

# FATHERING AND CHILD OUTCOMES

Eirini Flouri



John Wiley & Sons, Ltd



FATHERING AND CHILD  
OUTCOMES



# FATHERING AND CHILD OUTCOMES

Eirini Flouri



John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

Copyright 2005 John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester,  
West Sussex PO19 8SQ, England  
Telephone (+44) 1243 779777  
Email (for orders and customer service enquiries):  
cs-books@wiley.co.uk  
Visit our Home Page on [www.wileyeurope.com](http://www.wileyeurope.com) or [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except under the terms of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4LP, UK, without the permission in writing of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 8SQ, England, or emailed to [permreq@wiley.co.uk](mailto:permreq@wiley.co.uk), or faxed to (+44) 1243 770620.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The Publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the Publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

*Other Wiley Editorial Offices*

John Wiley & Sons Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA

Jossey-Bass, 989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741, USA

Wiley-VCH Verlag GmbH, Boschstr. 12, D-69469 Weinheim, Germany

John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, 33 Park Road, Milton, Queensland 4064, Australia

John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte Ltd, 2 Clementi Loop #02-01, Jin Xing Distripark, Singapore 129809

John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd, 22 Worcester Road, Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada M9W 1L1

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Flouri, Eirini.

Fathering and child outcomes / Eirini Flouri.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-470-86167-3 – ISBN 0-470-86168-1

1. Fatherhood-Psychological aspects. 2. Child development. 3. Child psychology.

I. Title.

HQ756.F593 2005

306.874'2-dc22

2004021920

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-470-86167-3 (hbk)

ISBN 0-470-86168-1 (pbk)

Typeset in 10/12pt Palatino by Dobbie Typesetting Limited, Tavistock, Devon

Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

This book is printed on acid-free paper responsibly manufactured from sustainable forestry in which at least two trees are planted for each one used for paper production.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR. . . . .	vii
PREFACE . . . . .	viii
FOREWORD. . . . .	ix
<b>Chapter 1</b> Fathering: A Changing Perspective . . . . .	1
<b>Chapter 2</b> Factors Associated with Father Involvement in Two-Parent Families . . . . .	20
<b>Chapter 3</b> Father Involvement and Children's Mental Health Outcomes . . . . .	53
<b>Chapter 4</b> Father Involvement and Children's Educational Outcomes . . . . .	83
<b>Chapter 5</b> Father Involvement and Children's Aggressive Behaviour . . . . .	99
<b>Chapter 6</b> Father Involvement and Children's Quality of Relationships . . . . .	112
<b>Chapter 7</b> Father Involvement and Children's Socio-economic Outcomes . . . . .	126
<b>Chapter 8</b> Non-Resident Fathers' Parenting: Determinants and Children's Psychological Outcomes . . . . .	153
<b>Chapter 9</b> Conclusions . . . . .	179
REFERENCES. . . . .	189
INDEX . . . . .	219





# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr Eirini Flouri** is Deputy Director of the Centre for Research into Parenting and Children, University of Oxford, and Lecturer in Statistics, St Hilda's College. Her main research area has been, broadly speaking, life-course development, and more specifically parenting (looking at fathering, in particular, since 2000) and child development in the long term. She has published in the area of economic psychology and especially economic socialisation and consumer values, children's resilience and recovery from emotional and behavioural problems, and children's outcomes associated with father involvement.

# PREFACE

What is fathering, and why should we be concerned about its relation to child outcomes? Fathers were often assumed to be on the periphery of children's lives and so of little direct importance to children's development. Since the mid-1980s, however, the 'discovery' of the father, and the role of 'father involvement' in particular, has been one of the major themes in child developmental research and psychological research on fathering which, until then, had scarcely changed in focus from describing what fathers do to discussing what fathers should do with their children. This book summarises the research I carried out (mostly with Ann Buchanan) since 2000 on fathering and children's well-being with funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the UK Economic and Social Research Council. Children's well-being was mainly operationalised as objective outcomes of functional significance (school achievement, delinquency and employment), subjective assessments of states (happiness, life satisfaction, psychological distress, emotional and behavioural well-being, and academic motivation) and quality of interpersonal relationships (quality of relationships with partners, parents and peers).

Eirini Flouri  
Oxford, August 2004

# FOREWORD

*By Ann Buchanan*

As Eirini Flouri notes in Chapter 1, the 'discovery' of the father has been one of the major themes in child developmental research in the past 30 years, but it is only in the last 10 years that the topic has really gained significance. This book brings together the international literature, as well as reporting more than 20 studies by Eirini, using five different data sources spanning more than 40 years. For many years to come, it is likely to be an important reference book for academic researchers on fathering and all those interested in the policy implications of the research. Her meticulous, scholarly and objective approach to the subject, and her many academic papers and conference contributions, ensure that Eirini is now recognised as a world authority on fathering.

Eirini and I started our academic journey of investigation into fathering five years ago. From earlier research with JoAnn Ten Brinke using the National Child Development Study, and other smaller-scale studies, clues were emerging that the role of fathers may be underestimated. As a Centre for Research into Parenting and Children, research on fathering fell right into our remit. Rather than supporting any particular agenda, our interest was simply to learn more about the factors that promoted child well-being. Rather tentatively we put in a bid to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for research on fathering using the UK's National Child Development Study. This marvellous database, which covers all children born in one week in 1958 (some 17 000 children), has recorded events in children's lives for over 40 years. When the findings were published in 2001, showing strong associations between fathering and a wide range of child outcomes, there was a frenzied response from the world media. In 2001, Eirini was awarded her own ESRC three-year research Fellowship, won against competition from across the UK and the only one awarded on that round for that year. She has used this time to include research on fathering and child well-being from the BSC 70 – another of the UK's great longitudinal cohort studies that started in 1970. During this period, too, a third database came on line. One of the criticisms of the longitudinal cohort studies was that, by their very nature, they could be dated and because of the major changes that have taken place during this period in family life,

they may be no longer relevant to modern-day fathering. The 2000 Family at the Millennium Study (FMS) was a cross-sectional study financed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). It offered an opportunity to test out whether things had changed. The JRF survey involved over 2000 teenagers in three secondary schools from different demographic areas, as well as more than 1000 of their parents. Linked to this were two other cross-sectional studies involving a further 2000 or more children. The particular interest of this book, therefore, is that it not only includes a summary of the world literature in each of the areas outlined in the chapters, but it also includes Eirini's own work based on five different data sources and gives clues on the centrality of some themes over time.

Eirini outlines these themes in the nine chapters of her book. Starting with an overview in Chapter 1, she explores fathers in the 'modern' family, cultural differences, the consequences of change, the controversies around family change and then the more focused research that seeks to define more precisely what fathers actually do in the modern family and how child well-being can be measured. Eirini's balanced and scholarly discussion of this highly controversial area sets the tone for the book.

Her second chapter looks at resident fathers' involvement with their school-age children and associated factors. This chapter, reporting findings from both the NCDS and the FMS, raises one of the central themes of the book: the close association between father involvement and mother involvement and the fact that child characteristics are related to the levels of involvement. Here the research raises a central dilemma: Which comes first? Do the characteristics of the child, such as easier behaviour and success in school, encourage more father involvement or is it the other way around? The answer – as Eirini repeatedly reminds us throughout the book – is that we cannot infer causation.

Chapter 3 is an important one, exploring as it does the relationship between father involvement and children's mental health. This chapter reports studies from three data sources: the FMS cross-sectional study, an earlier cross-sectional study of 1344 boys in Britain undertaken in 1999, and the NCDS. Although the evidence is stronger in the cross-sectional studies than the longitudinal, the studies suggest that there is a positive association between father involvement and children's mental health.

Chapter 4, on the relationship between father involvement and children's educational outcomes, describes another area that has attracted considerable attention, in particular from educationalists. The first study using the NCDS shows a strong relationship between fathers' involvement with children at age 7 and educational outcomes at age 20. The second and third studies, based on a cross-sectional study in Britain of 2722 adolescents in 1998/9, perhaps suggests how this may be operationalised. Both mother and father

involvement contributed significantly and independently to positive *school attitudes* and, at the bivariate level, father involvement was significantly related to '*career maturity*' or the extent to which the young people had plans for their future working life, knew what they needed to do and the steps to get there. The final study in this section used the 1970 British Cohort Study. Here we see that although fathers' involvement did not predict later educational attainment in men, it did for women, but, in addition, which is perhaps more interesting, it showed that for both genders an internal locus of control was positively related to educational attainment. This may link to the ideas raised in recent research about the importance of young people's '*agency*' in education. Young people achieve more where they believe that how hard they work will influence their futures (see Buchanan et al., in press).

Chapter 5 returns to a central concern of those responsible for public policy: aggressive behaviour delinquency in young people, the role of fathers and factors that might predict a reduction in antisocial behaviour. Using data from the NCDS, the first study, as might be predicted, found that for boys, being in trouble with the police was related to low IQ, low father involvement in childhood and parental criminality. The second study, based on cross-sectional data of 1147 adolescents between 14 and 18 in the UK in 2000, found that lack of father and mother involvement was associated with more bullying behaviour in the young person, while the final study based on the NCDS showed that there was some association between a cluster of protective factors, such as good parental relationships at age 16 and a decrease in antisocial behaviour.

In Chapter 6, Eirini suggests that, in addition to the hard outcomes such as mental health and education, there may also be a relationship between father involvements and less tangible outcomes such as relationships in adult life. Using data from the NCDS, Eirini shows that closeness to mothers and fathers in adolescence was related not only to good sibling relationships, but also to marital adjustment at age 33.

Chapter 7 takes the analyses one step further and considers whether, given concerns of welfare dependency, a lack of father involvement in childhood is associated with a greater risk of unemployment, homelessness, living on state benefits, or living in subsidised housing. Here it is helpful to report the negative findings. Although the findings are slightly different for men and women, welfare dependency, as defined, was more usually associated with the absence of a partner, mental health problems (particularly for men), coming from a large family, and low educational attainment rather than a lack of father involvement. The second half of the chapter goes some way towards explaining what may be happening. Financial difficulties in childhood were associated with a lack of materialistic values in later life.

Chapter 8, with the current debates surrounding contact and fathers' rights, also touches on highly topical issues. The question is: What is the relationship between non-resident fathers' involvement and children's psychological outcomes? The starting point was to use data from the FMS to find out the factors associated with non-resident fathers' involvement. Here we see two of the recurring themes throughout the book: fathers' involvement is closely linked to mothers' involvement, and there is likely to be less involvement where there is family conflict. Frequency of non-resident parents' contact was also likely to decline as the years pass following separation. When it comes to emotional well-being, we see the third major theme in the book: family conflict negatively impacts on children. Perhaps more controversially, however, while there was a significant relationship with mother involvement and child well-being there was no significant relationship with father involvement. How can this be? Cautions are attached to this finding because it may be related to the specific features of the data used. Further ideas, however, come from the qualitative element of the JRF study which relates to interviews with resident mothers, fathers and one of their children. This suggested that a central characteristic of the resident fathers is 'being there'. It is not so much what they do, but that they are around to help, advise and support when needed. If 'being there' is an essential attribute of modern-day fathering, it does make it more difficult to impact on child well-being if the father is non-resident. This suggests that non-resident fathers may need to learn a new way of being a 'dad'.

Eirini's final chapter epitomises her scholarly, meticulous and objective approach to her subject. She asks the question we all want to know: Does 'good' fathering promote 'good' children's outcomes? The answer, she says, is 'it depends...'.

It depends on what we mean by fathering (and 'good' fathering in particular), what children's outcomes we have in mind and what groups of parents and children we look at... Father involvement was sometimes associated with 'good' outcomes. Certain aspects of fathers' involvement, in certain groups of fathers, was associated with certain outcomes, in certain groups of children.

Eirini's careful and well-balanced conclusion makes this book a mine of information. It is in the detail where the clues emerge on how to work with fathers to improve children's well-being.

Dr Ann Buchanan  
August 2004

## Reference

Buchanan, A., Bennett, F., Ritchie, S., Smith, T., Smith, G., Harker, L. and Vitali, S. (in press). *The impact of government policy on children age 0–13 and their families at risk of social exclusion*. London: SEU.





## CHAPTER 1

---

# FATHERING: A CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

### INTRODUCTION

During the last 10 years attention has focused on fathers more than at any time prior to the beginning of the twentieth century mainly because of the rapid pace of family change (i.e. the decline in the traditional household form of a single breadwinner and the growth of dual participant households). The consequences, especially for children, of these changes have long been the subject of research and debate. Subsequently, research on fathering has both expanded considerably and matured scientifically as it started to move away from exploring the consequences of 'father absence' for children to understanding possible mechanisms of influence of fathering in both father-present and father-absent families.

### FATHERS AND THE 'MODERN' FAMILY: THE CURRENT PICTURE

The role of fathers in developed countries has changed over time. In the USA, Demos (1988) discussed how, during the colonial period, fathers were the primary parent and had ultimate say in matters of the child; in the rare case of divorce, the law awarded custody to the father, as mothers were considered too emotional and too indulgent to raise children properly. The advent of industrialisation in the nineteenth century redefined the roles of mothers and fathers, with the role of fathers becoming predominantly that of 'provider', and mothers becoming the parent with primary responsibility for children, and the operation of the household (Demos, 1988). As 'homemakers' in the suburbs mothers became increasingly isolated from life outside the family, mainly because the contributions that they had previously made to the economic well-being of the family decreased. All European countries have also historically given patriarchal authority to the father, although the form that this has taken has varied. In the UK, for

## 2 FATHERING AND CHILD OUTCOMES

instance, equal guardianship rights were not secured by mothers over their children until 1973 (Lewis, 2001b). However, the rapid pace of family change over the past decade has meant that in Britain, for instance, in one generation the numbers marrying have halved, the numbers divorcing have trebled, and the proportion of children born outside of marriage has quadrupled (McRae, 2000). Britain is not alone in experiencing these changes. The most recent (2003) statistics show that all 15 European Union member states have recorded an increase in births outside marriage since the mid-1970s. There are some differences, however. Data for 2000 showed that of the 25 (as of 1 May 2004) European Union countries, Cyprus (2.3%) has the lowest rate followed by Greece (4.1%) and Italy (9.6%). At the end of the scale, the highest percentages are in Denmark (42.6%), France (42.6%), Latvia (43.1%), Sweden (55.5%) and Estonia (56.3%), where over half of all children are born outside marriage (*Eurostat Yearbook*, 2003). At around 40% the UK has a high percentage of live births outside marriage. Most of the increase in the number of births outside marriage has been to cohabiting couples (that is, parents living at the same address). In 2001 three-quarters of births outside marriage in England and Wales were jointly registered by both parents and, of these births, three in four were to parents living at the same address (Office for National Statistics, 2003). The growth in the proportion of births outside marriage, and divorce – in the UK the divorce rate has risen from 2.0 per 1000 married population in 1960 to 13.6 in 1995 (Office for National Statistics, 1998) – has resulted in an increase in lone-parent families. In Spring 2002 a fifth of dependent children in Britain lived in lone-parent families (2% lived in lone-father families, and 19% lived in lone-mother families), almost twice the proportion as in 1981. The current North American picture is not dissimilar, with the latter half of the twentieth century having witnessed a sharp rise in non-marital childbearing in the USA, as well. Although in 1940 only 4% of all births in the USA occurred outside marriage, in 1999 one-third of births were to unmarried mothers (Ventura & Bachrach, 2000). Currently, the proportion of children in the USA who lived with only one parent at some point during their childhood is expected to continue and exceed 50% (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth & Lamb, 2000). Similarly, although in 1960 only 6% of families in the USA were headed by females in 1998, that proportion had risen to 24% (US Bureau of the Census, 1998). Generally, the percentage of female-headed households (usually, but not necessarily, with dependent children) is very high in some countries. The highest rates of female headship are reported in the African countries of Botswana (47%) and Swaziland (40%), and the Caribbean countries such as the US Virgin Islands (45%) and Haiti (39%). Some rates in the developed countries are at least equally high, ranging from 44% in Slovenia, 42% in Denmark and Finland, and 37% in New Zealand and Sweden (United Nations, 2000).

In addition, 1 in 8 children in the UK is expected to live at some stage before age 16 in a family in which their birth parent has either formed a new partnership or has remarried (Dunn, 2002), whereas in the USA it is estimated that about one-third of children will live with a step-parent, usually a stepfather, before reaching age 18 (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). In 2000/01 in the UK stepfamilies accounted for 8% of families with dependent children whose head was under age 60. The majority (88%) of these consisted of a couple with one or more children from the previous relationship of the female partner only, as there is a tendency for children to stay with the mother following the break-up of a partnership. These demographic trends suggest that increasing numbers of children grow up in families that do not fit the traditional pattern of two parents with their biological children. This increase of father-absent and stepfather families should be considered alongside the increase of mothers in employment – one of the most dominant and persisting trends in European labour markets, which has also raised questions about the role of fathers. Recent results from the European Labour Force Survey in EU15 showed that among households with two people of working age those with both partners in the labour force were almost twice as numerous in 2000 as those with only one, averaging around 62% in total (Franco & Winqvist, 2002). The UK has experienced a steady increase in the proportion of married women engaged in wage labour, from a figure of 26% in 1951 to 71% in 1991 and, more recently, of married women with a preschool child from 27% in 1973 to 52% in 1994 (Walby, 1997). As a consequence, households supported by a single male earner are now a minority, comprising in 1991 34% of all two-adult households below retirement age, with the contribution of men to overall family income falling from nearly 73% in 1979–81 to 61% in 1989–91 and that of women rising from 15% to nearly 21% (Creighton, 1999). In the USA the proportion of married women engaged in wage labour with preschool children rose from 12% in 1950 to two-thirds in 1997 (Cabrera et al., 2000). Only about one-quarter of children in the USA live in two-parent families supported by a single male earner (Cabrera et al., 2000). Generally over the past two decades, women's economic activity rates increased in all United Nations regions except sub-Saharan Africa, the transition economies of eastern Europe and central Asia, and Oceania. The largest increase occurred in South America, where rates rose from 26% to 45% between 1980 and 1997. The lowest rates were found in northern Africa and western Asia, where less than one-third of women were economically active (United Nations, 2000).

However, recent evidence seems to suggest the relatively slow pace of change in men's contribution to domestic labour, and child care in particular, relative to women's increased participation in the workforce. Sandberg and Hofferth (2001) showed that in the USA children's mean

#### 4 FATHERING AND CHILD OUTCOMES

weekly time with fathers increased only marginally between 1981 and 1997, although it increased significantly in families in which mothers were working, and that time with mothers in two-parent families generally increased over the period regardless of whether mothers were working. Sandberg and Hofferth's (2001) conclusion was that assertions that children spend less time with parents today than several decades ago because of changes in maternal labour market behaviour and in patterns of family formation and dissolution were largely unfounded. Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean and Hofferth (2003) showed that on weekdays, fathers' earnings and work hours had a significant negative effect on their involvement with a child, but mothers' work hours or earnings did not have an effect on mothers' involvement, which suggests that despite women's increasing role in the labour market, most mothers remain the primary caregivers of young children on weekdays.

In fact, the very long work hours of women and men with children in some EU countries – for example, 1995 data showed that, of all the EU15 men and women with children under age 17, UK fathers and Greek mothers worked the longest hours at 46.9 and 39.5 hours per week on average, respectively, which mirrors the US averages of 50 and 41 hours (Polatnik, 2000) – added impetus to EU policies aimed to reconcile work and family, and reduce working hours. As two recent Equal Opportunities Commission reports suggest, policies such as parental leave, the promotion of 'family friendly' workplaces, and an attack on the long-hours culture are important as catalysts for an 'active fatherhood' debate and for changing expectations (Hatten, Vinter & Williams, 2002; O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003). The Council Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996 on the framework agreement on parental leave guarantees men and women workers in the European Union the right to a minimum of three months' leave on the birth of a child or on the adoption of a child. Employees are protected against dismissal when applying for or taking parental leave. After the leave, they are entitled to return to the same job, or if that is not possible, to an equivalent or similar job. In addition, employees are entitled to time off for urgent family reasons. Although all EU15 countries offer at least 14 weeks' paid maternity leave, parental leave policies are poorly developed in most EU member states, reflecting little interest in fathers' care of young children, and therefore in bringing about equal employment opportunity for women. Furthermore, parental leave provisions differ widely between member states. Within the European Union Sweden has the oldest, most generous and flexible parental leave programme, aimed at both parents and designed to promote equal share of breadwinning and childcare responsibilities. Parents are entitled to share 450 days of paid leave at the birth or adoption of a child. Thirteen months of this leave are paid at 80% of salary up to a certain income level (circa \$45 000) with the remaining three months paid at a low

flat rate (circa \$13 a day). Leave can be taken any time before the child completes the first year of school, and there are no restrictions on how often parents can take turns at taking leave. In 2001 the majority (74%) of all children aged 1 to 6 were in publicly subsidised childcare, and the majority (75%) of mothers with preschool-aged children were in the labour force (Haas, 2003). It is no coincidence that in the three EU15 states with the lowest (40%) women's overall labour force participation (Greece, Italy and Spain) fathers do not take leave in normal circumstances either because parental leave is unpaid (Spain), or not guaranteed in companies of less than 50 employees (Greece), or because it is not an individual non-transferable right (Italy). These three nations also score the lowest of all EU15 states on a composite index measuring women's equal employment opportunities (based on gender differences in employment rates, women's share of higher job positions, the gender wage gap, the proportion of women with low incomes, and the male-female gap in unpaid time spent on caring for children and other persons) (Haas, 2003). Yet, even in Sweden mothers take as much as 85% of all parental leave, with many fathers reluctant to use their 'papa months'. Furthermore, despite the fact that Sweden has one of the world's highest rates of female participation in the labour force, women's wages still lag behind men's, and only two out of 282 listed companies have female chief executives (*The Economist*, 2004). Other developed countries are far worse. By the average basic statutory paid leave for developed and developing nations of 16 weeks (Allen, 2003), the United States, New Zealand and Australia, for instance, stand out as having particularly minimal legislation. Until 1993, the United States was one of the few industrialised countries without any maternity leave legislation. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that was passed in that year provided the right to a short (12-week) unpaid parental leave for workers who meet qualifying conditions (that is, those who work in companies of at least 50 employees and have worked at least 1250 hours in the prior year). Australia does not allow for any paid maternity or parental leave. New Zealand introduced paid maternity leave as recently as 2002, but still does not allow for any paid parental leave.

## **CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES: FATHERS ACROSS COUNTRIES**

Despite these demographic changes and policy differences, however, fatherhood research has only recently integrated developmental, ethnographic and demographic approaches to fathering. In Britain, for instance, the first demographic analysis of fatherhood took place in the mid-1990s (Burghes, Clarke & Cronin, 1997) using evidence from the British

## 6 FATHERING AND CHILD OUTCOMES

Household Panel Study (BHPS), the first nationally representative survey to ask men about fertility histories. Therefore, who fathers *are* (or, for the purposes of family policy-makers, who 'high-risk' fathers are) differs widely across Western countries. Recent demographic analyses comparing fatherhood between Britain and the United States have shown that young fatherhood was more common in the USA, especially among Black men, with 34% of men in Britain having their first child before age 25, compared to 41% of White fathers, 47% of Hispanic fathers and 61% of Black fathers in the USA, and with 54% of Black American fathers being co-resident with all their children compared to 76% of Hispanic Americans, 79% of White Americans and 85% of British fathers (see Clarke & O'Brien, 2004, for a review). In addition, what fathers *do* with their children is sometimes culturally prescribed and might not be in line with the empirical findings from the British, American or Australian studies with predominantly White middle-class samples in two-parent families which dominate the English literature. For example, although the father's role is recognised in all cultures, in Botswana the male kin who plays this role is the mother's brother (Townsend, 2002). Furthermore, although differences between paternal and maternal styles (with fathers being notably more playful than mothers) have been found in France, Italy, Switzerland, India, as well as in African-American and Hispanic-American households, Taiwanese, Aka, German and Swedish fathers, as well as men on Israeli kibbutzim, are not more playful than mothers (Lewis & Lamb, 2003). Significant cultural variability has also been documented in studies measuring the extent of the father-child interaction in Western countries even since infancy. Lamb (2002) summarised the evidence from earlier studies on father quantity of involvement in several countries. It seems that Swedish fathers in dual-earner families are probably most highly involved, spending an average of 10.5 hours per workday and 7.5 hours per non-workday with their infants, almost as much as the mothers do. Earlier studies showed that Israeli fathers spend 2.75 hours, British fathers spend less time with their infants than Israeli or Irish fathers, but German and Italian fathers spend a lot less than British, Israeli or Irish fathers. American fathers have been reported in some studies to spend around 3 hours per day interacting with their infants, and in others to spend around 15 to 20 minutes (Lamb, 2002). So far the highest degree of father involvement in any human society is found among the Aka pygmies, a hunter-gatherer people in the Central African Republic who were found to be present with an infant or child for 88% of the time, and to be holding an infant for 22% of the time (Hewlett, 1987). In the UK, Matheson and Summerfield (2001) showed that in households with children men reported spending around three-quarters of an hour a day caring for and playing with their children – just under half the amount reported by women. Using data collected in 1986 on the time that Japanese and American fathers spent with children aged 10 to 15, Ishii-Kuntz (1994)

showed that American fathers were directly engaged for 1 hour on weekdays and 2 hours on Sundays with sons and for 0.5 hour on weekdays and 1.4 hours on Sundays with daughters. More recently Yeung et al. (2003) showed that biological fathers in the United States spend on average 1 hour and 13 minutes on a typical workday and 2 hours and 29 minutes on a weekend day in direct engagement with their children in intact families. The corresponding estimates were 5 hours and 21 minutes for children who live only with their biological mothers (with or without a stepfather), 1 hour 4 minutes and 1 hour 30 minutes for children who live only with their biological fathers (with or without stepmother), and 9 hours and 28 minutes for those who do not live with either biological parent. American studies consistently show, however, that most of the time men spend with their children is in the form of 'interactive activities', such as play or helping with homework (Yeung et al., 2003), with the division of labour in childcare responsibilities being far from egalitarian. Lee, Vernon-Feagans, Vazquez and Kolak (2003) argued that a reason for this might be simply that fathers underestimate mothers' involvement in caregiving tasks (in their study fathers' and mothers' estimates of fathers' involvement were almost identical, but fathers' ratings of mothers' involvement were significantly lower than mothers' ratings of their own involvement). Finally, what fathers *should do* with their children has resulted in significant differences in the family policy agendas between Western countries. For instance, the British family policy on fatherhood occupies an intermediate position between the American 'father involvement' agenda, criticised as an attempt to reinstate male dominance by restoring the dominance of the traditional nuclear family with its contrasting masculine and feminine gender roles (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999), and the European 'gender equity' agenda (Clarke & O'Brien, 2004).

## THE 'CONSEQUENCES' OF THE CHANGES

The psychological consequences (especially for children) of these demographic changes (i.e. the decline in the traditional household form of a single breadwinner and the growth of dual participant households) have long been the subject of research and debate. Recent attention has also been given to the consequences for fathers. A Swedish study (Ringbäck Weitoft, Burström & Rosén, in press), looking at premature mortality in lone fathers and childless men, for instance, showed that compared to long-term cohabiting fathers with a child in their household, lone non-custodial fathers and lone childless men faced the greatest increase in risks, especially from injury and addiction, and also from all-cause mortality and ischaemic heart disease. Being a lone custodial father also entailed increased risk,

## 8 FATHERING AND CHILD OUTCOMES

although generally to a much lesser extent, and not for all outcomes. The consequences for children, on the other hand (particularly in the short term), of parental 'deprivation' in one form or another – at one time, and also recently, maternal work outside the home, then father absence, and now parental separation – have been an increasing focus of attention (see Ni Bhrolchain, Chappell, Diamond & Jameson, 2000, for a review).

### **WHY (AND HOW) FAMILY STRUCTURE AFFECTS CHILD 'OUTCOMES'**

Biblarz and Raftery (1999) usefully reviewed the main theories of the effects of family structure on children. Sociological theory, for instance, predicts that children from alternative families get fewer economic, social and cultural resources, which help to facilitate success. The sociological model also predicts less involvement by stepfathers and by partners who are not married to the mother because expectations are either, in the former, that they will be less involved with children or, in the latter, that social norms are not yet developed to guide unmarried partners in parenting their children (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). Economic theory predicts that the two-parent family is among the best-functioning forms of modern capitalist society because it allows for the provision of household services by one partner and economic resources by the other, and as such it is an efficient system for maximising utility and the human capital of the children. Evolutionary approaches to understanding parenting behaviours in humans suggest that men invest more in their children when the indirect benefit they get is greater than the benefit they could get from using their time and energy to seek additional mates (see Josephson, 2002, for a discussion). Mothers invest more of their resources in their children than fathers because women's potential for having additional children is far lower than men's, and so more of the mother's than of the father's potential reproductive investment is tied up in any one child. Therefore, evolutionary psychology also predicts that children from two-biological-parent families will have an advantage over children from other forms of family but also, in contrast to economic theory's predictions, that children from alternative families will do better when raised by a single mother than by a single father, and that children from single-mother families will have advantages over those from stepfather families. Finally, the selection hypothesis suggests that the observed adverse outcomes of children of alternative family structures might represent selection effects. For instance, the adverse outcomes in children of divorce might be because people who divorce are less competent at family life and less 'child-centred' than those who do not divorce (Amato, 2000), or because of the high levels of interparental conflict