

Fatherhood in the UK: What do we know about non-resident fathers?

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Outline

- Aims of the study
- Context – research and policy
- Methodology
- Non-resident fathers in the UK
- Types of non-resident fathers
- Questions

Aims of the study

Part of a wider ESRC funded secondary analysis study which aims:

- To provide a **comprehensive profiling** of fathers in 21st century Britain in terms of their paid work and family life.
- To explore **factors** associated with differences in fathers' paid work and family life.
- To analyse **time trends** in fathers' working patterns to explore effects of policy changes.
- To explore **institutional factors**, by comparing the UK with other European countries.

Context

Research on non-resident fathers

- Changing family structures:
 - four million dependent children living in two and a half million separated families
 - around 97% of separated parents with primary care of children are mothers
- However, limited primary research with fathers in general and non-resident fathers in particular:
 - hard to reach group
 - proxy measures often used

Legal and policy landscape

- In England and Wales both parents have parental responsibility for their dependent children.
- Post-separation parents are expected to make care and financial arrangements for their children.
- The legal and policy landscape for separated and separating parents is undergoing a number of changes:
 - rolling closure of the Child Support Agency (CSA)
 - Legal Aid will not routinely cover family law
 - proposed changes to the ‘welfare of the child principle’
 - introduction of ‘Help and Support for Separated Families’ (HSSF)

Legal and policy landscape

- Taken together these changes seem to promote ‘private’ or ‘family based’ contact and financial arrangements for children post-separation.
- This is to be achieved by:
 - reducing and restricting access to legal redress and statutory services
 - introducing and expanding help and support services

Methodology

Methodology

- Secondary analysis of Wave 1 Understand Society:
 - representative cross-section of the UK population
 - data collected directly from non-resident fathers
- Focus is on self-identified non-resident fathers of children aged under 16 years old (N=1,067).
- Range of analysis techniques including:
 - descriptive analysis
 - binary logistic regression
 - Latent Class Analysis

Non-resident fathers in the UK

Non-resident fathers in the UK

- 29% of all men aged 16-64 in the UK report that they have dependent age children.
- 5% of men report non-resident dependent children.
- Non-resident fathers do not form a homogenous group.
- *However* a range of characteristics have been found to be associated with non-resident fathers in comparison with resident fathers.

Non-resident fathers in the UK

Logistic regression analysis found a range of differences between non-resident fathers and resident fathers, relating to three main areas.

- Family life – *Non-resident fathers more likely to:*
 - live alone
 - have had multiple previous relations (cohabitations and marriages)
 - have fathered, or played a fathering role to, multiple children

Non-resident fathers in the UK

- Economic disadvantage – *Non-resident fathers more likely to be:*
 - unemployed or economically inactive
 - living in rented accommodation
 - belong to the lowest socio-economic group
- Ethnic group – *Non resident father are:*
 - **more** likely to belong to a Black ethnic group (compared with White British)
 - **less** likely to belong to an Asian ethnic group (compared with White British)

Types of non-resident fathers

Four groups of non-resident fathers

- Used latent class analysis to group non-resident fathers into four discrete 'groups'.
- Factors used in the grouping were related to:
 - how often in contact
 - overnight stays
 - distance lived from child
 - provision of financial support
 - whether lives with children and/or partner

Four groups of non-resident fathers

Engaged fathers (46%)

- At least weekly contact
- Regular stays
- Most provide child support
- Live less than 15 minutes away
- Mainly single

Less engaged fathers (28%)

- Contact once a week or month
- Most have stays
- Most provide child support
- Live an hour away
- Mix of family situations

Disengaged fathers (16%)

- No or very rare contact
- No stays
- Most don't provide child support
- Mix of distances
- Mix of family situations

Distance fathers (11%)

- Rare contact
- Most have rare or no stays
- Most provide child support
- All live over an hour away
- Mix of family situations

Four groups of non-resident fathers

- ‘Engaged’ and ‘Less engaged’ fathers are the least likely to be economically disadvantaged.
- ‘Disengaged’ fathers emerge as a group who are more economically disadvantaged and more likely to report poor physical health.
- ‘Distance’ fathers form an interesting minority group – more ethnically diverse, higher religious affiliation, highest educational attainment and a large minority not born in the UK and have children living abroad.

Thank-you

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