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Fathers, family life and work: Can fathers have it all?

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BACKGROUND

During the 1990s the work-life balance challenge came of age. Academics, policy makers, and indeed parents were raising the question: how can it be possible to provide for the material, emotional and, increasingly the educational, needs of children whilst balancing the economic and social benefits of employment? Or put more simply how could parents balance care of children and earning a living? It was becoming clear that the poverty and insecurity generated by too little parental employment on the one hand and the overload and stress created by too much parental employment on the other were raising serious questions about the balance of work and family time. A new vocabulary developed to describe the time pressures under which contemporary families live - 'the time squeeze', the 'second shift', the 'time crunch', 'the time famine', and 'hyper-scheduling' have become common currency (e.g. Hochschild, 1989; Daly, 2000; Doherty, 2004).

Historically work-family juggling has been a mothers' issue. In media debate and fiction working mothers are commonly portrayed as either heroic super women captured in the title *I don't know how she does it?* of Allison Pearson's (2002) global bestseller or alternatively egotistical child-neglecters. Media sources spotlight high-profile professional mothers who leave well-paid and prestigious jobs to become full-time mothers claiming *it's impossible to have it all*. In 2003 a New York Times feature describing this '*Opt Out Revolution*' provoked a national debate. 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 a hard fought for access to work. Whatever,

the rights and wrongs of opt out, this ‘choice’ is not available to the majority of parents, particularly poor families and also fathers who traditionally have the greater earner power.

More recently there are signs that fathers are being drawn into the work-family balance challenge debate (e.g. Haas, Hwang, and Russell, 2000). Fathers of the twenty-first century are expected to be hands-on carers of children as well as economic earners (Day, Lewis, O’Brien, and Lamb, 2004) As expectations for active fatherhood have become more heightened, the compatibility of fathers’ working and family life has come under increasing scrutiny. The growth of maternal employment, particularly in the early child-rearing years, has also had an effect. More fathers are sharing the economic provider role with their partners. Since the 1970s the proportion of families with a solo breadwinning father has declined markedly. In the UK 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).

This paper takes stock of fathers and the work-life balance question. It explores the dilemmas of contemporary working fathers. It reviews the evidence on how fathers combine caring for children and earning a living. How much caring of children do fathers do? How much working do fathers do? How child-centered is fathers’ overall care package? It draws on my Equal Opportunities Commission UK funded research on working fathers which includes a secondary analysis of the first national Work-life Balance Employee and Employer 2000 Survey, examining the provision, demand and uptake of flexible working time. ¹

1. CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN FATHERING ROLES NORMS - DETRADITIONALISATION OF FATHERHOOD?

‘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 & Delcroix (1992: 185)

‘After centuries of the father’s authority or absence, it seems that a new concept has come into existence- father love, the exact equivalence of mother love’ Badinter (1981: 325)

Amongst social science and public policy makers in Europe, there is increasing awareness of the complex and contradictory nature of contemporary fatherhood. Some commentators portray a model of ‘fatherhood in transition’ through the erosion of patriarchal fatherhood and an emergent caring father ideal (McKee and O’Brien, 1982; Björnberg, 1992), while others focus on the idea of ‘fatherhood in crisis’, a state where men are unable to either care or

¹ WLB2000 Employee Survey 2000 a nationally representative dataset of 7500 persons in employment in workplaces with five or more staff, including 1486 working fathers and 2260 working mothers with co-resident children under 19 years (O’Brien M and Shemilt I. (2003) *Working Fathers: Earning and Caring*. London: EOC; O’Brien, M. (2005) *Shared Caring: Bringing Fathers into the Frame*. London: EOC.

provide cash for their families (Hobson, 2002). Coltrane (2003) has characterized these simultaneous trends of greater involvement and more marginality as the paradox of fatherhood. A running theme in this commentary is the ‘detraditionalisation’ of fatherhood whereby fathers as a social group are conceptualized as moving from a ‘given’ ascribed status to where fathers have more choice in constructing an ‘achieved’ status (Jensen, 2001). Empirically there is growing evidence that fathers, particularly recent generations of fathers, are more self-conscious about juggling the different characteristics of ‘the good father’, particularly in terms of how they manage the conflicts between having a job and looking after the children (e.g. Henwood and Procter, 2003; Brannen, Moss and Mooney, 2004). As Daly (1996: 474) has argued:

This generation [of fathers] expresses a strong, family-based temporal conscience that keeps them vigilant in their fathering commitment. The value of spending time with the children has not been inherited from their own fathers but, rather, has been embraced in response to a new set of cultural conditions.

Similarly caring fathers are now part of everyday culture through advertising images and depictions of sporting icons. Fathers are expected to be accessible and nurturing as well as economically supportive to their children. In the UK for example, 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 happens at times in Britain (e.g. Government Minister Alan Milburn June 2003).

Psychological pedagogies are also placing less emphasis on the unique salience of mothers as the special provider of quality time and care for young children (e.g. Newson and Newson, 1974). Contemporary psychologists are more likely to stress the ingredients of quality care rather than the gender or family position of the caregiver. 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 commonalities include activities likely to promote an emotionally secure environment and child wellbeing in the 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.

2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE ON CONCEPTUALIZING FATHER INVOLVEMENT - WHAT COUNTS AS CARE?

Caring is a slippery concept, highly dependent on the domain being explored whether it be caring for another in terms of direct or indirect contact or as a relational activity encompassing evaluative elements such as an egalitarian or responsible attitude or an ethos – e.g. an ethic of care (Finch and Mason, 1993; Sevenhuijsen, 1999). When engagement in care is conceptualized as a time contingent activity, it can be measured for instance through time use quantitative methodology, and when approached more as a relational activity, qualitative tools, for instance interviews or observations, are typically adopted to capture interpersonal sensitivity or personal values.

Historically in the field of fatherhood research the concept of *father involvement* has been the point of entry into examining the extent of men's caring in families (Lamb, et al, 1987). Although this is a multi-dimensional concept encompassing wide-ranging domains, accessible to quantitative and qualitative scrutiny ('engagement' -care-taking, shared activities, direct contact time with child); 'availability' - presence and availability at home; and 'responsibility'- ensuring care-taking and resources) 'time struggles' about the contribution of men and women to child care and housework have tended to dominate the literature - particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, the degree of male participation in domestic matters first became an important new touchstone of gender equality during this period (McKee and O'Brien, 1982). In the 1990s, with the incorporation of children's perspectives, generation as well as gender has become more salient in debates on this issue (Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta, Wintersberger, 1994). Caring for children has become a project of personal commitment and not just a burden to be shared out between struggling parents. Also from children's perspectives the question of what goes on in the time they spend with their parents, as well as the amount of time per se is a further dimension for consideration.

It is not surprising therefore that quantity and quality thresholds and benchmarks of men's caring and father involvement continue 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)(e.g. Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Conceptualizing and measuring men's caring in families are highly connected and linked to societal cultural norms about what constitutes 'the good father'. The research evidence suggests that the involved caring father aspiration is culturally embedded in most western societal contexts and so regulates the feelings of mothers and fathers.

Time use surveys continue to be an important quantitative indicator of father involvement, displaying the amount of daily or weekly time devoted to childcare activities (with the advantage of charting change over time where the survey has been longitudinal). Similarly qualitative indicators of father involvement which focus on fathers' feelings about

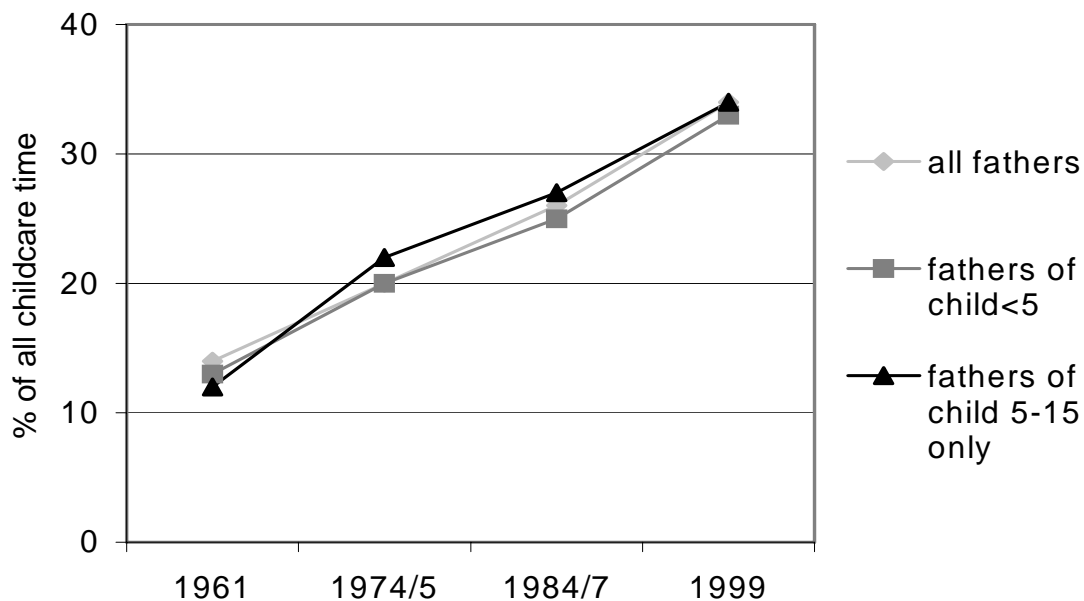
and perceptions of family relationships, parenting styles and family processes, continue to illuminate (e.g. Pleck and Steuve, 2001).

3. FATHERS' CARING TIME WITH CHILDREN

Using time budget diary data with nationally representative data sets, most studies have shown increases in *time devoted to child care activities* for successive generations of fathers since the 1970s (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004; Sandberg and Hofferth, 2001). Quantitative measures of fathers' involvement in childcare can be examined in absolute and relative terms. Absolute measures cover the actual time a father directly interacts with a child (the amount of paternal engagement, Pleck, 1997). In time budget diaries the amount of time spent on child-related activities as the 'main activity' is the typical measure adopted. Relative measures of father involvement estimate the proportion of time spent in childcare by fathers in comparison to mothers.

Gershuny (2001), using international time budget diary comparisons, has shown increased childcare time spent by British fathers since the mid-1970s, with increases especially sharp since 1985 and in particular for those men with children under age 5 years, mirroring similar trends in father childcare in the USA. As shown in Figure 1 fathers of children under the age of 5 years devoted less than a quarter of an hour per day to child-related activities (as their main activity) in the mid-1970s in contrast to two hours a day by the late 1990s.

Figure 1 Parental childcare undertaken by fathers



Source: Fisher K, McCulloch A, Gershuny J 1999.

This trend towards an absolute increase in child-related activities for fathers (and mothers) over recent time periods has been a repeated finding in time budget studies and puzzles commentators concerned about time pressures in contemporary family life. A range of factors are relevant in understanding this phenomenon including: the growth in time-saving domestic technology reducing time devoted to housework, which indeed also shows a decline over time (for mothers, but not fathers (Gershuny, 2001); the subjective over-estimation of mothers' direct interaction time with children in the past (Bianchi, 2000); a growth in more child-centred approaches to parenting influencing mothers' and fathers' behaviour (Newson and Newson, 1974); and a greater awareness of children and investment in child-related activities so that children are more likely to figure in contemporary parents' diaries as 'a main activity' when accounting for their day. Reductions in leisure time, emerging as a specific time-saving strategy for contemporary parents, are a further contextual factor. 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 also reduce men's exercise time, and much more significantly than women's (by 2.98 hours vs. 1.00 hours per two weeks lower than pre-parenthood rates), leading these 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.

More detailed studies of time use show that the increase can also be related to 'week-end catch up' for both working mothers and fathers (Yeung et al., 2001). These investigators found that in two-parent intact families, fathers are more engaged with their children during

weekends than weekdays. For American children under 13 years the average time spent directly interacting with their father was 1 hour and 13 minutes on a weekday and 3.3 hours on a weekend day.

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's (2004). In two-parent households with dependent children, paternal *engagement* time ranged from 1.83 to 0.62 hours per day (*between 44 per cent and 73 per cent of mothers' engagement*) and paternal *accessibility* time ranged from 3.8 to 3.56 hours per day (*between 65 per cent to 71 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's (2004) report that levels of paternal *responsibility* in two-parent households, indicated by planning child care 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.

Methodological caution It should be noted that most of the time use 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, 2004). More children experience transitions into and out of household types, often negotiating contact and relationships with both a non-resident biological father and a residential step-father. It may well be therefore that the trend to increased paternal involvement is linked to '*an increasingly select group of fathers*' (Sayer et al, 2004 : 31) 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.

Longitudinal survey data, as distinct from actuarial time use data, confirms the upward trend in men's involvement in the care of children (e.g. Smith, 2004). Using the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) data set Smith finds an increase in the weekly time fathers report spending with their children across 13 European nations covered in the survey between 1994- 2001. In addition she observes a North- South tendency towards greater paternal involvement being prevalent in Northern European countries, with the exception of Spain, which is characterized by higher than average for Southern Europe paternal involvement.

Smith selected those men who reported substantial paternal time (bench marked at an average of 28 hours per week) and categorized them into 4 regional groups:

- Denmark (41%), Finland (21%) and UK (23%);
- Belgium (11%), Germany (16%), Ireland (15%), The Netherlands (14%), Spain 16(%)
- Austria (8%), France (10%) , Italy(10%)
- Greece (4%), Portugal (5%)

Whilst the Nordic findings in line with predications arising from the historic governmental support and welfare regimes for active fathering, the other national patterns are less consistent. However, across countries, as found in other studies, father involvement was positively associated with a range of factors notably: maternal employment, shorter working hours, working in the public sector and higher levels of paternal education (Pleck, 2004).

4. FATHERS' HOUSEWORK TIME

Despite the increase in men's caring of children, studies show that fathers' involvement in housework remains *low*. In general across working hour categories, both males and females report greater sharing of childcare than housework. 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 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.

Similarly time use data show a continued high housework component to mother's caring that is not apparent for fathers (ONS, 2004). 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. While looking after children can be emotionally rewarding and self-fulfilling, this is less often the case for housework (Oakley, 1974).

An equivalence in emotional meaning and status between caring for children childcare, housework and paid employment, the other main parental activity involved in providing a secure base for raising children, cannot be assumed. The experience of each three parenting

activities varies for instance in terms of time autonomy, fatigue created and satisfaction, arguably paid employment retains the higher status. The housework component to women's care portfolio may contribute to feelings of overload and unfairness, particularly for fulltime working mothers.

5. IMPACT OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT ON CHILDREN'S WELFARE – MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

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

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's 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's (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. Never-the-less, clearly time together is required to develop and sustain mutually rewarding, or indeed difficult relationships.

There is some evidence to suggest that promoting father involvement and investment in the early years of a child's life is of particular importance for children's later emotional, cognitive and social well-being. Buchanan and Flouri's (2002) British evidence examines the impact of father involvement on later adult outcomes (through a secondary analysis of 17,000 children in the National Child Development Study born in the UK in 1958 and followed up at

ages 7, 11, 16, 23 and 33 and age 42). The key findings from the study show that when fathers were involved with their children when the child was 7 years of age

- it was positively related to their later educational attainment;
- children were less likely to be in trouble with the police;
- this was associated with good parent-child relationships in adolescence and also with later satisfactory partnerships in adult life;
- it protected against an adult experience of homelessness in sons of manual workers;
- it protected children in separated families against later mental health problems.

Their analysis included resident and non-resident and biological and non-biological fathers.

The beneficial outcomes for children of earlier paternal involvement are even more striking when one considers the rather minimalist extent of involvement required for a father to be considered 'involved' with his seven year old child. With the narrow range of indicators of parenting available in the NCDS survey data set, Buchanan and Flouri defined an 'involved' father as one who: read to his child 'most weeks' (37% of fathers); were rated by teachers as being 'very interested' in their child's education (44% of fathers); took their child on outings 'most weeks' (73% of fathers) and took an equal role to mother in the management of their children (60 % of fathers).

Moreover, involvement levels at seven appeared to be continuous over the life course, in that early father involvement with a child was associated with continuing involvement (using age appropriate indicators) with that child throughout childhood and adolescence (Flouri and Buchanan, 2003). Their research suggests an important message for practitioners:

'engaging fathers in their children's lives from an early age should guarantee that they remain involved throughout their children's childhood.' (Flouri and Buchanan, 2003: 95)

Studies assessing the impact of father involvement in the earliest years on late child outcomes confirm this message. For instance, Grossman et al. (2002) has shown that the quality of fathers' playfulness with their two year olds predicted German children's attachment at 16 years, independently of maternal factors. Similarly Yogman, Kindlon, and Earls (1995) study of preterm babies in ethnically and disadvantaged urban areas in US found a general link between higher levels paternal involvement in infancy (measured through father presence in the home plus his amount of play with the infant) and later cognitive outcomes. At

3 years high father involvement was associated with significant IQ gains (controlling for neonatal health, family income and paternal age).

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 fulltime in the first year of children's lives, increased father involvement can act to protect child welfare (Gregg and Washbrook, 2003).

Impact 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 commit to be 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.

Using the National Survey of Families and Households, Eggebeen and Knoster (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.' (p.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.

Other research has focused on the impact of more involved caring on how men balance work and family life. 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 child care, but non-the-less 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. Milkie et al's (2002) study points in this direction as does Henwood and Procter's (2003, pg) 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 engagement 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, 2003) 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.

In conclusion, like mothers, fathers matter emotionally and financially. Fathers matter to children and in turn influence their psychological, educational and material welfare. There is growing evidence that fathers are significant in family relationships in both an economic and an emotional sense. Fathers can bring strengths to their relationships with their children and father involvement can have beneficial effects at different stages of children's development. Fathers can also act as supportive co-parents to their partners. From a working mothers' perspective, enlisting paternal support is one useful strategy in the negotiation of work-family time.

6. FATHERS' PAID WORK TIME

As I have argued in responding to norms of the *good father* there are greater expectations on men to become involved as fathers, active in the upbringing of children and supportive co-parents with their partners. Increasingly 'earning as caring' is not enough to validate being a good father; fathering is also about directly caring for and being with children. Generally more time with children means less time in the workplace, especially when children are young and not at school.

However, when we compare fathers and non-fathers working hours what is striking is that in general fatherhood is associated with longer working hours (see Table 1). Fathers are more likely to be economically active and in full-time employment than non-fathers and economic

activity rates are highest for fathers with dependent children (Table 2). The vast majority of fathers work full-time which highlights the continued importance of earning to men's life as fathers. EU data show that UK fathers work the longest hours in Europe and in 2001, the mean number of usual weekly hours worked by fathers was 46.1. In the same year, UK's mothers' average weekly hours of work by 27.8 (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003). Our analysis showed that in 2001 the proportion of fathers working long hours remained at a high level with nearly two-fifths usually working 48 hours or more per week and around one in eight usually working longer hours of 60 or more (Tables, 3). Around one in eight fathers work excessively long hours of 60 or more per week. Less than 2 per cent of mothers work such long hours.

On the face of it, if in work, fathers appear reluctant (or unable) to reduce their working hours. In our analysis fathers showed a greater tolerance of long working hours than did mothers. Whereas employed mothers' work-life balance satisfaction was starting dropping significantly when working a 48 hour week, for fathers this drop only appeared significant at the 60 hour a week threshold (see ppt²). Fathers dissatisfied with their working hours, highlighted three favoured changes (in order): being able to leave on time; working less overtime; working longer hours for more pay. By contrast, dissatisfied mothers highlighted three favoured changes (in order): being able to leave on time; working fewer hours for less pay; and working less overtime.

Recent Australian analysis suggests that fathers' appraisal of their long working hours is a crucial dimension in understanding toleration. In a nationally representative study of face-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 60hours or more per week. This polarised pattern was not found for fathers working in the standard 35-40 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.' Pg 16.

Whilst arguing for a 'horse 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.

² Satisfaction with work-life balance dropped to 60 per cent for fathers usually working 48+ hours per week and to 50 per cent for those regularly working 60+ hours per week. Mothers' work-life balance also reduced if they were working long hours and much more significantly than that of fathers (40 per cent for those usually working 48+ hours per week, 38 per cent for those regularly working 60+ hours per week).

Research evidence is now showing that long working hours and work overload can create familial problems, although patterns are complex. Crouter, Bumpus, Head and McHale (2001) examined the separate influences of long work hours (overwork) and role overload (feelings of being overwhelmed by multiple work commitments) on fathers' relationships with both their children and their wives. This American study included working and middle class families with adolescent children. Overwork had a greater impact on fathers' relationships with their children than on their marriages. Long working hours and less time together appeared not to effect wives' evaluation of their marriage but when the ingredient of role overload was added, wives tended to report partners being less loving and couple relationships as being more conflictual. In contrast, role overload emerged as a more significant influence on father-child relationships, even when fathers worked shorter hours. As the authors reflect:

Indeed, when fathers worked long hours but (miraculously) reported low overload, relationships with sons and daughters were as positive as those of fathers who worked fewer hours. (Crouter et al. 2001:13)

During the adolescent years when children spend less time with their parents anyway, the amount of time a father is away from his child might be less important than his capacity to be emotionally available when he is present in the home. The authors suggest that feelings of workload may be associated with fatigue, stress and a '*turning inwards*'.

Other studies of high-stress occupations have indicated a negative impact on family interaction. For instance, Repetti's (1993) study of air-traffic controllers has shown them to be more emotionally and behaviourally withdrawn from interactions with children and partners after difficult shifts. However, this transfer process or '*spill over effect*' can also be beneficial, for instance when fathers have high levels of job satisfaction. Parke's (2002) review of studies exploring the impact of paternal occupation on father-child relationships found strong evidence for more emotionally responsive and intellectually supportive parenting styles when fathers had stimulating and challenging occupations. Job attributes and work cultures create '*emotional climates*' which clearly fathers do not leave at the workplace.

Despite some fathers' tolerance for long working hours, our 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). When the whole sample of employed fathers, irrespective of current workloads, were asked explicitly about ideal flexible working time arrangements we found: 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.

The dilemma for contemporary men is that when they become fathers they need to maximise their economic potential. This context creates a different pattern of work-life balance preferences for fathers and mothers, especially with the current gender pay gap. Globally parents are making employment and childcare decisions in the context of fathers’ greater earning power and in those societies with weak welfare regimes, employment is the only means to ensure child survival.

‘Being there’ and emotionally available to children can also be rewarding for fathers and mothers alike but difficult to combine with work which entails long weekly working hours or anti-social hours. Using US time use data Yeung et al (2001:11) have been able to estimate that:

“for every hour a father is at work, there is an associated one-minute decrease in time a child spent with him on weekdays”.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored fathers and work-life balance issues. It began with the rhetorical question ‘Can fathers have it all- a satisfying job and time to connect and sustain good relationships with their children and partners? It ends with the question Do fathers want it all? Even though these may be ‘first world’ questions they are relevant to increasing numbers of children and their parents. As Moss (2000: 172) has observed, for employed parents their prime working years have become a period when many are running around like ‘headless chickens’ ‘facing an ever increasing workload and considerable financial pressures, trying to fit too much into a finite day’.

In terms of child welfare, parental care in the form of *time and sensitivity* as well as *economic provision*, is of course essential. Both domains are crucial, and neither emotional nor financial security alone is a sufficient basis for optimal child outcomes. The relative influence of *money over quality of parental care and the optimum engagement of mothers and fathers in both domains is still not fully understood*. So the extent to which parental and non-parental investment in care can be offset against investment in financial resources in bringing up children, or the general balance between market and non-market care behaviour for later child well-being is not yet known. 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, 2004). Clearly the age of the child is a crucial variable in this process. Infant care is needed on a 24/7 basis but as children get older, and for instance go to school, the time they need to be directly cared for by parents reduces. Children's own personal schedules and choice about how they spend their time also become more important creating complex co-ordination activity between children and parents especially for after-school times and holiday periods.

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 wellbeing, 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'.

Paternal involvement in the care of children is higher when mothers are employed, particularly when mothers work full time, but direct equity is rare and compensatory male domestic engagement appears targeted in childcare and not routine housework. In turn, parental equity in hours invested in economic provisioning is also rare. Mothers continue to work shorter hours than fathers, either through constraint or choice. The lack of equal caring in practice, combined with the continued high housework component to women's caring, can create feelings of overload and unfairness amongst mothers. In turn more fathers, particularly younger and more educated cohorts, are expressing disappointment in missing out on time with their children, but as yet unable or not wishing to reduce working time.

The manner in which societies, parents and children manage the *care mix*, and the extent to which economic imperatives, parental work patterns and children's quality of life dovetail, is both a policy problem and a personal issue. Personal solutions are influenced by the options realistically available within different societies with their unique governmental policies and welfare regimes. In all types of families and societies parental involvement and investment in children is a trade-off between money, time and care. 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, or of course children, whilst ensuring at a societal level economic productivity. Both gender and generation are relevant dimensions in developing sustainable work-life balance policy approach.

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