

Working Paper Series

No. 18

Shared caring: bringing fathers into the frame



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Women. Men. Different. Equal.
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First published Winter 2004/05

ISBN 1 84206 126 7

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When the Equal Opportunities Commission asked me to conduct an independent review of how fathers can be supported to balance their employment and family commitments I was delighted. Despite best intentions, reconciling work and family life is still too often seen as an exclusively maternal issue. The academic evidence I have reviewed and the interviews I have conducted suggest that the tide is beginning to turn; parents, politicians and employer and employee organisations are increasingly bringing fathers into the frame.

I would like to thank the following individuals and organisations: Frances O'Grady of the Trade Union Congress, Susan Anderson and Anthony Thompson of the Confederation of British Industry, Sally Low and Louis Sidnick of the British Chamber of Commerce, Matthew Hassan and Anna Nsubuga of the Treasury, Rebecca Goldmann, National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI), Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Steven Taylor and Deborah Lincoln of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Becky Mason of British Telecom, Duncan Fisher and Tom Beardshaw of Fathers Direct, The Conservative Head Office and Paul Goodman M.P., Professor Linda Hantrais, Loughborough University, Dr Juliet Webster, Work and Equality Research and Professor Peter Moss, Institute of Education.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Julia Warner and Emily Jordan of the Centre for Research on the Child and Family, UEA and Liz Speed of the EOC for their valuable support towards the production of this report.

November 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

British fathers are now expected to be accessible and nurturing as well as economically supportive to their children. They are increasingly self-conscious about juggling conflicts between looking after children and having a job. Government has responded to these changes introducing father-sensitive employment legislation. From April 2003, for the first time, British fathers were given a legal paid right to take leave from work for a period of time when their child is born, some 30 years after Sweden. Under the legislation fathers continue to have access to unpaid parental leave but in addition, employers of fathers with young children under six years of age or older disabled children have a new 'duty to consider' fathers' requests for flexible working.

Shared caring is a slippery concept dependent on how both sharing (equal or contributory) and care (direct engagement, availability, responsibility or attitude) are defined or prioritised. This report explores the extent to which fathers can be further incorporated into a shared caring framework for family-employment reconciliation policies. The report reviews current academic and policy developments on shared caring with a specific focus on the role of fathers in employment.

Evidence from the literature

- Research suggests that the ideal of the involved caring father is culturally embedded in Britain and can impact upon the feelings of mothers and fathers, even when men cannot be as involved as they would like. This ideal is creating new benchmarks by which father involvement is judged.
- Time use studies consistently show that fathers, both resident and non-resident, are spending more time with their children, albeit still at a lower level than mothers. In dual full-time earner couples men spend about 75 per cent of women's absolute time on childcare and other activities with dependent children.
- Fathers' involvement in housework remains low, contributing to women's feelings of overload and unfairness, particularly for full-time working mothers.
- Studies assessing the impact of father involvement in the early years on later child outcomes confirm the importance of early paternal investment in caring. In dual earner families where mothers work full-time in the first year of children's lives, increased father involvement can protect child welfare.

- In the early years, high levels of father support for mothers can increase infant feeding options and promote breast-feeding (British rates are currently low with only 28 per cent of UK mothers still breast-feeding at four months).

Policy implications

- The introduction of paternity leave in Britain has been welcomed particularly by the under 25s, with 96 per cent reporting it as either 'just right' or 'too mean'. During paternity and parental leave fathers can get to know and develop a relationship with their infant, settle older children, practically support partners while they establish breast-feeding or help with bottle-feeding. Paternity leave also supports men's own health needs at this time, because of the sleep disruption they may face from having a newborn in the home.
- In 2000, before the arrival of the new legislation, 61 per cent of fathers with a dependent child aged less than one year of age had taken paid or unpaid paternity leave in the previous twelve months. Initial monitoring of uptake of the new provision has not been formally reported but early indications suggest rates are lower than expected. Only 19 per cent of fathers took statutory paid paternity leave in the first year after this entitlement was introduced. Fathers may still be relying on annual leave.
- In European countries where salary compensation rates for paternity leave are earnings related, uptake rates are high. Government should reconsider the current reimbursement rate of paternity leave to ensure adequate financial incentives for families.
- In terms of men's access to parental leave, consideration could be given to extending paid leave during the early years, and including a special 'daddy period'. These have been very popular in Nordic countries where they operate within a generous maternal support context.
- Avoiding chronic long weekly working hours can help fathers become more involved with children. Research shows that children benefit from both paternal and maternal attention and the emotional and practical support which derives from 'at home' parenting. 'Being there' and emotionally available to children can also be rewarding for parents but difficult to combine with work which entails anti-social hours.
- There are no easy solutions to resolve inherent tensions between working hours, parenting and family welfare. Adherence to the average 48-hour maximum working week requirements of the EU Working Time Directive can

help shape norms of appropriate working hours for fathers and mothers, but employees 'right to choose' their own working hours is also a factor to consider. For example, some people do not object to working long hours and would probably face lower earnings if their hours were reduced.

- Access to flexible working hours is strongly endorsed by fathers but in practice few have used the new optional right to request flexible working. Government and employer promotion of family and business benefits of family-work flexibility for fathers would be timely.
- Other important factors in successfully encouraging active fatherhood through policy initiatives include: government awareness campaigns; public endorsement of paternity leave by political, business and organisational leaders when they become fathers and presenting policies within a gender collaborative and child welfare context.

1 INTRODUCTION

This report explores current academic and policy developments on shared caring with a specific focus on the role of fathers in employment. The literature review concentrates primarily on the interaction of fathers' domestic life with their commitments to employment. Evidence is explored to identify the extent of fathers' caring responsibilities, the factors which encourage and enable fathers to participate more fully in the caring of children and the constraints contemporary employment practices may place on paternal involvement in family life. The report builds on the first EOC *Working Fathers* report (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003) covering new research evidence and any previous studies not fully examined at that time. The intention is to provide an evidence base from which to examine the extent to which fathers can be incorporated into a shared caring framework for family-employment reconciliation policies.

The report is timely as its publication takes place following recent significant changes in employment legislation for British fathers. (This is a fast moving policy scene and the Government has recently announced new policy proposals on which it will be consulting.¹) From April 2003, for the first time, British fathers were given a legal right to take leave from work for a period of time when their child is born, some 30 years after Sweden, a forerunner in father-sensitive employment legislation. A period of two weeks paid paternity leave marked the arrival of an employment policy specifically targeted at fathers. The Employment Act also ensured that fathers continued to have access to 13 weeks of statutory unpaid parental leave (a provision, available since 1999, open to mothers as well as fathers of young children under five years of age).

A new element to the employment legislation was a provision to support flexible working for fathers, as well as mothers, of young children under six years of age or older disabled children. Parents have a new right to formally request flexible working and employers have a formal 'duty to consider', but not necessarily to accede to, the request. These specific developments emerged from extensive consultation between Government and child welfare, employer and employee groups, through the 2002 *Work and Parents Taskforce*.

The Employment Act provisions show the beginning of a 'caring' rather than solely 'economic' father norm emerging within governmental policy. This policy turn had its roots in the Green Paper *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1999: 26) which emphasised the caring and economic responsibilities both parents held in common,

¹ See http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pre_budget_report/prebud_pbr04/assoc_docs/prebud_pbr04_adchildcare.cfm for further information

'to extend choice for both mothers and fathers by giving them the chance to spend more time at home, as well as support their children financially'. The amount of male caring implicit in this new legislation extends beyond an intermittent and discretionary form of paternal involvement to a more continuous and integrated routine workday father role. As Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women, stated in a keynote speech, 'Father inclusiveness is part of a modern family policy' (Hewitt, 2004).

The growth in dual earner families has been a key driver of recent policy shifts, as has public anxiety about the impact of work intensification on the welfare of children. Dual earner couples now make up 66 per cent of households with dependent children, in contrast to 45 per cent in 1971 (Collingwood Bakeo and Clarke, 2004). Analysts suggest that it is this increase in the combined working hours of couples with dependent children, through the rise of the dual earner family and the enhanced economic activity of lone parents, which is creating the sense of a time squeeze or bind (e.g. Jacobs and Gerson, 2004). On the employment side, increased competition at a global level (e.g. lower wage levels in developing countries and the 24 hour market place and communications culture) has amplified corporate and individual employee insecurity, potentially corroding even the most advanced work-life human resource strategies (Dex, 2003).

Despite the attempt to open up support for fathers in the new employment legislation, debate has ensued about the persistence of barriers to paternal uptake, especially within the context of British fathers' weekly work hours. Any move to a shared caring father norm raises questions about its compatibility with the average paternal working week of 47 hours for full-time employees (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003).

In the report that follows Chapter 2 reviews research evidence on the extent of fathers' caring responsibilities and how they interact with commitments to employment. Chapter 3 examines the implications for any further support to integrate fathers within a shared caring work-life balance framework. In this chapter I will be drawing on interviews with informants from key Government departments, the Conservative Party, employer and employee organisations to assess the context of future policy directions. The focus of discussion is on further adaptations to both parental leave and flexible working policies. Enhanced financial incentives, greater flexibility, and parental choice have been central issues.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A defining feature of contemporary fatherhood is an emphasis on fathers as an active, 'hands-on', sharer of child caring responsibilities, an extension and deepening of nurturing expectations found in earlier historical periods. Today, fathers in Britain are expected to be accessible and nurturing as well as economically supportive to their children. They are more self-conscious about juggling the different characteristics of 'the good father', particularly in terms of how they manage conflicts between having a job and looking after the children (Henwood and Procter, 2003). Caring fathers are now part of everyday culture through advertising images and depictions of sporting icons. There are regular newspaper columns on the pleasures of being a dad and coping with children 'Forty-eight hours alone with four children? Easy...it's just that time seems to stand still'. *The Observer Magazine* Hogan, P. (20th October, 2002) or resisting the expectations of wives and partners ('Slack Dad' *The Guardian* column). Indeed, the wish to be a more involved father can even legitimise stepping down from a demanding and prestigious occupation, as Government Minister Alan Milburn found out in June 2003.

'Father time: How hands-on dads are changing the way we raise our children.' Mark Honigsbaum, *The Observer Magazine* (30th November, 2003)

'The children of today grope for a relationship with their daddy as a human being not as an authoritative figure. "The father of duty" (*pere de devoir*) leaves the scene; enter the "loving father" (*pere de coeur*).' Bertaux and Delcroix (1992: 185)

'The qualities of the new model of fatherhood [are] presence, involvement, putting children's needs first, approachability, nurturing and caring.' (Henwood and Procter, 2003: 350)

'The daddy of all dilemmas. As Health Secretary Alan Milburn resigns to spend more time with his family, Rhodri Clark asks, 'Can career men be good fathers?'' R. Clark *The Western Mail* (June 14th 2003)

Fathers in family life

Fathers' involvement in childcare

Recognition of the shift in cultural norms and values governing contemporary fatherhood has been complemented by a growing body of academic research charting an increase in the involvement of fathers in the care of children (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004; Sandberg and Hofferth, 2001; Bianchi, 2000). However, assessing the quantity and quality of father involvement continues to be hotly debated, in particular, the extent to which measures should include generic housework (e.g. cleaning the house as distinct from cleaning the baby) or financial

provision (hours spent earning money). Most research has built on the classic tripartite typology of father involvement developed in the 1980s: 'engagement' (care-taking, shared activities, direct contact time with children); 'accessibility' (presence and availability at home); and 'responsibility' (ensuring care-taking and resource availability) (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine, 1987). Indicators of father involvement range from time use studies of family members' activities, some of which now include child as well as parental accounts (e.g. Yeung and Glauber, 2004) and intensive qualitative studies (Pleck and Steuve, 2001) which are more able to assess individual perceptions and appraisal within households.

The trend towards greater father involvement in childcare across most western countries was described in our last report. Using time budget diary data with nationally representative data sets, most studies have shown increases in time devoted to childcare activities for successive generations of fathers since the 1970s (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004). The UK trend has been most striking for fathers of children under 5 years, where absolute levels of involvement in child-related activities as a main activity (for example, changing a nappy whilst listening to the radio) increased from a baseline of just less than 15 minutes a day in the mid-1970s to two hours a day by the late 1990s (Fischer, McCulloch and Gershuny, 1999). Father involvement in the care of older children, between five and 15 years of age, has also increased over the same time period but not to the same degree as that found for fathers of the under-fives: from just more than 15 minutes a day in the mid-1970s to 50 minutes a day by the late 1990s. (The absolute lower level of father involvement with older children is mainly due to children's movement out of the home into school and that time given to the direct care of children generally decreases as children age).

Further inquiry into the time UK fathers spend on childcare has been provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Time Use National Survey conducted in 2000-01 (ONS, 2003). Although comparisons between mothers and fathers have not been fully exploited in the data set, selected gender analyses have been conducted. A gender comparison of dual full-time earner couples has shown that men spend on average just over three and a half hours a weekday on childcare and other activities with dependent children (about 75 per cent of women's absolute time, which was nearly four and a half hours). During weekends, both men and women report spending more time with their children, just over six and a half hours a day, representing a 'catching-up' in family time.

In general, for couple households there appears to be growing gender convergence, but not equity, in parents' contribution to childcare time. UK data are similar to the international time use diary results on levels of paternal involvement reviewed by

Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004). In two-parent households with dependent children, paternal involvement ranged from 1.83 to 0.62 hours per day (between 73 per cent and 44 per cent of mothers' involvement) and paternal accessibility time ranged from 3.8 to 3.56 hours per day (between 71 per cent to 65 per cent of mothers' accessibility). Assessment of paternal responsibility is more complex to capture. Researchers have suggested that it is a composite of 'executive function' tasks, such as arranging and planning health care appointments, which do not necessarily involve direct interaction with children, but may involve rumination and worry as well as motivation and attention. Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) report levels of paternal responsibility in two-parent households, indicated by planning childcare arrangements, to be about 20 per cent of maternal responsibility levels, showing an upward trend from an historic low base. It should be remembered here that researchers are describing 'responsibility in action' rather than an equal responsibility attitude, levels of which are high for both men and women (Alwin, Scott and Braun, 1998).

Dual earner families and father's time with children

A key social policy concern about the growth in dual earner families has been public anxiety that increases in parental employment would decrease the amount of time fathers spend on child rearing, despite changes in norms towards involved fathering and intensive mothering. Comparing trends across four national United States (US) time diary surveys of couple households with dependent children between 1965 and 1998, Sayer, Bianchi and Robinson (2004) have found instead a trend towards mothers and fathers spending more time in childcare activities, despite increases in dual earner households over the last forty years.

Researchers were able to distinguish two categories of parental engagement: routine daily childcare tasks (e.g. physical care) and time in teaching and playing (e.g. helping with homework; indoor games). Traditionally commentators and researchers have suspected that fathers selectively get involved in the more fun and playful side of family life, leaving the routine physical care to mothers (Pleck, 1997). Instead these researchers found that the absolute levels of engagement in both teaching and playing and routine childcare increased for both mothers and fathers over time. Overall, time devoted to all childcare activities increased from 80 to 95 minutes a day for mothers and from 17 minutes to just under 60 minutes for fathers. The proportion or ratio of mother to father time reduced from 4.9 in 1965 to 1.9 in 1998, leading Sayer et al. (2004: 11) to suggest that 'fathers have not substituted involvement in some childcare activities, but instead are spending more time across the full spectrum of childcare activities'.

These findings also show that as a generational group parents in the 1990s are spending more of their time caring for children than previous generations:

At any point in time, children of employed mothers spend less time with their mothers than children of non-employed mothers. However, children of employed mothers in 1998, spend more time with their mothers than children of the average mother in 1965.

(Sayer et al., 2004: 29)

Reductions in leisure time emerge as a specific time-saving strategy for contemporary parents. For example, couples with young children, especially those working long hours, spend significantly shorter times exercising (Nomaguchi and Bianchi, 2004). Mothers of young children, in particular, spend less time exercising than fathers (4.25 hours in contrast to 5.05 hours per two weeks). However, despite this absolute leisure advantage to fathers, marriage and parenthood appears to reduce men's exercise time much more significantly than women's (by 2.98 hours vs. 1.00 hours per two weeks lower than pre-parenthood rates), leading the authors to suggest that the norms of being a 'good husband, father, and provider' are beginning to alter modern men's time for personal leisure.

It should be noted that most of the studies showing an increase in father involvement in childcare rely on data from two-parent couple households, leaving out a significant minority of fathers who no longer reside with their children. Although the majority of children still live in a two-parent couple household (77 per cent of British children in 2001) and will spend all of their childhood in this type of family, this proportion has fallen considerably from 83 per cent in 1991 (ONS, 2003). More children experience transitions into and out of household types, often negotiating contact and relationships with both a non-resident biological father and a resident step-father. Sayer et al. (2004) suggest that the trend to increased parental involvement may be linked to an increasingly select group of fathers who are both highly committed to children and to sustaining a couple relationship over time. Children living in such households are 'parental time rich' and as such may be more emotionally, as well as materially, advantaged, contributing to the polarisation of family life experiences in contemporary childhood. If relationship breakdown and re-partnering continue to increase, such 'privileged' households will inevitably decline in number.

However, there is emerging evidence from the UK and US that contact between children and non-resident fathers is increasing. There is little reliable historic UK time use data on children's involvement with their non-resident fathers (Blackwell and Dawe, 2003), although US estimates suggest that a quarter to one third of children of non-resident fathers remain in regular, weekly contact with them and the proportion of children who lose all contact with fathers after parental separation, currently

estimated to range from a quarter to almost a half, is reducing (Amato and Sobolewski, 2004).

Poverty can also influence the degree of involvement fathers have with their children. Using data from the US 1997 Panel Study of Income Dynamics Child Development Supplement (children aged 0-12 years) Yeung and Glauber (2004) show that children of working poor (below federal poverty line) two-parent families have less time with both parents and less father time than non-poor working two-parent families. Difficulties managing insecure and inflexible low paid jobs with irregular hours decreased parental availability to children. As well as spending less time with parents, children of two parent poor families spent more time in day care, with friends, watching TV and less time in sports and the arts. Access to higher levels of parental time was important in protecting children's academic outcomes, as parents were available for monitoring and supervision. In terms of children's emotional and behavioural outcomes, however, maternal psychological well-being emerged as the crucial predictor for child welfare, once other variables were controlled. Across all family types, mothers who reported high levels of aggravation about caring for their children (e.g. hassles, time problems) and low mood were most likely to report behaviour problems with their children. Yeung suggests that family policies for low income families should combine good quality childcare, flexible working hours and parenting support measures to reduce maternal depression.

Paternity leave provides another context for father involvement in dual worker households. An important 15 year longitudinal study of paternal involvement in Sweden has been able to illuminate the relationship between fathers taking paternity leave and later paternal involvement in childcare. (Lamb, Chuang and Hwang, 2004). This study followed 116 children born in the early 1980s tracing links between absolute time-based and relative estimates of maternal and paternal involvement. At the beginning of the children's second year (average age 1.3 years) higher levels of father involvement and responsibility were found for fathers who had taken more than two weeks paternity leave and by the beginning of the third year (average age 2.3 years) taking paternity leave was associated with greater accessibility to children during week-days. However, maternal and paternal overall working hours were more powerful correlates of father involvement at 3.3 years than the short period of paternity leave itself. There have been no published studies which have traced the long term impact on children's welfare of men's involvement in parental leave although Lamb, Chuang and Hwang's (2004) Swedish study has the follow-up potential. As parental leave tends to be longer and more sustained than paternity leave it could be predicted that parental leave would have more impact on father involvement and child welfare.

Fathers and housework

The tendency toward gender convergence found in childcare is not apparent as far as housework is concerned: housework continues to be a more maternal domain. For example, analysis of the British Household Panel survey (BHPS) shows that in dual earner couples where mothers work 48 hours a week or more, they were still also mainly responsible for the washing and ironing (63 per cent), cleaning (49 per cent), cooking (49 per cent) and grocery shopping (44 per cent) (Kodz, 2003). According to this group of mothers who were working long weekly hours, it was only in less than 20 per cent of cases that male partners took on the 'main responsibility' for any of these housework tasks.

In general across working hour categories, both males and females reported greater sharing of childcare than housework, but joint caring of children reduced when either couple worked over 48 hours per week. For men who work long hours, childcare was mainly their partner's responsibility in 68 per cent of cases, reflecting reduced working hours for partners of work intensive husbands; for women working long hours childcare was mainly their partners' responsibility in 26 per cent of cases, reflecting the tendency for husbands to continue in the labour market, irrespective of wives' working hours. The housework overload, combined with unequal childcare responsibility, may be why women are more likely than men working longer weekly hours to show greater dissatisfaction about long working hours and have a preference to reduce them (Kodz, 2003).

ONS researchers also suggest that UK time use data show a continued high housework component to women's caring. On average women spent around two hours a day on housework as a secondary activity while with their children, compared with 1 hour and 20 minutes spent by men. Men, by contrast spend around 1 hour and 20 minutes a day watching TV as a secondary activity in the company of their children, compared with around 50 minutes by women. The inter-relationship between housework and childcare cannot be excluded in a holistic appreciation of family support and caring. However, while looking after children can be emotionally rewarding and self-fulfilling, this is less often the case for housework (Oakley, 1974). It cannot be assumed that childcare, housework and paid employment (the other main parental activity involved in providing a secure base for raising children) enjoy the same emotional meaning and status. While the experience of these parenting activities varies, for instance, in terms of time, fatigue created and satisfaction, arguably paid employment retains the higher status.

Researchers have calculated that the father and mother time in 'family work' converges when paid work is added to housework and childcare producing a 'total work time' sum (Pleck, 1985). These early findings have been confirmed by recent

large scale time use surveys, for instance Zuzanek's Canadian analysis (2000), which found a narrowing gap in total work time between fathers and mothers: in 1998 the combined load of paid and unpaid work for Canadian employed fathers with at least one child under the age of 18 was 617.8 minutes per day compared to 624.5 minutes per day for employed mothers.

Father involvement and couple relationships

Father involvement cannot be separated from the network of family relationships within which it is embedded. The couple relationship is a key one, setting the scene against which parents negotiate and balance their family and employment roles and responsibilities. Research suggests that high paternal involvement is 'grounded' in harmonious couple relationships (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004) and that the quality of fathers' relationships with their children is more vulnerable than mothers' to the negative effects of marital discord (Cummings, Goeke-Morey and Raymond, 2004). Lower marital quality is more consistently associated with parental negativity to children (e.g. criticism, lack of warmth) for fathers than mothers. Belsky has explained this pattern by stressing the vital mediation role mothers play in facilitating men's parenting (Belsky, Gilstrap and Rovine, 1984). That is, it may well be that the average father is more reliant on their partner's interpretation of children's behaviour than the average mother. There is a body of literature on maternal facilitation and blocking of father involvement, processes summarised by Allen and Hawkins (1999) as maternal gate-keeping.

Men's attempts to become more involved in childcare are contingent on maternal beliefs and mothers' assessment of its benefits. In general evidence suggests that both mothers and fathers tend to endorse beliefs about the importance of shared parenting (that both mothers and fathers should 'equally' discipline, emotionally support, monitor, financially support etc.) and are often disappointed when there is a discrepancy between ideals and actual behaviour (Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly and Robinson, 2002). In a nationally representative study of American couples, Milkie et al., (2002) found that when mothers reported less than ideal father involvement in the emotional care of children, they were more likely to believe the division of labour was unfair to them and had significantly higher levels of self reported stress. Fathers who experienced discrepancies also expressed unfairness and higher stress levels, but only when they felt their involvement in breadwinning was higher than ideal. Fathers who reported being over-involved in work felt that the division of labour was unfair to partners rather than to themselves. These findings show that norms of shared parenting are beginning to influence interactions between couples and their respective personal well-being particularly when mismatches between ideals and behaviour develop.

Parenting is but one dimension of a couple relationship but research evidence is emerging that the extent to which parents can 'acknowledge, respect and value the parenting roles and tasks of the partner' - 'the parenting alliance'- is crucial for family well-being (McBride and Rane, 2001: 230).

Impact of increased caring on fathers

Qualitative studies on the impact of greater involvement in caring for children on fathers' lives have explored the personal gains and costs to men. Drawing on Freud's dictum of adult maturity being marked by the ability 'to love and to work', Palkovitz (2002: 256) traces how fatherhood creates meaning for men: 'fathering anchored men's mental, physical and relational life'. Through his in-depth investigation of involved fathers of different ages, including resident and non-resident fathers, he suggests that men who are active in their children's lives tend to be more personally integrated and involved in their community. It may well be, he argues, that men's emotional involvement with children can operate to buffer against employment related stress.

More representative studies have confirmed some of these themes but also portray a more complex picture. Using the National Survey of Families and Households, Eggebeen and Knoester (2001) found that fathers differ from non-fathers in being more connected to wider intergenerational kin relationships, community associations and in having a stronger link to the labour market. Fatherhood status was not however, independently associated with psychological and physical well-being, except for men who lived away from their children who were lower on psychological well-being and life satisfaction. The researchers argue that 'once men step away from co-residence, the transforming power of fatherhood dissipates.' (ibid., 391). Further longitudinal research is needed to fully exclude selectivity into fatherhood: it may be that men who are already connected to kin and have high work motivation are more likely to become fathers.

Earlier UK research of parents, aged 33 years, from the 1958 birth cohort National Child Development Study (NCDS) showed that dual-earner families where mothers and fathers worked full-time reported the highest levels of stress among cohort parents (Ferri and Smith, 1996). In line with more recent research, they found that dual-earner fathers who worked more than fifty hours a week lowered their participation in childcare, but nonetheless felt stressed. It may well be that the difficulties in not being able to live up to contemporary good father norms creates role strain for these men. The study by Milkie et al. (2002) points in this direction as does Henwood and Procter's (2003) UK study of first time fathers whose family were financially dependent on them:

Financial dependency of the family upon them, working long hours or away from home left them with a variety of social and emotional sources of dissatisfaction. They felt they were missing out, vulnerable to and fearful of criticism for being a bad father, and engaged for long periods of time in activities that were not valued.

In the recent past, manual working fathers were secure in the cultural knowledge that a positive and valued contribution to the family was being made through work (O'Brien, 1982). Now, even if fathers cannot share care or opt-out of shared care they are still aware that 'sharing' governs and regulates fathering norms and deviation from involvement is not ideal. Historically, there is some evidence that when discrepancies arose, mothers 'covered' for fathers by presenting minimal involvement in childcare, or fathers 'showing an interest' as a symbolic form of commitment (Backett, 1987). With growing demands on maternal time these altruistic representations are hard to sustain and no longer match ideal notions of family life. Moreover, employed wives are less likely to be available to provide the 'package deal' (Reeves, 2002) to hard pressed employed husbands, enhancing feelings of time pressure and lack of support. It appears that involved fathers live out a series of 'provisional balances' (Palkovitz, 2002) through which they monitor the gains of personal investment in children and partner against any losses in status and family income created by being less involved in work.

However, research indicates that despite economic losses and short term communication disagreements between couples (Crouter et al., 1997), greater father involvement in family life has beneficial returns for the quality of couple relationships in the longer term. Snarey's (1993) follow up study of US men born in the 1930s found that after controlling for socioeconomic factors, positive paternal engagement (e.g. with routine every day childcare as well as play and school liaison) throughout a child's life to beyond adolescence, accounted for 21 per cent of the variance in father's marital happiness at midlife.

Impact of father involvement on children

The literature on fathers' impact on children's welfare is now extensive (e.g. Lamb, 2004) and shows that children are at risk or benefit from the life histories both parents bring to their parenting, summarized as the 'double dose' (Dunn et al., 2000) or 'double whammy' impact (Jaffee et al., 2003). Traditionally, psychological research had not recorded paternal behaviour or instead relied on maternal accounts, making it difficult to discover if fathers had any independent influence on children's development. In addition, those studies that began to explore paternal factors, often failed to control for the level and quality of maternal involvement experienced by the same children, making it difficult to assess the relative contribution of fathering and mothering to children's outcomes. A recent systematic review of studies, where

maternal involvement had been controlled and where data had been gathered from different independent sources, has found a beneficial impact of 'positive' father involvement in children's lives (Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004, see too Marsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb, 2000 for decade review). These studies have moved beyond crude time use indicators; as Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) point out, more parental time does not necessarily mean better time, time is 'not content free'. There is little evidence for a linear relationship between amount of time invested in children and good child outcomes. Nevertheless, clearly time together is required to develop and sustain mutually rewarding, or indeed difficult relationships.

Hallmarks of 'positive' father and mother involvement or care depend, to some extent, on the theoretical models of psychologists or sociologists and the age of the child, but there are certain commonalities. These include activities likely to promote an emotionally secure environment and child wellbeing in its broadest sense, such as: warm, responsive and sensitive interaction; monitoring and guiding behaviour to set limits; spending time to listen and talk about the child's concerns; encouraging age appropriate independent action in the home and neighbourhood; caring for the child's physical welfare.

Provision of economic welfare is rarely conceptualised as a form of care. However, it could be argued that the manner in which parents collectively provide material support, for instance the extent to which it is organised in a way that promotes children's emotional security and wellbeing, should be included in a 'positive care package'. There are still relatively few studies that trace the interplay and impact of both paternal and maternal working patterns, crucially hours away from children, and paternal and maternal quantitative and qualitative involvement on child wellbeing (Yeung et al ., 2004). The relative influence of money over quality of care and the optimum engagement of mothers and fathers in both domains has rarely been fully captured in most research designs. Engaged, sensitive care from both parents may be optimal, but at what point does a reduction in the time available, for example, to listen and spend time with children, outweigh the financial advantage gained through hours spent in employment? In one parent households, the same calculation needs to be made, with the added dimension of the non-residential partner's involvement and economic provision.

In all types of families parental involvement is a trade-off between money, time and care. The extent to which investment in care can be offset against investment in financial resources in bringing up children, or the balance between 'market and non-market behaviour' as Milkie et al. (2003) describe it, is still unclear. Both domains are crucial, as is the quality of non-parental care and neither emotional nor financial security alone is a sufficient basis for optimal child outcomes. Also as Lamb and

Tamis-LeMonda (2004) argue, the pathway into higher father involvement is crucial. Forced high paternal involvement, for example, through unemployment, does not bring with it the same benefits of greater paternal involvement by choice. Despite some of the limitations in existing research on father involvement and its impact on child outcomes in terms of exploring work-life balance issues, there is a body of work showing the importance of fathers at different stages of children's life. Some emergent findings are briefly described below (see too Lamb and Lewis, 2004).

Pregnancy, birth, breast-feeding and infancy

During the late twentieth century in most industrialised countries, it became more socially acceptable, indeed normative, for fathers to be present at the birth of children. For instance, Lewis (1987) showed that rates in Nottingham increased from 10 per cent of 1950s births to 70 per cent in the early 1980s. With the advent of new technologies to monitor pregnancy confirmation and fetal development, such as ultrasound and screening tests, fathers are being drawn into the pregnancy experience at even earlier stages (Draper, 2002). There are a growing number of studies of fathers' emotional and physical changes during their partner's pregnancy. Men may suffer from increasing anxiety and stress during their partner's pregnancy but a severe 'couvade syndrome' (a male psychologically distressed reaction to pregnancy) is rare. Recent UK research (Singh and Newburn, 2000) suggests that the three greatest concerns about pregnancy for both men and women were: the anxiety about something being wrong with the baby; the possibility of miscarriage; and money problems.

Other studies have focused on specific features of the transition to parenthood such as fatigue. Eleck, Hudson and Fleck's (2002) study of first time parents, shows significant increases in mothers' and fathers' level of self-reported fatigue from the ninth month of pregnancy to one month after the birth. In line with other studies, fathers reported more fatigue than mothers in the first month, possibly because they had not become accustomed to the sleep interruption of late pregnancy, directly experienced by expectant mothers and in this Australian study, most had taken only about 3.5 days (median) paternity leave. Fatigue persisted at the one month level until the end of the monitoring period, 16 weeks post partum, giving some foundation to the need for men to reduce employment commitments during this period.

Fathers' presence at birth by itself has not been directly linked to better child outcomes or higher levels of later father involvement, although some research suggests that a pre-delivery wish to be present and extensive father-infant interaction in the hospital afterwards may be better predictors of subsequent paternal involvement in the first year (Lamb and Lewis, 2004).

The daily life of the infant is organised around regular feeding on six to eight (or more) occasions in a 24 hour cycle, holding, soothing, nappy changing, bathing, dressing as well as playful interaction in between regular phases of infant sleeping. In this highly dependent phase of childhood the infant needs at least one carer to be constantly in close physical proximity. All parental activities, except breast-feeding, are theoretically open to mothers and fathers, although mothers' physical connection with the baby through nine months of pregnancy and associated biological changes creates heightened initial responsiveness to infant cues such as feeding movements and crying (Storey, Walsh, Quinton and Wynne-Edwards, 2000). Storey et al. (2000) noted though that hormonal change patterns in new fathers (e.g. increased prolactin and cortisol levels) resemble those in new mothers, although to a lesser degree.

It is important to consider the issue of breast-feeding in terms of any shared parenting agenda, as creativity is needed in order to understand how this exclusively female activity can be supported within a gender equity ethic. Breast-feeding also adds the child welfare dimension to gender equity and work-life balance policies. Currently the proportions of UK mothers who are breast-feeding at two weeks, six weeks, four months, six months and nine months are 52 per cent, 42 per cent, 28 per cent, 21 per cent and 13 per cent respectively (Department of Health (DoH), 2000). These rates are similar to America, where 29 per cent of mothers are still breast-feeding at six months but lower than rates in Nordic countries, for example Sweden where 73 per cent of mothers are still breast-feeding at six months. Generally the rates of initiation of breast-feeding just after birth are also higher in Nordic countries.

There are a range of reasons why women plan to breast-feed ranging from convenience to a belief that it will foster a closer bond with the baby, but the most commonly endorsed reason is a belief that it is best for the baby's health (given by 79 per cent of UK women planning to breast-feed (DoH, 2000)). This belief is grounded in biomedical evidence showing significant breast-feeding over bottle-feeding benefits, controlling for socioeconomic status and region, for several conditions including respiratory tract infection, reduction in diarrhoea and urinary tract infections. Improvements to children's cognitive development have also been found (Quinn et al., 2001) alongside health benefits to women in protecting against breast cancer (Labbok, 2001). Several international bodies now recommend exclusive breast-feeding for the first six months of children's lives (Galtry, 2003).

In the UK, breast-feeding rates are significantly higher for older mothers (aged 30 years or over), minority ethnic women and for women with higher levels of education and in non-manual occupations. Regional variation in prevalence rates exists too. Thirty-four per cent of English and Welsh mothers who initially breast fed were still breast-feeding at six months (including combined feeding), in comparison to 40 per

cent of Scottish mothers and 21 per cent in Northern Ireland. Within England rates are lowest in the North and highest in the South East.

Currently for UK women, returning to work is the most common reason for ceasing breast-feeding, between the ages of four to six months, whereas physical reasons were more common at earlier stages (DoH, 2000). In the Avon Longitudinal Cohort Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) born in 1991 and 1992, mothers who returned to work full-time within the first 18 months of birth had a shorter duration of breast-feeding (by five to six weeks) when compared to mothers who returned to work part-time in that period (reduction of two weeks). Women who return to work within the first six months after childbirth show the greatest reduction in breast-feeding duration (Gregg and Washbrook, 2003).

Detailed studies of the family context have shown that men's attitude is an important factor too. Paternal support is one of the factors that can promote breast-feeding. When fathers have sufficient knowledge about the benefits of breast-feeding this can act to encourage mothers to breast-feed (Earle, 2000). It could be argued that paternal support of breast-feeding is an indirect form of childcare. For example through giving practical support to mothers by providing meals to promote breast milk production or by looking after other older children to give mothers time to feed. These types of support are very difficult to sustain if fathers are working long weekly hours in the in the postpartum period.

However, for some couples breast-feeding is not a preference and does not fit into a shared parenting lifestyle. In a study by Shepherd et al. (2000) the decision to bottle-feed was motivated by a desire for greater paternal involvement. In fact, national data show that a quarter of mothers who choose not to breast-feed, do so to enable flexibility of others to feed the baby (DoH, 2000).

A country's family policy support regime is an important factor supporting high rates of breast-feeding. Galtry's (2003) international comparison shows a positive association between postbirth leave policies and duration of breast-feeding. She argues that the Swedish model encourages both high female employment participation rates over a mothers' working life and high breast-feeding rates through a parental leave and flexible working policy which enables many mothers to be more home based for the first six months of a child's life and extends men's access to paid parental leave beyond the first year of a child's life. In addition the introduction of specific father leave targets, such as the 'daddy month provision', did not operate to take away from maternal time with the infant.

Data indicate that by the time Swedish cohorts of children born in the early 1990s had reached 30 months, parental leave had been shared by 50 per cent of parents with 49 per cent of the remaining leave days being used by mother only and one per cent by father only (Haas and Hwang, 1999). In Sweden the most common time for fathers to take parental leave is when their child is between 11 to 15 months, not younger (Rostgaard, 2003). Similarly, in Denmark, the proportions of men taking parental leave are highest when children are in the three to five year age group and lowest for infants under one (Rostgaard et al., 1999).

Galtry (2003: 174) argues that a mother's right to work and breast-feed is an equal opportunity issue:

This argument centres on the need to conceive the intersection of breast-feeding and women's employment as an 'equal opportunity' concern, both for the ability of women workers to practice breast-feeding as well as to ensure the equal opportunity of infants to good health.

Whilst the focus on breast-feeding emphasises difference between mothers' and fathers' behaviour in the early years, feeding is but one, albeit important, part of parent-child relationships. Current reviews of parenting practices in the round stress similarities between parents, rather than the unique qualities of mothers and fathers. As Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004: 4) describe:

Sensitive fathering - responding to, talking to, ...teaching and encouraging their children to learn - predicts children's cognitive and linguistic achievements just as sensitive mothering does.

For instance, Steele, Steele, and Fonagy (1996) found that about 80 per cent of both mothers and fathers, in a middle class London sample, were rated as having a securely attached relationship with their infant, showing continuity in expectations from a pre-birth interview. Fathers with a secure sense of self could be used by infants as a secure base after separation or at other times of distress, just as with mothers. The idea of a unique father role such as 'father as playmate' develops from the finding that a greater proportion of a father's time with children is made up of play time. Whilst this distribution is changing as described above, it must be seen in the context that, overall, mothers still play with their infants and young children more than fathers. Differences in absolute levels of play towards greater father engagement begin to emerge in later childhood (Yeung et al., 2003).

In dual earner families where mothers work full-time in the first year of children's lives, increased father involvement can compensate or 'protect' against children experiencing less over-all parental time (Gregg and Washbrook, 2003). In this large scale national cohort study of 12,000 children born in the Avon area, Gregg and

Washbrook found that 57 per cent of mothers had returned to work by 18 months, 14 per cent full-time and 43 per cent part-time. The ALSPAC dataset includes extensive survey and biomedical data on mother and target child, with maternal reports of father involvement, collected three times a year from the pregnancy onwards. Focusing on language communication at two years (maternal report), behavioural problems at four years (maternal report), school-based cognitive assessments at four/five years and seven/eight years, Gregg and Washbrook (2003) found small negative effects on cognitive outcomes for children whose mothers had returned to full-time work before 18 months. These negative effects were not found in families where mothers returned to work part-time before 18 months or for those who returned to work full-time after 18 months. However, this effect disappeared where fathers increased their engagement in childcare activities across the board (routine physical care, educational and play, as reported by mothers). The negative effect was sustained though for children whose mothers returned to full-time work before 18 months and whose non-parental care was *solely* a friend, kin member or relative (rather than a nursery or other paid care). The authors suggest that maternal employment in the early years is detrimental to child welfare when it is accompanied by risk factors such as poor quality informal childcare or lack of compensatory father investment. In terms of policy implications on fathers and shared caring they posit:

The importance of the role of the father in early child rearing opens up other potential ways of influencing children's development - policies relating to paternity leave and flexible working for fathers as well as mothers, could on the basis of our results, have quite strong effects on child outcomes.

(Gregg and Washbrook, 2003: 56)

A more personalised and nuanced approach to full-time early parental working is needed however, since Gregg and Washbrook (2003) also found that children in lone mother families benefited from early maternal working, as the extra material resources outweighed some of the disadvantages associated with less access to parental time. Maternal employment in the early years has 'offsetting positive and negative effects' depending on the family and the particular outcome being monitored.

In summary, studies assessing the impact of father involvement in the early years on later child outcomes confirm the importance of *early paternal investment in caring*. Moreover, analysis of British cohort studies is beginning to show continuity in paternal involvement over time. As Flouri and Buchanan, (2003: 95) argue:

Engaging fathers in their children's lives from an early age should guarantee that they remain involved throughout their children's childhood.

Later childhood

The balance of parenting practices shifts as children get older and monitoring children's movement to increasingly independent lives is an important dimension of sensitive father and mother involvement. Findings from a recent longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of adolescents and their families has contributed to understanding fathering in later childhood (Scott, 2004). Scott traced the influence of family background and parental environment during early adolescence on children's later educational attainment. Like many other studies of social class and educational achievement, this study shows that fathers' occupational status is a significant predictor of educational attainment. Young people with fathers in high status occupations were about eight times more likely to achieve two or more A levels in contrast to children with fathers in manual occupations. However, income was insufficient on its own to secure successful educational outcomes. The final statistical model found that higher levels of attainment were predicted by a combination of psychological and socio-economic factors: parental couple stability, material resources, occupational status, child educational aspirations and parenting style. Only a limited number of parenting style indicators were assessed and not all gathered for mother and father separately. Children who reported that their parents, both mother and father, imposed limits on TV watching were advantaged in terms of educational outcomes. Being able to talk to mum about 'things that matter' emerged as a significant parenting factor for higher attainment at both GCSE and A level. Talking to father was also significant but to a lesser extent.

This study along with others (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003), shows the importance of 'at home good parenting' for children's educational attainment, even when socioeconomic factors are controlled. Fathers have their place to play in this process, even though they are often lost in the gender neutral term 'parental involvement' or 'parental investment'.

Diversity amongst fathers

As noted above, the increase in father involvement should be seen in the context of an expansion in the number of children growing up in fatherless families. The proportion of children living in lone mother households increased from 11 per cent in 1981 to 21 per cent of households with dependent children by 2001 (Collingwood Bakeo and Clarke, 2004). The proportion of lone father households has remained stable, at 2 per cent throughout this period. Although divorce rates have stabilized, even declined, linked to the decline in marriage, divorce, separation of consensual unions and re-partnering have changed the nature of fathers' families. For example, in the UK the proportion of men cohabiting more than doubled between 1986 and 1998/9 from 11 per cent of men aged 16-59 years to 26 per cent (Matheson and Summerfield, 2001). Throughout their life course, therefore, fathers are now more

likely than in previous generations to experience more than one family type (serial fathering) and in the process, fathers typically cease to reside with the children of their first relationship increasing the potential for marginalisation.

In this changing demographic context, Hofferth and Anderson (2003) ask are all dads equal in terms of their investment in the care and financial support of children? Through a secondary analysis of the nationally representative sample of time use in American children aged 0-12 years, they compare the engagement and warmth of residential fathers in a diverse range of family types: married biological parents, unmarried biological parent, married stepparent, cohabitating father families. They find that even when fathers or father figures are co-residential with the children, the time children spend with them varies considerably. Children spend significantly more time with biological fathers, whether cohabiting or married, than they do with their co-resident stepfathers. Part of the reason is that children of stepfathers have non-residential biological fathers to see and stepfathers themselves have non-residential biological children to visit. Providing support and time to the first family detracts from the time and emotional energy stepfathers have to invest in the second. Although the biological connection between a child and father promoted greater time investment, Hofferth and Anderson found that other cultural forms of commitment, such as marriage, were important too. For instance, stepfathers were more involved and warm with stepchildren where they were married to the children's mother than when they remained non-married.

The preservation of children's relationships with biological and non-biological (social) fathers after marital separation and divorce is emerging as a key preoccupation of legal jurisdictions throughout the world (Bainham, Lindley, Richards and Trinder, 2003). Since 1989, contact with parents has been enshrined as a basic human right for children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, although the principle is difficult to implement when there are conflicts about contact between a residential parent (usually the mother) and non-residential parent (typically the father). Fathers' lobbyists often complain that courts tend to underplay their child caring competencies whereas mothers' lobbyists declaim fathers' desires for contact without responsibility. As the debate continues, some legal scholars have argued that 'the answer is not to remove the rights but to promote and if necessary attempt to force the obligations which go with them' (Bainham, 2003: 86). Because it is difficult to intervene successfully in private family life, particularly on relationship issues, Bainham suggests that the law needs to play an educative function in setting guidelines for normative behaviour.

It appears that the diversification of fathers' family and kinship networks has created more complex set of responsibilities to children of different families. For example, it

would not be uncommon for a contemporary divorced father to have caring and economic responsibilities to a non-resident biological child living with his ex-wife, a biological child living with him and his new partner, and as well as a co-resident, non-biological child from his second partner's first marriage. Probably more than at any other time in history fathers, both biological and social, confront a range of decisions about how to conduct their kin and non-kin relationships. Managing these complexities can take time and provides new challenges for some fathers as they attempt to negotiate work-life balance.

Young fathers

With one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe, young fatherhood, as a site of economic and personal adversity, became a focus of debate in Britain during the late 1990s. However, despite this policy interest there is surprisingly little British empirical evidence to review (Speak et al., 1997; Quinton and Pollock, 2002). Quinton and Pollock's (2002: 5) recent research on British first time fathers aged 17-23 suggests that, despite past disadvantage, 'fatherhood may help young men at high risk of social exclusion to create a new identity and a more positive engagement in social life'. Over 60 per cent of young fathers in their study had significant involvement with their infants at nine months, with 37 per cent showing disengagement. The researchers found that the quality of men's relationship with their partner during pregnancy, not their family and social background, was the most important factor predicting men's post-natal involvement with infants. These findings reflect US research on fathers in non-marital unions, many of whom were young (Carlson and McLanahan, 2004).

Quinton and Pollock (2002:3) argue that health care professionals could be more proactive in supporting young fathers in both their couple and parenting roles. The young men reported feeling excluded from ante-natal and post-natal care and in turn health care professionals described a distant relationship to the fathers. '[They] often knew little about the fathers, did not see them as central to their task, and felt they lacked the skills to engage with men.'

Ethnic and faith diversity

Very little is known about the forms of father involvement among minority ethnic families in Britain. Although fertility rates have been declining across Europe, the higher fertility rates amongst minority ethnic groups in many European nations suggest an increasing ethnic and religious diversity in future fatherhood. Moreover, this diversity will result in different types of fathering behaviour within individual countries. For instance, in the British context recent analysis has shown different residential patterns between minority ethnic fathers (Berthoud, 2000): Black British

fathers are less likely to living with their children than White British fathers and Asian fathers are the most likely to be living in a married couple family with their children.

Despite the growth of secularism in Britain religion, especially Islam, remains a powerful source of values about the conduct of family relationships. Although there are as yet no studies of fathering amongst Islamic families in Britain a rare study of Moroccan migrant fathers in the Netherlands shows the continuing relevance of gender differentiated fathering ideals. Pels' (2000: 89) describes how:

Fathers are discouraged by traditional sectors of the community from 'becoming a woman' and from allowing an altered power and role division within the family. Male honour may also be threatened through social control and gossip and Moroccan law or Islamist movements may offer an important counterbalance to pressure for changing family relations.

This study suggests that the general movement away from paternal authority as a major organising principle in family life in Britain may lie uneasily with religious models of fathering which stress the importance of male elders.

Differential patterns of labour force activity among South Asian British men including: high levels of chronic unemployment (notably among Pakistanis and Bangladeshis); high self-employment rates of others (notably Pakistanis and Indians); and concentration in particular sectors (Owen 2000); imply that work-life dynamics may differ from those of white British men. Most discussions of work-life balance invoke the image of a couple alone negotiating the competing roles of carer and financial provider. The reality for many South Asians living in Britain may be very different with complex, sometimes multi-site households, being common.

Fathers and employment

The work-family debate of the 1990s was dominated by the headline that British fathers worked the longest hours in Europe (Deven et al., 1998). By 2001 the mean number of usual weekly hours worked by fathers decreased slightly from 46.7 to 46.1 in 1998, although overall economic activity rates of fathers had increased (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003). The working week of fathers continues to be longer than that of men in general, with two-fifths usually working 48 hours or more per week and around one in eight usually working longer hours of 60 or more, and fathers are still much more likely than mothers to work during 'atypical' times (La Valle, Arthur, Millward, Scott and Clayden, 2002). Over the time period mothers' economic activity rates and hours at work have increased: from a mean number of usual weekly hours of 27.2 in 1998 to 27.8 in 2001 (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003), with the greatest expansion occurring for mothers in part-time occupations and those heading lone parent families. Despite British mothers' greater participation in part-time

employment, the combined working hours of British parents is comparatively high in the European context (Deven et al., 1998).

Jacobs and Gerson (2004) argues that it is this increase in the *combined working time* of couples with dependent children, through the rise of the dual earner family from the 1970s, and the enhanced economic activity of lone parents, which is creating the sense of time squeeze or bind. In Britain, dual earner households have increased in proportion from 45 per cent of couple households with dependent children in 1971 to 66 per cent in 1999 (Collingwood Bakeo and Clarke, 2004). The emergence of intensive mothering and involved fathering norms is adding, they suggest, to time pressure on working parents. In a case study of couples living in five economically successful cities (London, Edinburgh, San Francisco, Seattle and Portland), Jarvis (2002) describes how the demands of a 24/7 economy fuels long working hours making it very difficult to combine two full-time jobs and childcare responsibilities. One San Francisco couple with a three year old daughter worked a combined total of 122 hours away from home each week (including commuting) in the Silicon Valley and managed by staggering their start and finish times, while their daughter spent ten hours a day in a private nursery.

The availability and nature of employment, both nationally and locally, provide an important context to work-life balance (Mauthner, McKee and Strell, 2001). In a study of working time preferences among men and women in 22 countries, Stier and Lewin-Epstein (2003) found that preferences were linked to a country's economic vitality. The wish for longer working hours was more common in countries with low rates of economic growth, high rates of inequality and inflation. In countries with higher levels of economic development, individuals were more likely to prefer time reductions in paid work. They suggest that the broader macro-economic context influences individuals' aspirations and decision-making about working hours. Overall the proportions wishing to devote less time to work activity was greatest in developed countries such as Sweden, UK, Japan and France, although there were different gender patterns within countries. For example more women than men wanted to work longer hours in the UK, several Mediterranean countries, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland, all countries where female labour market participation is developing from a lower base. Preferences to reduce work-time were more common amongst women in post communist countries, USA, Scandinavia and Canada, many of which have longer working hours for women.

Specific studies of fathers' preferences indicate a reluctance to reduce working hours in practice. O'Brien and Shemilt's (2003) analysis of UK fathers showed that satisfaction with work-life balance only dropped significantly when fathers were regularly working 60+ hours per week. Fathers showed a greater tolerance of long

working hours than did mothers. In the recent Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) survey (2004) only one in 10 fathers formally asked for flexible work to be considered, compared with four times as many mothers. Recent Australian analysis suggests that fathers' appraisal of their long working hours is a crucial dimension. In a nationally representative study of face-to-face interviews with 14,000 adults, Weston, Gray, Qu and Stanton (2004) divided fathers who regularly worked 60 hours or more per week into subgroups depending on their level of satisfaction with working hours. A strongly polarised picture was found of low wellbeing (on relationship with partner, children and health indicators) for those not happy with long working hours and all-round consistent wellbeing for those fathers satisfied with 60 hours or more per week. This polarised pattern was not found for fathers working in the standard 35 to 40 hours range. They conclude:

While long work hours appeared detrimental for some fathers and their families, this was not the case for all fathers. Our analysis suggests that workers' satisfaction with their work hours, regardless of their work hour preferences in the light of pay received, needs to be taken into account when examining the long work hours debate.
(Weston et al., 2004: 16)

Whilst arguing for a 'horses for courses' approach, Weston et al., (2004) are mindful that high working hours may not be in men's long term health interest. Similarly, although some fathers may enthusiastically embrace intensive and enduring long working hours, partners and children may not endorse this work-life balance lifestyle. Other studies have found that long working hours can create marital discord and for some, be a reason for separation (e.g. Crouter et al., 2001): such separated couples would not have been included in Weston et al., (2004).

Despite some fathers' tolerance for long working hours, research suggests there is substantial unmet demand for flexible working conditions amongst fathers, but in general their preferences are different to mothers (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003). In this survey fathers were most likely to want access to flexitime (52 per cent), a compressed working week (46 per cent) and working at home (40 per cent). A relatively low proportion of fathers were interested in undertaking a job-share arrangement (14 per cent) or working reduced hours for an agreed period at a reduced salary (22 per cent). By contrast mothers were most likely to want access to flexitime (46 per cent), term-time only working (42 per cent) and part-time working (44 per cent). Working part-time was not a favoured option by fathers (22 per cent). Although both fathers and mothers placed flexitime at the top of their 'wish list', fathers were more likely to want flexibility of working hours over the day and week without reduction in salary. By contrast, mothers' preferred flexible working

arrangements entailed greater reductions in discrete chunks of working time, perhaps linking with children's requirements, with the inevitable drop in pay.

However, evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) Work and Family Life research programme (Dex, 2003) suggests that British mothers in dual earner families are expressing a growing dissatisfaction with the intrusion of work on everyday family life, particularly when atypical working is common. Bell and La Valle (2003) found that nearly 50 per cent of dual earner mothers reported a preference for staying at home to look after the children, if it was affordable. This wish to stay at home and look after the children created intense public debate in the US last year when a New York Times Magazine article profiling professional women/mothers leaving high profile jobs was published 'The Opt-Out Revolution' (New York Times Magazine, 2003). Whilst some embraced opting out as a new feminist 'right to choose', seeing it as a sane response to the impossible 'time squeeze' of dual earner family life, others were appalled at women's apparent rejection of hard fought for access to work. Whatever, the rights and wrongs of opt-out, this 'choice' is not available to the majority of families in the US or indeed the UK. Recently a similar debate has started in Britain.

It beats working: women fought hard for the right to be working mothers - but now many want to step off the career ladder and swap the boardroom for full-time motherhood. Is this the failure of one movement or the beginning of another? Lisa O'Kelly. The Observer, 6th June 2004.

Further research

Further UK based research on how fathers and mothers negotiate work and family life is required. Research needs to be multilevel, exploring individual experiences in families and workplaces as well as structural and organisational factors. Topics could include: refining measurements of father and mother involvement; exploring children's perceptions of parental work practices; the relationship between maternal and paternal working hours and quality of family relationships for families with children aged under three; the relationship of children with their parents following separation or divorce; employee productivity, health and working hours in dual earner families; and fathers' and mothers' experiences of paternity leave, parental leave and flexible working.

3 STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY OPTIONS

This review of academic evidence and current policy positions portrays the complexities in bringing fathers into the frame of a shared caring approach to work-family balance. In this chapter, implications of the review for future policy development and specific policy options are discussed. It has been argued that fathers' inclusion in work-family balance provision signifies awareness that men have childcare and home-related responsibilities, beyond breadwinning. However, thorny gender equity issues remain, particularly in relation to the implementation of family leave and flexible working practices for fathers. Policy makers and parents are not making employment and childcare decisions in a gender neutral environment. Fathers generally have greater earning power; public childcare provision is of uneven quality; and caring preferences and practices differ between individual men and women.

Shared caring

Shared caring is a slippery concept dependent on how both sharing (equal or contributory) and care (direct engagement, availability, responsibility or attitude) are defined or prioritised. The research evidence outlined in the previous chapter suggests that:

- The idea of involved caring for fathers is now culturally embedded in Britain and impacts upon the feelings of mothers and fathers even when men cannot be as involved as they would like. Time use studies consistently show that fathers, both resident and non-resident, are spending more time with their children, albeit still at a lower level than mothers.
- The emotional and cognitive benefits to children of sensitive care from fathers is well supported by psychological research, joining the historic evidence showing the importance of maternal care for children's well-being (Lamb 2004).
- Paternal involvement levels are higher when mothers are employed, particularly when mothers work full-time. But equal sharing of responsibilities is rare and fathers' domestic involvement is generally in childcare and not routine housework.
- The current model of the 'good father' means that earning is not automatically construed as caring, which can cause confusion and frustration for men, particularly those with a cultural tradition of the breadwinner father. Fathers who are constrained by economic considerations or custom and practice to work long weekly hours can feel disappointed in missing out on time with their children and not having space for a satisfying family or personal life.

- On average, with the current gender pay gap, the financial penalties to a family are greater if a father rather than mother reduced working hours. However, the financial penalties to mothers for taking on the primary caring role are longlasting, resulting in lost employment opportunities, occupational segregation in low-paid and low-skilled jobs, and more impoverished retirement.
- The relative influence of money over quality of parental care and the optimum involvement of mothers and fathers in both domains is still not fully understood. So the extent to which investment in care can be offset against investment in financial resources in bringing up children, or the general balance between market and non-market caring for later child well-being, is not yet known.
- For two-parent households, there is some evidence that the British pragmatic solution of a 1.5 dual earning couple, typically with mother working part-time (Dex, 2003), serves to protect child welfare, particularly in the first 18 months of children's life (Gregg and Washbrook, 2003) but at a cost to women's economic advancement.
- There is now also clear evidence that in dual earner families where mothers work full-time in the first year of children's life, increased father involvement can compensate or 'protect' children from experiencing less overall parental time (Gregg and Washbrook, 2003). This research suggests a need for greater investment in father support for families where mothers work full-time, particularly in the early years, and for alternative extra care support for families with one main carer who is in full-time employment, such as lone mother or lone father families.

In terms of a shared caring approach, the challenge is how to provide a framework of choice which does not disadvantage either the female or male parent.

Policy options

What scope is there for further development of work-family balance policies for fathers? The new employment legislation which came on stream in April 2003 combined a series of measures to support working parents building on previous provision. The general strategy on work-family balance prefiguring this legislation is set out in the joint Treasury/DTI Government paper *Balancing work and family life: Enhancing choice and support for parents* (2003). In this paper fathers and mothers are addressed together as parents for responsibilities held in common and separately, for instance, in terms of gender specific provision e.g. paternity leave. Principles of both gender *convergence* (attention to similarities between women and men) and gender *differentiation* (attention to differences between women and men) co-exist in the new legislation.

Paternity leave and fathers' access to parental leave

Historically, parental leave policies are gender differentiated in that they are tailored to the perceived particular needs of female and male parents and their children at any one time. For the current parental leave provision, gender differentiation is the norm in the period around birth and the first year of a child's life. Mothers are given a continuous time period of leave from employment to recover from pregnancy and childbirth and to care for the infant. Only the first six weeks of this leave is reimbursed at a level commensurate with pre-existing salary. The principle of gender convergence or symmetry appears to operate for later statutory parental leave, where fathers as well as mothers can take periods of time off work to care until their child reaches five years of age.

Implications of 2003 Employment Act legislation

- Extended Maternity Leave to one year. The first 26 weeks, called 'ordinary maternity leave', used to last 18 weeks. The second 26 weeks, called 'additional leave', used to last 22 weeks. Britain now has the longest 'maternity leave' in Europe at 52 weeks.
- Extended period of payment of Statutory Maternity Pay to six weeks at 90 per cent of income (no change) and a further 20 weeks @ £102.80 (extended from 12 weeks).
- Introduced Paternity Leave around the birth of a child for the first time in Britain for two weeks @ £102.80.
- Mothers and fathers still have access to Statutory Parental Leave for 13 weeks unpaid while their child is under five years. Comparable rights have been introduced for adoptive parents as far as possible. Leave continues to be offered in a uniform manner, to be taken in blocks or multiples of one week, up to four weeks per year.

Paternity leave

The introduction of paternity leave in Britain has been met with general support and in some quarters acclaim. Its arrival was predicated by high levels of consultation, most significantly with employer organisations, which have since shown broad acceptance. One year later high levels of support from the general public continue (ICM, 2004). Fifty-eight per cent of the nationally representative sample report that the new paternity and (maternity) leave provision is 'about right' with another 18 per cent describing it as 'too mean' (only 19 per cent of the sample were of the opinion that the provision was 'too generous'). Younger people, particularly the under-25's,

were most enthusiastic about the new provision, with 96 per cent reporting it as either 'just right' or 'too mean'.

Paternity leave was introduced as an extension or add-on to current family support, signalling that at this time fathers were needed at home with their infant and partner rather than in the workplace. It provides an opportunity for fathers to be involved in many aspects of family life: for example, getting to know their infant, becoming sensitive to the rhythm of infant life, supporting mother in the immediate aftermath of the arrival of the child, settling older children, cooking and cleaning while the mother establishes breast-feeding or helping with bottle-feeding. In addition, paternity leave supports men's own health and safety needs linked to the sleep disruption experienced by those with a newborn in the home. Through paternity leave, therefore, mothers can, in principle, gain potential support from fathers in the period after birth while not losing any maternity entitlement, albeit with a reduction in income as reimbursement rates are not income related. Similarly infants can gain by receiving a boost of joint parental time.

There is no formal constraint on fathers to take paternity leave but over time it should become a normative part of paternal caring as pre-2003 uptake rates were high. Data from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) Work-life Balance survey 2000 showed that 61 per cent of fathers with a dependent child aged less than one year of age had taken paid or unpaid paternity leave in the previous twelve months (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003). Initial monitoring of uptake rates of the new provision has not been formally reported but early reports suggest that fewer employees than expected are claiming the paid entitlement, possibly relying on annual leave, with its higher reimbursement levels. Only 19 per cent of fathers took statutory paid paternity leave in the first year after this entitlement was introduced. The Government had budgeted for 70 per cent of fathers taking their entitlement (Response to Parliamentary question by Malcolm Bruce, MP; Hansard, 14 July 2004, Column 1147W). The low flat rate payment in the new legislation may have acted as a disincentive especially for lower income men, who may have to rely on annual leave. In other European countries where paternity leave salary compensation rates are earnings related, uptake rates are generally high (Deven and Moss, 2003).

Since the advent of paternity leave in Britain, various limitations of the arrangements have been raised. A recent ICM poll (2004) found that 53 per cent of the sample felt that fathers should be given more than the statutory two weeks paternity leave. Employee organisations, such as the Trades Union Congress (TUC), wish to reduce the notification period fathers need to give before embarking on paternity leave and want to increase choice and flexibility in how parents use parental leave in general. Joint Treasury/DTI (2004) consultation has found some support, especially from

employee organisations, for extending paid paternity leave in cases of multiple births and where there are disabled infants, although many of the employer organisations consulted preferred the use of informal discretionary 'best practice' in these cases. In terms of financial incentives, European comparisons show the importance of replacement income levels up to 80 to 100 per cent of earnings as a necessary condition for universal father take-up (Deven and Moss, 2003). The UK flat rate salary compensation could act as a disincentive for both high and low earning fathers. Other research has pointed to certain anomalies in the legislation, such as the inability of fathers to assume maternity entitlements, after maternal death (Cappleman-Morgan, 2003).

In conclusion, sensitivity to child welfare and gender equity requirements suggests the need for Government to reconsider the scope, reimbursement levels and flexibility of paternity leave provision (see too Harker and Kendall, 2003).

Parental leave

The theme of flexibility and choice has also emerged in relation to fathers' access to parental leave. The public preference appears to endorse both equal treatment of mothers and fathers and special treatment of mothers. On the one hand, 66 per cent of the ICM sample felt that either the mother or father should be able to take up to six months of paid leave (at the moment only mothers are eligible to take up the 26 weeks 'ordinary maternity leave' paid for at a flat rate for 20 weeks, see above). On the other hand, 51 per cent felt that mothers should be given more than six months paid maternity leave. As in the actual legislation, principles of both gender *convergence* and gender *differentiation* appear to co-exist in British societal attitudes to parental leave.

One Nordic solution to the gender and parental leave issue has been to introduce a father targeting or a father quota as an expansion of parental leave whilst not taking away from maternal leave. Such an approach enables many mothers to be more home based for the first six months of a child's life, so supporting for instance, optimal periods of breast-feeding, whilst also extending men's access to paid parental leave.

These designated 'daddy periods' have been introduced, notably in Sweden and Norway, to strengthen fathers' caring role with their infants and also to encourage more fathers to take leave (Bjornberg, 2002; Liera 1999). The four weeks paternity quota, introduced in Norway in 1993, had a 'compulsory' or mandatory intention to it. The leave could not be transferred to the mother, with the result that if the father chose not to take it, or was unable to take it, the family could not benefit. Brandth and Kvande (2001: 256) suggest that 'The paternity quota is a 'gentle' way the welfare

system uses to force fathers into taking part in early childcare'. Contrary to expectations at the time, the scheme was very popular, and now taken up by 85 to 90 per cent of eligible fathers by 2003 (Brandth, 2004). Brandth and Kvande place the success of the scheme on its lack of choice, it is in the form of 'use it or lose it', so reducing pressures on workplace and domestic negotiation. There is a current debate in Norway about whether the paternity quota should be extended to eight weeks.

Norwegian fathers use this leave in a variety of ways: some are 'home alone' with their child while their partner returns to work, whilst others use the leave to be at home together with their partner and child. It is typically taken towards the end of the parental leave period. In Norway, a smaller and wealthier country than Britain and one which, like many other European nations, is keen to boost the birth rate, parental leave is paid either at a 100 per cent salary reimbursement level for 29 weeks or 80 per cent for 39 weeks and is open to either the mother or the father. Mothers take the majority of parental leave as well as the targeted maternity leave of three weeks before birth and six weeks after birth.

Therefore, in the Norwegian context, daddy days are embedded in a very generous state support for mothers, in fact explicitly for working mothers. The level of salary reimbursement of the paternity quota depends on both the maternal and paternal employment record and has not, until recently, become a universal payment to all mothers and fathers (Brandth and Kvande, 2001). Employed fathers with economically inactive partners (e.g. those who are 'homemakers', students or on social security benefit) have not been eligible for the benefit. As such, the Norwegian provision has also acted as an incentive for men and women intending to become parents to be in paid employment. The pattern for Norwegian fathers to take their father quota towards the end of the first year, mirrors the Swedish experience where the most common time for fathers to take parental leave is when their child is between 11 and 15 months, not younger (Rostgaard, 2003).

The principle of father targeting developed in a gender collaborative manner could be considered in Britain alongside any new optional sharing of parental leave, particularly in light of the initially low take-up by fathers on the optional right to request flexible working. Father involvement at this time could go a little way to compensate for the reduction in parenting time associated with mothers returning to work full-time and so help promote child well-being (Gregg and Washbrook, 2003). From the employers' perspective, however, there will be some resistance. Our consultation showed that at the moment, employers and the Conservative party generally do not support any extension of paternity entitlement, although in the build up to an election further policy development will occur. As indicated in joint

Treasury/DTI (2004) consultation, employer organisations wish to see how the current new provision settles down and fear that any new entitlements will increase administrative and financial costs. Employer organisations are, however, sensitive to the ‘child development’ case, so further dialogue and research evidence would be timely. In terms of financial incentives, as with paternity leave, unpaid or low flat rate replacement options will undermine paternal uptake and on average, given current gender pay differentials, will serve to create an incentive for maternal uptake.

Flexible working

There is gender convergence in the provision for flexible working as all forms of flexible working, in principle, are open to fathers as well as mothers. There is no gender targeting.

Tabloid press reaction to extension of fathers’ access to parental leave

G. Wilson (2003) *‘Paternity leave fury: we couldn’t cope if fathers had six months off, say small firms’*, Daily Mail Dec 24th.

*Federation for small businesses struggling to get used to new legislation
– anxiety unpaid would become paid.*

Implications of 2003 Employment Act and EU 1998 legislation

- Use of 48 hours weekly opt-out from Working Time Directive equally available to women and men.
- Introduced a right to request flexible working for mothers and fathers of children aged under six and disabled children under 18, and a ‘duty to consider’ for employers.

However, in practice, as shown in Chapter 2, mothers tend to use flexible work arrangements and the specific new request for flexibility more than fathers (one in four mothers compared with one in ten fathers (DTI, 2004)).

Within Government there is uncertainty about how far to promote flexible working. The right for fathers as well as mothers to request flexible working was indeed, as Jackie Ashley suggests, a significant move. However, the Government is caught between the business community who wish to preserve their right to control working hours and promote employee choice and employee and parent groups who are asking for measures to promote greater involvement of parents, including fathers, in all realms of family life. A promise has been made by the current Government to the

business community that there will be no further changes in work-family balance employment legislation until after a three year period.

A law that could change everything: If fathers take up their right to work flexibly, it will benefit us all.

Fascinating to see what happens. Will fathers 'grab the chance'? 'Will employers let them? Will company managers accept that bringing up children matters to the whole of society?

Wettest of damp squibs? Or revolutionary? In the end it isn't about 'working practices'. It's about civilisation.

Jackie Ashley, The Guardian March 27th 2003

Working hours

As research evidence has shown, fathers tend to work longer hours than mothers, typically but not exclusively for economic reasons, and appear to have a higher tolerance than mothers for long working hours (Weston et al., 2004). However, when very high working hours or perceptions of work overload develop, fathers' work satisfaction begins to drop. Employer and employee discretion and choice appear to be important for this issue, although women's dissatisfaction with fathers' working hours is a further developing trend. Currently there is a perception that mothers already have more 'choice' than fathers to decide how many hours they should devote to caring for their children (Houston and Waumsley 2003). They can choose to work part-time, reduce their hours around the school day and holidays and, as the DTI monitoring has shown, are much more likely than fathers to choose these options in practice (Hogarth et al., 2000; DTI, 2004).

Avoidance of chronic long weekly working hours can help promote active father involvement with children. As Chapter 2 indicates, children benefit from both paternal and maternal attention and the emotional and practical support which derives from 'at home' parenting. 'Being there' and emotionally available to children can also be rewarding for parents but difficult to combine with work which entails long hours away from home or anti-social hours (Dex, 2003; Skinner, 2003).

There are 'no easy solutions' to resolve inherent tensions between working hours, parenting and family welfare. The political struggle over 'time' and how time is spent has crystallised around the campaign for tackling 'the long hours culture' and arguments against Britain's continued opt-out of the 48-hour maximum working week requirements of the EU Working Time Directive (e.g. *About Time*, 2002). Legislation

can help shape norms of appropriate working hours and indirectly influence the working patterns of those who work excessive hours in jobs they enjoy. However, employers and some employees also stress the importance of an individual's 'right to choose' their own working hours. The TUC estimate that a majority of those employees who sign the voluntary 'opt-out' from the Working Time Directive, feel the choice is not real (TUC, 2003), but further research is needed on this issue.

It seems likely that business will be resistant to further attempts to tighten up regulation of the Working Time Directive although the recent Confederation British Industry (CBI) initiative, to examine employer abuses, is a promising work life balance development. This review may also include methods to ensure that signing a contract of employment and the working-time opt-out agreement are separate activities and not dependent on each other. Employer organisations representatives make the point, however, that formal regulation or monitoring cannot totally protect against informal practices, for instance, 'presentism' or variation in personal preferences. Parental dissatisfaction about working unsocial hours, for example during weekends, may be a further useful area for dialogue. These periods are important family catch-up times in a busy schedule, particularly for fathers and full-time working mothers.

Flexibility

A flexible working life is top of fathers' and mothers' work-life balance wish list but in general, the type of flexibility they prefer, differs. As reported in Chapter 2, fathers are more likely to want flexibility of working hours over the day and week without reduction in salary. By contrast, mothers' preferred flexible working arrangements tend to entail greater reductions in discrete chunks of working time for example, through part-time work when children are young. Both fathers and mothers use work flexibilities, for instance, when taking time off to care for sick children (28 per cent of fathers in previous year compared with 41 per cent of mothers) and actual flexitime, such as altering start and finish times or banking hours to leave early (20 per cent fathers and 27 per cent of mothers) (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003).

In terms of the broader picture, employer organisations report a wide range of formal and discretionary informal flexibilities for fathers (e.g. attendance at school events without loss of pay; enabling fathers to continue the school run with a later start time after office relocation), but there is timidity from both organisations and fathers themselves in promoting these practices as normal and routine (c.f. Dex, 2003). Shifts in workplace culture are being sponsored by more family friendly assertive and economically buoyant organisations such as 'Employers for Work Life Balance' through initiatives such as 'Take the Time for a Work-Life Strategy Partnerships' sponsored by Government and non-governmental organisations and corporations.

The new work-life balance regulations are formally accepted by employer organisations, although there is anxiety that these policies may be extended, for instance to parents of older children, beyond the statutory five years of age.

However, in terms of fathers' uptake of family friendly work practices, the Norwegian experience (Brandth and Kvande, 2001) suggests an inflexible and non-optional mode of delivery may be more effective than flexible and optional alternatives, at least as far as parental leave provision is concerned. In 1994 Norwegian parents became able to personally devise how they used their parental leave provision through a couple 'time account scheme'. For example, couples could reduce their joint working hours to 'stretch' parental leave over a longer period. There was an expectation that a flexible rather than regulated delivery mode would be attractive to parents, both mothers and fathers. However, the optional and personalised approach did not work to promote father uptake of parental leave. Only 1.5 per cent of eligible fathers and 3.5 per cent of eligible mothers utilised this way of accessing parental leave in Brandth and Kvande's 1995 national survey (Brandth and Kvande, 2001). By contrast in 1995 74 per cent of men used their paternity quota in the block time non-discretionary mode. The authors suggest that:

If leave is collectively granted and collectively taken, the risks associated with taking it, are perceived to disappear and fathers are able to act on their wish to become more involved with their children...As long as taking up family friendly policies is an individual option, the employee risks becoming a 'time-deviant'.

(Brandth and Kvande, 2001: 265)

Despite the resonance with contemporary concepts of choice and discretion, Norwegian parents, particularly fathers, chose not to take up individualised time shares. This national experiment suggests a tendency for flexible and personally negotiated choices to lead to more traditional gender arrangements.

Diversity amongst fathers and work-life balance

As fathers are not an homogeneous group, Government policies and informal practices need to be responsive to this diversity. In particular work-family reconciliation requires sensitivity to fathers who have primary carer duties, for example lone fathers or fathers with partners who are physically or mentally unwell. Childcare responsibilities contribute to lone fathers' lower rates of employment: for example they are far less likely to be employed full-time than fathers in couple households (55 per cent compared with 87 per cent, O'Brien and Shemilt 2003). A substantial minority of lone fathers are not in a position to take up employment, and like lone mothers, would benefit from targeted childcare support and access to flexible working arrangements.

Conclusion

Men's take up and use of parental leave and flexible working practices increase the likelihood that men will be available and directly involved with their children. At the societal level, fathers' inclusion in family-employment provision shows awareness and acceptance that men may have childcare and home-related responsibilities, beyond their breadwinning role. However, as indicated, issues remain, particularly in relation to the implementation of family leave and flexible working practices for fathers. Most mothers want fathers to be more involved in everyday childcare (excluding the conflictual cases of spousal divorce or abuse) but the transition to more sharing needs to be managed by acknowledging what is different between the sexes (giving birth and breast-feeding), and current inequalities in pay. Measures to promote gender equality in educational and occupational life should go hand in hand with shared caring leave options to provide a framework of real choice. A simple equal rights approach to leave and flexible working is too simplistic.

It may be argued that a gender collaborative approach to incorporating fathers in work-life balance initiatives is vital in achieving a sustainable balance of work and family life, as recognised in many Nordic countries. For example, incorporating the principle that any future innovations, such as a father quota, need to be developed as an expansion of parental leave and not subtracted from maternal leave. However, the needs of employers also need to be recognised.

In brief, policy development could concentrate on a number of key areas:

- Review the scope and flexibility of paternity leave provision and current reimbursement levels, to ensure there is adequate financial provision for families and that fathers can take the leave when it is most needed.
- Review parental leave provision recognising that designating a portion of paid parental leave for each parent on a 'use it or lose it' basis is more likely to increase fathers' take up, and to influence workplace culture. Flexible and personally negotiated choices tend to lead to more traditional gender arrangements.
- Target fathers to take parental leave within a gender collaborative framework while recognising that unpaid or flat rate pay replacement options will undermine their take up and create an incentive for maternal take up instead, given the gender pay gap.
- Legislate to help shape the norms of what are appropriate working hours by adhering to the 48 hour working week regulations in the EU Working Time

Directive. This may also indirectly influence the working patterns of those who work excessive hours in jobs they enjoy.

- Further promote the family and business benefits of work flexibility for fathers, to encourage employers to recognise the advantages and more fathers to request flexible working.

In doing so, it needs to recognise that:

- A caring father ideal is already culturally embedded in the UK, and regulates perceptions of the 'good father'.
- There are limits to the extent of gender convergence which will realistically occur; ignoring this will risk losing the 'mum' vote.
- A common cause for parents and society in general is concern about the welfare of children.
- Managing gender equity with child welfare needs sensitivity towards and understanding of the different players involved.

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