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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engaged fathers (46%)</th>
<th>Less engaged fathers (28%)</th>
<th>Disengaged fathers (16%)</th>
<th>Distance fathers (11%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least weekly contact</td>
<td>Contact once a week or month</td>
<td>No or very rare contact</td>
<td>Rare contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular stays</td>
<td>Most have stays</td>
<td>No stays</td>
<td>Most have rare or no stays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most provide child support</td>
<td>Most provide child support</td>
<td>Most don’t provide child support</td>
<td>Most provide child support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live less than 15 minutes away</td>
<td>Live an hour away</td>
<td>Live an hour away</td>
<td>All live over an hour away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly single</td>
<td>Mix of family situations</td>
<td>Mix of family situations</td>
<td>Mix of family situations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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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