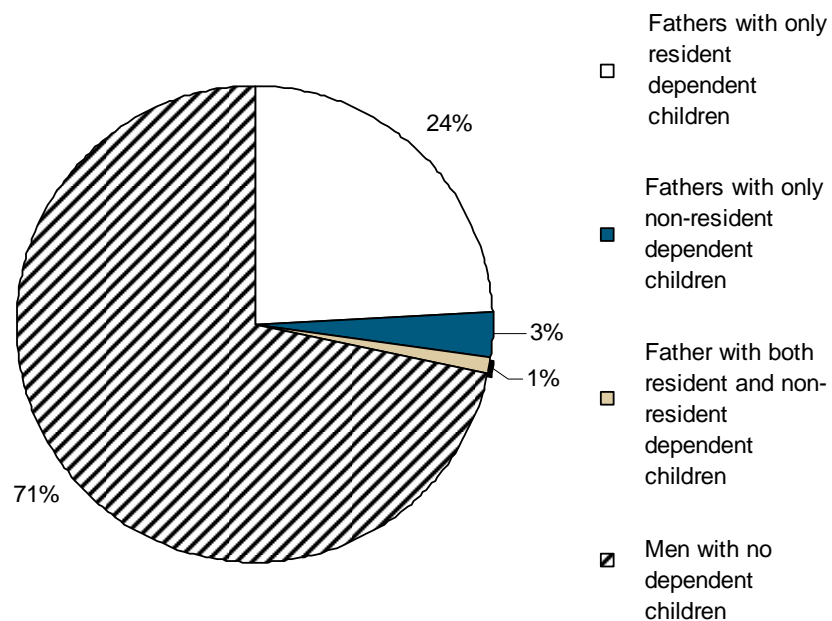
Detailed facts and figures on non-resident fathers are available in the data tables accompanying this paper. Our focus is on non-resident fathers of children of dependent age (normally under 16 unless they are in education or training).

¹ Although 95% of the statutory child maintenance caseload in 2010 was female, estimates using The Families and Children Study (FACS) suggested that the actual figure was closer to 97% (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010).

How many men have non-resident children?

Looking at *all* men, only 29% have dependent children. A small minority (3%) of all men say they do not live with the dependent children they have biologically fathered or played a fathering role to (through adoption or being a step parent). Only 1% of men are in a situation where they live with dependent children but also have other dependent children that live with someone else.

How many men have dependent children, and whether these children live with them



Base: All men aged 16-64 (N=20,741)

We estimate that 5% of all men aged 16-64 have non-resident children aged under 16² - this equates to **980,000 men in the UK**.³

Although these findings give an insight into the numbers of men who have children that don't live with them, we need to treat them with caution. We know from other research

² This includes men who have only non-resident children (3%) and men who have both resident and non-resident children (1%) – due to rounding these figures add up to 5%.

³ In total 20,340,700 men aged 16-64 are estimated to have been living in the UK in mid-2012 (Office for National Statistics, 2013b). This population estimate was used to calculate the number of men aged 16-64 who report non-resident children aged under 16. The 95% confidence interval around this estimate is from 915,000 to 1,037,000. The population estimates are rounded to the nearest 1000.

that men are less likely to report children who live elsewhere (Garfinkle et al, 1998; Rendall et al, 1999; Sorenson, 1997). Our figures only represent the children that don't live with their fathers that men themselves report. We know for example that fathers may not report children that they have fathered because of denial or because they may not even know of their existence. Men may be unwilling to acknowledge their children who don't live with them because they may not have a relationship with them, or they don't see them as their children in the same way they do with those they live with, they may have hidden the existence of these children from new partners and/or there may be issues around social disapproval or shame.

If we only look at fathers with dependent children rather than all men, 17% of fathers have non-resident children. This figure includes both fathers who only have non-resident children and fathers who have both resident and non-resident children.

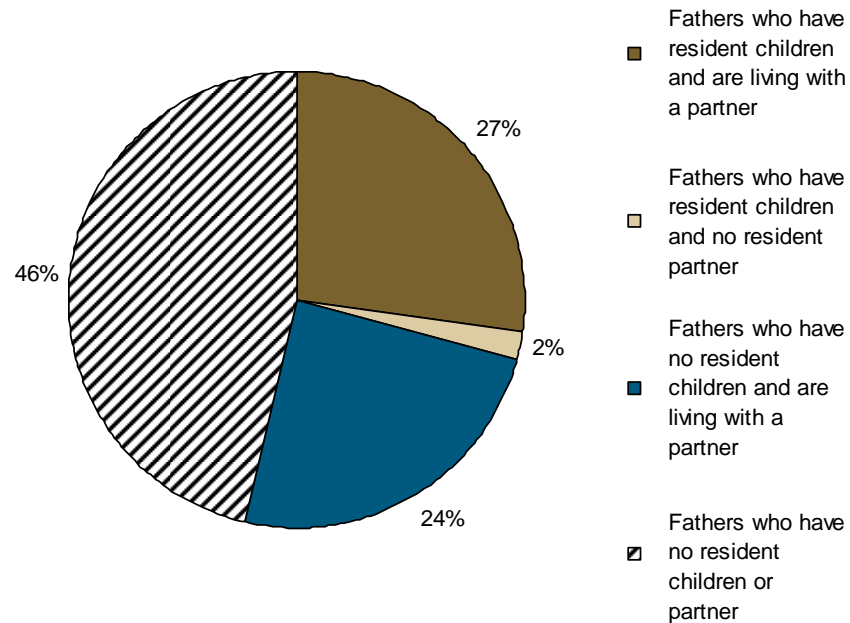
Who are non-resident fathers?

In this section we look at fathers who report having dependent children under 16 years old who don't live with them, and compare them with those who only have dependent children who live with them. Of course, fathers who don't live with their children form a diverse cross section of men, but these are the key differences we found between them and fathers who live with their children.

Residential situation

The majority of fathers (71%) who have non-resident children of dependent age don't live with any other dependent children. Only three in ten fathers who have non-resident dependent age children are also living with other dependent children (29%) – they have both resident and non-resident dependent children. Fathers who don't live with their dependent children are likely to be single - nearly half of fathers with non-resident dependent children (46%) are not living with either a child or a partner.

The residential situation of fathers with non-resident children



Base: Fathers with non-resident children aged under 16 (N=1,053)

Age and marital status

The younger the father, the more likely they are to have children who live with someone else. A third of 16 to 24 year old fathers (34%) report having non-resident children compared with 14% of fathers aged 45 or older.

Unsurprisingly, fathers who don't live with their children are more likely to be divorced, separated or never married; 25% of non-resident fathers have never been married and are not currently cohabiting, compared with just 1% of fathers living with dependent children⁴.

Ethnic background and religion

Very little is known about fatherhood among ethnic minority families in Britain (Phoenix & Hussain, 2007). Our analysis shows that ethnic background of fathers of dependent children living apart from their children is a significant factor.

⁴ Although an important factor, the length of time since separation is not available in the dataset and therefore cannot be presented.

Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani fathers with dependent age children are the least likely to be living separately from their children. Just 6% or 7% of fathers from these groups report not living with their dependent children.

Black Caribbean fathers are the most likely to report not living with their children (32%) followed by mixed race fathers (21%) and Black African fathers (19%). These findings support earlier analysis by Berthoud (2000) which found that Asian fathers are the most likely to be living in a married couple with their children and Black Caribbean fathers the least likely to be doing so.

We also found that fathers with dependent age children who belong to a religion are more likely to live with their children than fathers who report that they do not belong to a religion and this varies by religion; 19% of fathers with no religion have non-resident children compared with 14% of Christian fathers, 7% of Muslim fathers and 7% of Sikh fathers.

Economic profile

Fathers who have non-resident children appear to be more economically disadvantaged than fathers who have resident children only.

- Non-resident fathers are more likely to have no qualifications (25% compared with 17%) and be unemployed or economically inactive than fathers living with their children (17% compared with 7%).
- Fathers not living with their children are far less likely to be working, or have worked, in management or professional jobs (25%) than resident fathers (43%).
- Around half of this group of fathers (49%) are home-owners (either outright or with a mortgage), compared with three-quarters (74%) of fathers who live with their children.

Along with economic disadvantage, other research has shown that non-resident fathers have poorer wellbeing, both physical and emotional, compared with resident fathers and non-fathers (Eggebeen and Knoster, 2001). This is attributed to the fact that wellbeing is associated with fatherhood status, and that moving away from a co-residence “the transforming power of fatherhood dissipates” (ibid p.319).

Relationship history

It appears that the more relationships a father has had, the more likely he is to not be living with his dependent children. The vast majority of fathers living with their dependent children have only had one marriage or cohabiting partner⁵, including any current relationship (73%). Only 32% of fathers with non-resident children have had one

⁵ Cohabiting partners are those partners who the father has lived with for a period of at least 6 months.

relationship. Non-resident fathers are more likely to have never married or cohabited and more likely to have been married or cohabited many times, suggesting a range of relationship histories among this group.

Number of children

Fathers with non-resident children are more likely to have fathered⁶ a greater number of children (25% have fathered four or more children) than fathers with only resident children (13% have fathered four or more).

Background of fathers themselves

Fathers who as children themselves did not live with both of their parents from birth to the age of 16 (whether because of their parents separating, divorcing or for some other reason), are more likely to have non-resident children (31%) than those who lived with both parents throughout their childhood (21%).

The likelihood of having non-resident children

The associations between father characteristics and having non-resident children, listed above, may be inter-related or could be because of other factors. Logistic regression analysis allows us to explore the effect of socio-demographic, economic and relationship histories on the likelihood of having non-resident children when other characteristics are controlled for.⁷ The results of this regression analysis show that a father is more likely to have non-resident children if:

- **They are white British compared with an Asian ethnic group⁸.**
- **They are in a Black ethnic group, compared with a White British ethnic group.**
- **They have a lower level of educational attainment.**
- **They are not in paid work.**
- **They belong to the lowest socio-economic group (routine employment) compared with the highest socio-economic group (management or professional).**
- **They rent a property, rather than owning outright or with a mortgage.**

⁶ This includes biologically fathering a child, adopting a child or being a step father.

⁷ Only factors which vary significantly between fathers with non-resident children and fathers with resident children have been included in the model.

⁸ The 'Asian ethnic group' includes those fathers who belong to Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other Asian ethnic groups. The 'Black ethnic group' includes those fathers who belong to African, Caribbean and any other black backgrounds.

- They have **married or cohabited three or more times**.

The age of the father and the relationship history of the father's own parents are not significantly related to having non-resident children once other factors are controlled for. This is because they are strongly associated with the number of relationships the father has had and his socio-economic position.

Contact with children

Article 9 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that: "Children whose parents do not live together have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this might hurt the child" (UNCRC, 1989). However, it is well established that following parental separation not all children maintain contact with their non-resident parent.

This section examines the contact between fathers who don't live with their children and the factors associated with greater contact.⁹ The analysis relies on the fathers' reported levels of contact with their children and is based on the fathers' own interpretations, so over-reporting may have an effect. Contact between a non-resident parent and a child is subject to mis-reporting - the resident parent often under-estimates and the non-resident parent is believed to over-estimate the level of contact; a nationally representative UK survey found that resident parents reported far lower rates of daily contact with the non-resident parent (6%) than non-resident parents themselves (12%) (Lader, 2008).

Whether a father is in contact with his children that he doesn't live with and the frequency of this contact vary hugely. Only a minority of fathers report that they have no contact with their non-resident children (13%). This equates to 129,000 men in the UK.¹⁰ Over half of fathers who don't live with their children say they stay in touch¹¹ at least once a week:

- 38% have contact several times a week
- 21% are in touch once a week

⁹ The analysis presented in this section is limited by the fact that we do not know the profile of the non-resident children; in particular we do not know the number of non-resident children nor their age, both of which are likely affect the relationship between father and non-resident child. Furthermore the differences observed between the two groups of fathers (those with only non-resident children and those with both resident and non-resident children) may be related to the differences of the profile of the non-resident children rather than related to the fact that they also have resident dependent children.

¹⁰ This figure was grossed up based on the ONS estimate that 20,340,700 men aged 16-64 were estimated to have been living in the UK in mid-2012 (Office for National Statistics, 2013b). The 95% confidence interval around our estimate of how many men in the UK have no contact with their non-resident children is from 105,000 to 154,000. The population estimates are rounded to the nearest 1000.

¹¹ The question asks how often the father 'visits, sees or contacts' his non-resident children.

- 28% are in touch less than weekly but at least a few times a year
- 13% have no contact

Nearly half of fathers report that their children stay with them at weekends or school holidays on a regular basis (49%) and a further 14% report irregular stays. Just 24% of fathers are in contact with their children, but do not have their children staying with them at weekends or holidays.

International data suggests that there has been a decline in the proportion of those fathers who have no contact with their children following separation (Cheadle, Amato & King, 2010), although this decline needs to be seen in the context of international debate about 'shared care' for children post-separation (Parkinson, 2010). Though the definition of 'shared care' varies cross-nationally, in the UK the most recent version of the Children and Families Bill (at the time of writing) is seeking to amend the welfare of the child principle in the Children Act 1989: "to presume, unless the contrary is shown, that involvement of that parent in the life of the child concerned will further the child's welfare" (Clause 11, Children and Families Bill).

Which non-resident fathers are more likely to stay in contact?

A range of factors are associated with father-child contact. This section examines the factors and characteristics associated with a father being in contact with his non-resident children, compared with those fathers who have no contact or rare contact.¹²

Fathers who are in contact with their non-resident children,¹³ compared with those who have rare or no contact, are more likely to:¹⁴

- Provide financially for their non-resident children.
- Live less than half an hour away.
- Have multiple bedrooms in their home.
- Be a home owner (either outright or with a mortgage).
- Have no dependent children living with them.
- To have never been married and not living with a partner.

¹² Rare contact is defined as visiting, seeing or contacting non-resident children a few times a year.

¹³ This includes those fathers who report being in contact with their children more than a few times a year. The frequency of contact reported by this group ranges from everyday contact to less than monthly contact.

¹⁴ For detailed information please see the accompanying set of tables.

- Be in paid employed and belong to a higher socio-economic group.
- Have educational qualifications (at least GCSE level).

Just over two-thirds of non-resident fathers report that they give or send money for child support (68%),¹⁵ which equates to 313,000 men in the UK.¹⁶ Fathers who are in contact are more likely to provide financially for their non-resident children: 83% of fathers who see their children several times a week send or give money for child support. This compares with 29% of fathers who do not see their non-resident children. Although the link between contact and financial support is well established, the direction of the relationship is not clear (Hutson, 2007; Morris, 2007; Amato and Dorius, 2010) and is not completely straightforward. For example, when there is very high frequency of contact, the level of financial support may be replaced by other forms of support or deemed unnecessary (Morris, 2007). We find that when non-resident fathers see their children every day a smaller proportion give or send money (65%, compared with the 83% who see their children several times a week).

Fathers who have both children living with them *and* non-resident children elsewhere see their non-resident children less frequently than fathers who only have non-resident children. They are more likely to report that they never see their non-resident children (21% compared with 10%) and have less frequent contact (8% have almost daily contact, compared with 14%).

Whether children stay with their non-resident father is linked with how many bedrooms there are in the father's house. Unsurprisingly, those fathers who have one bedroom or no bedroom are the least likely to have their children for regular weekend and holiday stays (34%) and the most likely to have no stays (31%). In comparison, 51% of fathers who have three or more bedrooms have regular weekend and holiday stays. As noted above, non-resident fathers in less secure financial situations are less likely to have contact with their children. This may be related to the fact that fathers in less secure economic positions do not have the necessary resources, including bedroom space, to allow contact and stays easily.

¹⁵ The question asks "Thinking about your children aged under 16 who are not living with you here, do you send or give money for child support?"

¹⁶ The estimate of 68% of non-resident fathers equates to a grossed up figure of 313,000 of the 20,340,700 men aged 16-64 that were estimated to have been living in the UK in mid-2012 (Office for National Statistics, 2013b). The 95% confidence interval around this estimate is from 274,000 to 352,000. The population estimates are rounded to the nearest 1000.

Quality of relationship

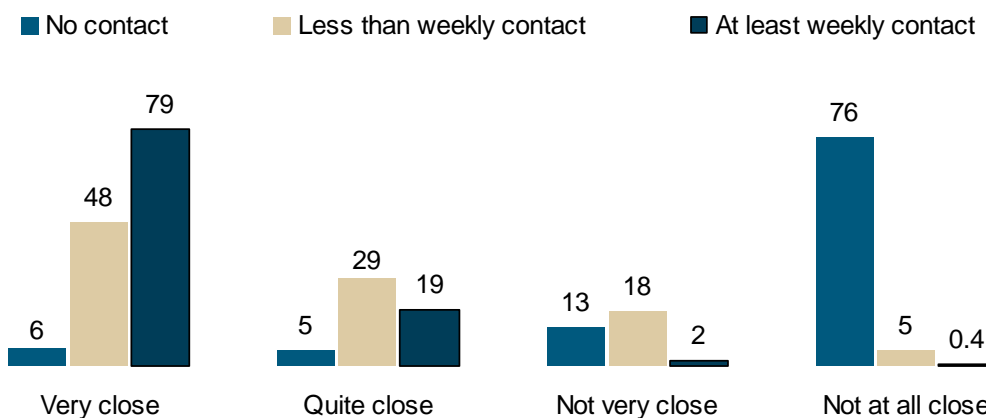
All fathers, regardless of whether they are in contact with their non-resident children, were asked how close they are with the children who do not live with them.

Overall, eight in ten fathers report that they are very or quite close with their non-resident children (81%). One in ten said that they are not close at all (11%).

As expected, the closeness of the relationship is strongly associated with the level of contact the father has with his non-resident children: the more frequent the contact the closer the relationship. The vast majority of fathers who are not in contact with their children report that their relationship is not close at all; however, one in ten report that their relationship is very or quite close.

Non-resident fathers who also have resident children are less likely to report that they are close to the children who do not live with them than fathers without resident children. Some 85% of fathers with no resident children say they have a close relationship with their non-resident children, 69% of fathers with resident children report this.

Closeness of relationship between father and non-resident children



Base: All fathers with non-resident children under 16 years old (N=1,045)

Key findings

- We estimate that 980,000 men in the UK have non-resident children under 16 years old. This equates to 5% of all men aged 16-64 and 17% of fathers with children of dependent age.
- Fathers who don't live with their children are a diverse cross section of men. However, when other characteristics are controlled for, fathers are more likely to have non-resident children if they are more economically disadvantaged, if they

belong to particular ethnic groups or if they have been married or cohabited three or more times.

- The vast majority of fathers who don't live with their children (87%) say that they continue to have contact with them, and close to half (49%) say that their children stay with them on a regular basis, on weekends and during school holidays.
- Several factors are related to whether a father is in contact with his non-resident children, notably whether they are living with a new partner and children, their economic situation and whether or not they provide money for child support.
- Most non-resident fathers (81%) report a close relationship with their non-resident children. Non-resident fathers who also have resident children are less likely to report that they are close to the children who do not live with them than non-resident fathers who live alone (69% compared with 85%).

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