

## 6. Fatherhood

### **UN Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality (extract)**

**Forty-eighth session, 1-12 March 2004**

The Commission urges UN agencies, Governments, the private sector, NGOs, and other stakeholders, to:

- 'Promote understanding of the importance of fathers, mothers, legal guardians and other caregivers, to the well being of children and the promotion of gender equality and of the need to develop policies, programmes and school curricula that encourage and maximize their positive involvement in achieving gender equality...
- 'Create and improve training and education programmes to enhance awareness and knowledge among men and women on their roles as parents, legal guardians and caregivers and the importance of sharing family responsibilities, and include fathers as well as mothers in programmes that teach infant child care development...'

### **The Council of the European Union**

#### **Conclusions on men and gender equality (extract)**

**30 November and 1 December 2006**

The Council of the European Union:

- 'encourages the development, from early childcare and education, of pedagogic practices aimed at eliminating gender stereotypes, also paying attention to educational methods and tools that improve the capacity and potential of boys and men to care for themselves and others...'

## Introduction

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## European trends

Since the 1970s, demographic changes across Europe – including declining fertility, ageing of the population, falling marriage rates, an increase in relationship breakdown and a growth in cohabitation – have resulted in a diversification of fathering models and networks.<sup>218</sup> There is a growing minority of households without resident fathers, but also evidence of increasing contact between non-resident fathers and their children. Many fathers have active relationships with children in different households and with different biological parents.<sup>219</sup>

The traditional division of labour between men (as ‘breadwinners’) and women (as ‘carers’) has also been strongly influenced by shifting employment patterns over recent decades, both in the UK and Europe. Such trends include the significant increase in women’s labour force participation, the decline in what have been regarded as ‘men’s jobs’ (e.g. in factories, mining, shipbuilding), the introduction of new technology and a growth in transnational migration (See section on ‘Work’, page 45).

From the 1990s onwards, there has been an increasing policy focus across Europe on fatherhood, including a rapid expansion of paternity and parental leave provision targeted at fathers (particularly in Nordic countries). Whilst there is also a greater cultural expectation that fathers will participate more actively in caring for children, and a growing understanding of the important roles fathers play in children’s well-being, there are still many social and economic barriers to greater direct caregiving by fathers – and substantial numbers of men and women retain more traditional attitudes to gendered childcare roles. Although findings from a cross-European network suggest that increase in actual direct childcare by men has been modest in many countries,<sup>220</sup> there is evidence that change has been more extensive in the UK.

For the future, the continuing pay gap between men and women is likely to impede moves to greater sharing of caring responsibilities, but there are signs that young people increasingly endorse more egalitarian attitudes involving less polarised gender roles.<sup>221</sup> Alongside this trend, growing cultural and religious diversity will generate a rich mix of fathering models, and a contrasting emphasis on the importance of male elders.<sup>222</sup>

## Fathers, work and care in the UK

Being an economic provider is one way in which fathers demonstrate ‘care’ for children, and breadwinning is still seen by many as an important part of their identity. This commitment to financial provision is combined with a growing interest in being ‘involved’ at home. According to the latest British Social Attitudes report,<sup>223</sup> in 1989 one-third of men (32 per cent) agreed that ‘a man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family’, but two decades later this proportion has nearly halved to 17 per cent.<sup>224</sup>

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218. There are differences between countries. For example, in northern Europe, marriage appears to be less popular than in southern or eastern European countries; whereas cohabitation is more popular.

219. O’Brien M. (2004) *Social Science and Public Policy Perspectives on Fatherhood in the European Union*, in Lamb M.E. (ed.), *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, Fourth Edition, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons

220. Hearn J., Pringle K. (2006) *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Pringle K. et al. (2006) *Men and Masculinities in Europe*, Whiting and Birch

221. Scott J., Brown M., Alwin D. (1998) *Partner, parent, worker: Family and gender roles*, in Jowell R., Curtice J., Park A., Brook J., Thomson K., Bryson C. (eds.) *British and European social attitudes: How Britain differs*, Aldershot: Ashgate

222. O’Brien M. (ibid.)

223. Crompton R., Lyonette C. (2008) *Who does the housework? The division of labour within the home*, British Social Attitudes, 24th report, National Centre for Social Research, SAGE

224. It is of course hard to disentangle what men and women say, what they believe, and what they do in practice, and these issues are often conflated in the fatherhood literature.

In practice, fathers can find these discourses hard to reconcile. On becoming parents, couples tend to adjust their working arrangements, with many women shifting to part-time (and lower paid) work. Meanwhile, fathers in Britain work long hours, and longer hours than non-fathers,<sup>225</sup> reflecting their generally higher incomes and a stronger emphasis than for mothers on their role as 'providers' – 91 per cent of working men are employed full-time prior to having children, while 96-97 per cent of working fathers with a pre-school child or a youngest child of school age are full-time.<sup>226</sup> They also work much longer hours than their EU counterparts; nearly two-fifths of British fathers are regularly engaged in paid employment for more than 48 hours per week (the EU Working Time Directive maximum), and around one in eight work over 60 hours.<sup>227</sup>

Fathers' involvement in caring for children under five years old in the UK has risen from less than 15 minutes a day in the mid-1970s to two hours by the late 1990s during the week, and more at the weekend.<sup>228</sup> 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 the time that women do on childcare and other activities with dependent children.<sup>229 230</sup> It is often argued, with some justification, that fathers tend to participate more in education and play rather than routine physical care,<sup>231</sup> however the trend is also towards greater convergence in what mothers and fathers do.<sup>232</sup> Nevertheless, fathers' involvement in housework remains relatively low.<sup>233 234</sup>

Surveys have found a narrowing gap in the time spent by fathers and mothers in supporting the family (either through paid employment, childcare or housework). But whilst the experience of these parenting activities varies (e.g. in terms of time and satisfaction), paid employment generally retains a higher status.<sup>235</sup>

Although the vast majority of men look forward to an involved parenting role, the reality of caring for a baby can challenge their sense of being able to control their lives,<sup>236</sup> and can leave them feeling isolated and undervalued – as can also be the experience of new mothers. For many fathers (and mothers), the period around the birth of a child can be a difficult transition,<sup>237</sup> and fathers are

225. However fatherhood status is not a good predictor of the number of hours worked; in fact, hours of work are more closely related to age, form of economic activity, occupation, earnings, and partner's working time. See Dermott E. (2006) *The Effect of Fatherhood on Men's Patterns of Employment*, Swindon: ESRC

226. The changes for women are dramatic, and go in the opposite direction. Eighty-five per cent of working women are in full-time employment before having children, but once they become mothers only one-third of those who have pre-school children and work are employed full-time. See Paull G., *Children and Women's Hours of Work*, *The Economic Journal*, February 2008

227. O'Brien R., Shemilt I. (2003) *Working Fathers: Earning and Caring*, London: Equal Opportunities Commission

228. O'Brien R., Shemilt I. (ibid.)

229. O'Brien M. (2005) *Shared caring: bringing fathers into the frame*, Working Paper Series No. 18, Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission

230. Note that most studies showing an increase in fathers' involvement are based on couples, and leave out non-resident fathers.

231. Pleck J. H. (1997) *Parental involvement: levels, sources and consequences* in Lamb M.E. (ed.) *The role of the father in child development*, New York: Wiley

232. Sayer L., Bianchi S.M. and Robinson J. P. (2004) *Are parents Investing less in children?: Trends in mothers' and fathers' time with children*, *American Journal of Sociology*

233. For example, one recent study found that nearly eight in ten people (77 per cent) with partners say that the woman usually or always does the laundry, a similar proportion to that found in 1994 (81 per cent). Men and women also disagree when it comes to saying how much of the housework they do. Two-thirds of women (68 per cent) say that in their relationship they usually or always do the cleaning – but only 54 per cent of men say this of their partner. See Crompton R., Lyonette C. (2008) *Who does the housework? The division of labour within the home*, British Social Attitudes, 24th report, National Centre for Social Research, SAGE

234. O'Brien M. (2005) (ibid.)

235. O'Brien M. (2005) (ibid.)

236. Lupton D., Barclay L. (1997) *Constructing Fatherhood: Discourses and Experiences*, London: SAGE

237. This is evidenced by the particular risk of domestic violence during this period. See Taylor D., What he did seems inhuman, *Guardian*, 2 April 2008

particularly ill-prepared.<sup>238</sup> Antenatal and parenting education tends to stress the importance of the link between mother and child, and mothers are encouraged to seek out information, which is widely available and targeted primarily towards them. Conversely, fathers are more ignorant than mothers about the services that may be available to them. Many fathers follow the mother's lead in relation to the birth – and this may set the tone for parenting responsibilities and practices into the future.<sup>239</sup>

## The impact of fathers' involvement

'Father-child relationships – be they positive, negative or lacking – have profound and wide ranging impacts on children that last a lifetime, particularly for children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.'

Department for Education and Skills (2007) 'Every Parent Matters'

Recent studies assessing the impact of father-involvement in the early years on later child outcomes confirm the importance of early paternal investment in caring across a wide range of outcomes. For example, in dual-earner families where mothers work full-time in the first year of children's lives, increased father involvement can protect child welfare.<sup>240</sup> High levels of father support for mothers can also promote breastfeeding.<sup>241</sup>

Whereas earlier research tended to focus on mothers, data from the recently available Millennium Cohort Study,<sup>242</sup> with a large sample of fathers, show that children were more likely to have developmental problems if their father had: not used their employer's flexible working options; allowed the mother to do all the home-based childcare instead of sharing; taken only annual or sick leave around the time of the birth, compared with a mixture of paternity and annual leave; or taken no leave around the time of the birth. There is also some evidence that father-involvement which is supportive and affectionate is related to positive educational outcomes for children.<sup>243</sup>

Despite the specific positive outcomes identified above, father-child relationships are part of a wider web of family and social relationships. Lewis and Lamb therefore conclude<sup>244</sup> that '*all family relationships are highly interrelated and it is difficult to single out individual relationships as unique determinants of child development*'. For them, rather than suggesting that fathers 'make some magical contribution', '*the quality of father-child relationships is simply a marker of the quality of all the relationships within families...*'. The same, of course, is likely to be the case where mothers' influence is deemed positive.

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238. Kearney J., Mansson S-A., Plantin L., Pringle K., Quaid S. (2000) *Fatherhood and masculinities: A comparative study of ideals and realities of fatherhood and masculinity in Britain and Sweden*, Sunderland, England: University of Sunderland, Centre for Social Research and Practice

239. Fletcher R., Silberberg S., Galloway D. *New Fathers' Postbirth Views of Antenatal Classes: Satisfaction, Benefits, and Knowledge of Family Services* Journal of Perinatal Education, Volume 13, Number 3, Summer 2004

240. Gregg P., Washbrook, E. (2003) *The effects of early maternal employment on child development in the UK*. University of Bristol: CMPO Working Paper Series

241. Scott, J.A., Landers, J., Hughes, R., Binns, C.W. (2001) *Factors associated with the initiation and duration of breast feeding amongst two populations of Australian women*, Journal of Paediatrics & Child Health, 37, 254-261

242. Dex S., Ward K. (ibid.)

243. Goldman R. (2005) *Fathers' Involvement in their Children's Education*, London: National Family and Parenting Institute

244. Lewis C., Lamb M. (2007) *Understanding Fatherhood: a review of recent research*, Lancaster University, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

There has also been a significant change in fathers' accounts of being a father. The notion of father as 'breadwinner' continues to underpin male identity; however there is evidence that many fathers have expanded their understanding of the economic provider role to encompass 'caring' (e.g. as a protector/playmate for children).<sup>245</sup> This can create 'role strain', especially for those fathers who work long hours – and especially for those in dual-earner families. Whilst many men express joy and elation on becoming a father, sustaining this enjoyment depends on the extent to which they can successfully integrate their 'provider' and 'involved father' roles. For some, the financial dependency of the family upon them, and working long hours or away from home, can leave them dissatisfied; they feel they are missing out, vulnerable to and fearful of criticism for being a 'bad father' and engaged for long periods of time in activities that are insufficiently valued.<sup>246</sup>

Fathers may need more support to develop their relationships with their children. Research amongst boys<sup>247</sup> in particular reveals a high level of disappointment with their fathers. In one study, most regarded their mothers as *'more sensitive and emotionally closer to them than their fathers who were seen to be more jokey, but also more distant and detached.'* Many children wish to see more of their fathers, and this is especially the case in relation to non-resident parents.<sup>248</sup> Mothers are more likely to be seen as a source of help and emotional support.<sup>249</sup>

A common public perception is that children, especially boys, need fathers as 'male role models' if they are to become appropriately masculine, and that father absence is almost invariably harmful.<sup>250</sup> But fathers' identities and contributions are hugely diverse, and the research on child outcomes indicates that children benefit in similar ways from specific behaviours by their fathers and mothers. This suggests that there is no one identikit model of fatherhood or masculinity that is uniquely beneficial to boys (or indeed to girls), nor do children need different things from their fathers and mothers. However, there remains a lack of clarity in popular discourse about what qualities men should model, and how, perhaps reflecting the absence of any popular consensus about men's and fathers' roles with children.<sup>251</sup>

What is clearer is that positive parenting by the mother or the father (and ideally both, sharing the tasks and the stresses) makes more difference to children's outcomes than the simple presence of the father per se.<sup>252</sup> Positive father and mother involvement or care includes common factors 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.'*<sup>253</sup>

Much of the literature outlined above presents an encouraging picture of increasingly involved fathers having a positive impact on child development. Nevertheless, it is also true that the behaviour of some fathers presents serious risks to mothers and children. A major NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) study of child maltreatment,<sup>254</sup> based on the views

245. Featherstone B., *Contemporary Fathering: Theory, Policy and Practice*, Bristol: Policy Press (forthcoming)

246. Henwood, K.L., Procter, J. (2003). 'The 'good father': Reading men's accounts of paternal involvement during the transition to first time fatherhood, *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 42(3)

247. Frosh S., Phoenix A., Pattman R. (2002) *Young Masculinities*, Basingstoke: Palgrave

248. Dunn J., Deater-Deckard K. (2001) *Children's views of their changing families*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

249. Frosh S., Phoenix A., Pattman R. (ibid.)

250. A similar, but slightly more developed, academic perspective is that of 'generative fathering', which focuses on the strengths of fathers' relationships with sons, however this concept suffers from the same problems as the more 'public' notion of "positive male role models." See, for example, Hawkins A.J., Dollahite D.C. (eds.) *Generative fathering: Beyond deficit perspectives*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

251. Cameron C., Moss P., Owen C. (1999) *Men in the Nursery: gender and caring work*, London: SAGE

252. Flood M. (2003) *Fatherhood and Fatherlessness*, The Australia Institute

253. O'Brien M. (2005) (ibid.).

254. Cawson P. et al, (ibid.)

of young adults, found fathers were consistently less likely to be seen as offering closeness, support and good role models than were mothers. Moreover, 20 per cent of interviewees were sometimes really afraid of their fathers and seven per cent were sometimes really afraid of their mothers (i.e. almost three times less).<sup>255</sup>

It is sometimes argued that mothers and fathers are equally likely to maltreat their children (through physical or emotional abuse, or neglect). But given that women are much more likely to be involved in the day-to-day care of children, the percentage of incidents involving men is disproportionate.<sup>256</sup> Moreover, fathers are more likely than mothers to inflict severe punishment. In addition, over 90 per cent of all child sexual abuse is perpetrated by known males – particularly brothers – and approximately one-third of this involves physical force.<sup>257</sup>

## Diversity amongst fathers

As a result of the factors outlined above (See 'European trends'), fatherhood is an increasingly complex and dynamic experience. For example:

Ten per cent of all families in the UK are stepfamilies and increasing numbers of children live with **stepfathers**.<sup>258</sup> Over 80 per cent of stepfamilies consist of the biological mother and a stepfather – and seven times as many resident step-parents are male than female. Legal definitions of fathering continue to stress the importance of biological links between men and children,<sup>259</sup> and specific support for stepfathers with the issues they face (e.g. negotiating a new role, conflicting loyalties, discipline) is minimal.

The numbers of **lone fathers** has increased threefold since 1970, to 178,000,<sup>260</sup> but they are still only 10 per cent of lone parents overall. In practice, lone fathers often seem to rely heavily (as do lone mothers) on relatives – particularly female relatives – for assistance.<sup>261</sup>

**Birth fathers** whose children have been placed for adoption have been insufficiently researched; one study challenges conventional assumptions, and shows that '*men's absence from the adoption process is not necessarily a matter of choice or an indication of a lack of concern for their child*'.<sup>262</sup> Birth fathers lack a legal right to any involvement in adoption proceedings when they do not have 'parental responsibility'.

Many **grandfathers** are actively engaged with grandchildren, and – like grandmothers – feel a strong emotional closeness with them. Grandparents, particularly grandmothers, play a key role as a source of childcare and practical support. Grandfathers are less likely to see grandchildren frequently if they are not living with their wife.<sup>263</sup>

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255. Figures here include stepfathers and stepmothers

256. For example, the influential NSPCC prevalence study found that, for the 25 per cent of the whole sample who experienced physical violence during childhood, the person responsible was most often the mother (49 per cent) or father (40 per cent). See Cawson P., Wattam C., Brooker S., Kelly G. (2000) *Child Maltreatment in the United Kingdom: A study of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect*, London: NSPCC and Cawson P. (2002) *Child Maltreatment in the Family: the experiences of a national sample of young people*, London: NSPCC

257. May-Chahal C. (2006) *Gender and Child Maltreatment: The Evidence Base*, *Social Work & Society*, Volume 4, Issue 1

258. The composition of stepfamilies varies significantly according to factors such as the age and number of children, social class and ethnic background. Stepfamilies also tend to be larger than biological families, and family incomes lower.

259. Lewis, C. (2000) *A Man's Place in the Home: Fathers and Families in the UK*, Foundations 440, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

260. Office for National Statistics (2005) *Focus on families*, ONS.

261. Barker, R.W. (1994) *Lone Fathers and Masculinities*, Aldershot: Avebury

262. Clapton G. (2003) *Birth Fathers and their Adoption Experiences*, London: Jessica Kingsley

263. Clarke L., Roberts C. (2003) *Grandparenthood: Its Meaning and its Contribution to Older People's Lives*, Research Findings 22, ESRC

The impact of fathers' different identities is also becoming of increasing interest to researchers and policy-makers, as the experience of fatherhood is cross-cut by issues of age, race, class, disability, faith and sexual orientation. Below we highlight some key aspects:

**Young fathers**, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are most at risk of becoming disengaged from their parenting responsibilities;<sup>264</sup> they are often characterised as 'irresponsible' or 'feckless'<sup>265</sup> and viewed with distrust and excluded by service providers.<sup>266</sup> However, many voice a desire for information, advice and inclusion.<sup>267</sup>

The limited research with **black and minority ethnic fathers** in the UK has tended to focus narrowly on the effects of 'father absence' among African Caribbean fathers; however there is evidence of non-resident fathers contributing in other ways to their children's lives.<sup>268</sup> Recent work indicates British-Punjabi fathers express a strong desire to provide for the family.<sup>269</sup> Fathers from some South-Asian communities are more likely to be unemployed or self-employed, highlighting the importance of understanding the relationship between ethnicity and social class. Although no research has yet been done, it is likely that fatherhood in Islamic families will be a focus for future research.

There are a small but increasing number of **gay fathers**, with fostering and adoption services and support groups emerging.<sup>270</sup>

There is currently little research literature on **fathers of children with disabilities or chronic illness**. Whilst fathers and mothers share many of the same experiences and responses to being a parent of a disabled child, there are some differences,<sup>271</sup> and relationships tend to be more 'gendered' than in other families. Fathers tend to be less involved with their disabled than their non-disabled children, partly because they tend to be more involved in physical activities.<sup>272</sup> There are significant barriers for disabled children and their parents in accessing services, including lack of skilled staff and equipment, and negative attitudes. In relation to **fathers who are disabled**, even less research is available; they tend to be invisible to service providers, and at disproportionate risk of social exclusion.<sup>273</sup>

264. Quinton D., Pollock S., Golding J. (2002) *The Transition to Fatherhood in Young Men*, ESRC: Trust for the Study of Adolescence; Dennison C. (2004) *Teenage pregnancy: an overview of the research evidence*, NHS: Health Development Agency.

265. Some young single fathers may experience praise by virtue of being a lone male parent undertaking an unusual role, but this is very much a minority experience. See Hirst J., Formby E., Owen J. University of Sheffield (2006) *Pathways into Parenthood: Reflections from three generations of teenage mothers and fathers*, Sheffield Hallam University

266. Ashley C., Featherstone B., Roskill C., Ryan M., White S. (2006) *Fathers Matter: Research findings on fathers and their involvement with social care services*, London: Family Rights Group

267. Quinton D., Pollock S., Golding J. (ibid.)

268. Phoenix A., Husain F. (2007) *Parenting and Ethnicity*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

269. Warin J. Solomon Y., Lewis C., Langford W. (1999) *Fathers, Work and Family Life*, London: Family Policy Studies Centre

270. Mallon G. (2004) *Gay Men Choosing Parenthood*, New York: Columbia University Press

271. Harrison J., Henderson M., Leonard R. (2007) *Different Dads: fathers' stories of parenting disabled children*, London: Jessica Kingsley

272. SCIE (2005) Research briefing 18: *Being a father to a child with disabilities: issues and what helps*, London: Social Care Institute for Excellence.

273. Kilkey M. (2007) *Disabled Fathers: Identifying a research agenda*, Working Papers in Social Sciences and Policy No. 20, University of Hull

## The legal and policy framework

'Nothing can ever rival or match the joy of becoming a father, and knowing what I can pass on to my children only adds to that'.<sup>274</sup>

Prime Minister, Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP

In the main, the policy of the Labour Government has tended to stress the need to take account of and support the positive impact that fathers can have on their children's lives, and in sympathy with arguments about the need to remove institutional barriers to them spending more time with their children and to support fathers' as well as mothers' parenting roles.<sup>275 276</sup> At the same time, the 'Respect' agenda has emphasised the importance of holding irresponsible parents to account; in line with this approach, there has been a continuing focus on the avoidance by some fathers of their responsibilities (e.g. in relation to child support). However, there has been less attention paid to the need to offer support to non-resident parents.

Whilst there are signs of a new approach, there are therefore also elements of continuity with the stance of previous Conservative administrations, which were largely preoccupied with restoring the economic obligations of fathers (e.g. through the setting up of the Child Support Agency). Current Conservative Party thinking appears to reflect the 'Social Justice Commission' report,<sup>277</sup> which argues that 'dadlessness' exacerbates children's underachievement, and that supporting marriage more strongly is essential. But recently a new strand has emerged, with the Leader of the Opposition voicing support for significant improvements to parental leave, and for this to be available for step-parents and lesbian partners.<sup>278</sup>

Over the last five years in particular, there has been increasing governmental emphasis on including fathers in policy and service delivery. However, the approach has not been coherent between or within departments, and local delivery has moved far more slowly than national policy frameworks.<sup>279</sup> Nevertheless, overall there has been a welcome trend to name explicitly 'fathers' and 'mothers' in key documents, moving away from framing policy in terms of 'parents', which often obscures the gendered implications of such policy.

The most positive promotion of father involvement is in the document 'Aiming High for Children',<sup>280</sup> the Government's response to the review on children and young people (as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review). This argues that: both fathers and mothers have the right to support from government to enable them to meet their responsibilities; services tend to be mother-focused and do not yet fully recognise the key support role of fathers; and funding through Children's Centres will increase so they can reach out to disadvantaged parents – and fathers in particular.

This agenda properly emphasises the importance of supporting fathers and mothers, and encouraging fathers to devote more time and priority to caring and housework. However, rhetoric

274. Quoted in Brown S., McNeil G. (2008) *Dads: A Celebration of Fatherhood from Britain's Finest and Funniest*, Ebury Press

275. Williams, F. (1998) *Troubled masculinities in social policy discourses: fatherhood*, in *Men, Gender Divisions and Welfare*, in Popay, J., Hearn, J. and Edwards, J. (eds.), London: Routledge

276. Williams, F. (ibid.)

277. Social Justice Policy Group (2006) *Breakdown Britain: Interim report on the state of the nation*

278. Mulholland H., Family-friendly moves could challenge Labour, *the Guardian*, 15 March 2008

279. The Treasury/DfES policy document 'Every Child Matters' argued in 2003 that 'We should recognise the vital role played by fathers as well as mothers'. The DfES report *Every Parent Matters* (2007) also states that: 'Irrespective of the degree of involvement they have in the care of their children, fathers should be offered routinely the support and opportunities they need to play their parental role effectively'

280. HM Treasury/DfES (2007) *Aiming High for Children*

and policy measures to strengthen fathers' involvement can cause tensions – either for those mothers who see their primary role as looking after children and running the home, or for some fathers who may be resistant to efforts to involve them at home – and service providers need to be sensitive to these tensions in their work with parents.

Promoting more 'involved' fatherhood means acknowledging and working with the significant issue of men's violence to women and children, routinely encountered in the child protection caseloads of front-line staff such as the police and social workers.<sup>281 282</sup> This suggests the importance of policy and practice engaging more actively and more often with fathers when they are abusive (as well as when they are not), and greater joining up between the agenda of different government departments in relation to fatherhood and to violence against women and children.

Below we highlight some key policy areas:

### Leave arrangements

'With regard to the impact of family responsibilities, the most pressing need is to encourage men to take up parental leave and flexible working, and to make sure that when they wish to share the day-to-day care of their children with their partners, they are not penalised for doing so – there would be little point in transferring the disadvantage from women to men'.

Equality and Human Rights Commission, Submission on the Sixth Periodic Report of the UK to the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), June 2008

#### Significant changes were introduced in leave policy in April 2003:

Fathers have been entitled to two weeks paternity leave, paid at a partial wage replacement rate. A 2005 survey reported increased leave-taking by fathers; nearly 80 per cent of fathers who took time off took paid paternity leave, sometimes in combination with other forms of leave.<sup>283</sup>

Fathers and mothers have had rights to take up to 13 weeks unpaid parental leave each during the first five years of their child's life, or 18 weeks for parents of children with a disability. Take-up has been very low, both for mothers and fathers – in 2005, eight per cent of fathers had taken some parental leave within 17 months of their child's birth, three-quarters for less than a week.<sup>284</sup>

Parents with children under age six (or with dependent children with a disability under age 18) have had new rights to request flexible working arrangements. Employers are now under an obligation to consider these requests and can only refuse where there is a clear business ground for doing so. In 2005, 47 per cent per cent of mothers worked flexitime compared to just 17 per cent in 2002, and almost triple (11 per cent to 31 per cent) the number of new fathers worked flexibly.<sup>285</sup> However, fathers are less likely to be granted a request to work flexibly than mothers.

Parents also have the right to take time off work to deal with an emergency involving someone who depends on them. Both fathers and mothers take unpaid leave to look after children (e.g. when a child is ill) but the uptake is lower for fathers.<sup>286</sup>

281. Hearn J. (1999) *The Violences of Men*, London: SAGE

282. Scourfield J. (2006) *The challenge of engaging fathers in the child protection process*, in *Critical Social Policy* Vol 26 (2)

283. Smeaton D., Marsh A. (2006) *Maternity and Paternity Rights and Benefits: Survey of Parents 2005*. Employment Relations Research Series No. 50. Department of Trade and Industry

284. Smeaton D., Marsh A. (ibid.)

285. Smeaton D., Marsh A. (ibid.)

286. O'Brien R., Shemilt I. (ibid.)

In practice, fathers in higher occupational groups are more likely to have access to longer paternity leave, to have their statutory pay entitlement topped up by their employer, and to have greater access to flexible working. In contrast, fathers in lower-paid manual occupations (and Pakistani and Bangladeshi fathers) are more likely to use part-time working and special shifts; such working arrangements may not be a positive choice, but instead reflect their limited employment opportunities and concentration in certain types of work.<sup>287</sup>

The Government is in the process of extending leave provision to fathers, giving them the right to take up to 26 weeks Additional Paternity Leave (APL). But this is unpaid (and is therefore highly unlikely to be taken up by substantial numbers of fathers) and can only be taken in the first year of the child's life. It also depends on the mother having the entitlement in the first place, and will be conditional on her not using her full entitlement to Maternity Leave (which at 52 weeks is the longest period in Europe).

The Chief Executive of the Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently argued<sup>288</sup> there is a risk that the current approach to leave entitlements – and in particular the widening gap between the leave available to mothers and fathers – is entrenching the stereotype that it is women who do the caring, and undermining moves towards shared care (e.g. by failing to provide a workable choice for families who want the father to spend more time with the child).

Unfortunately, the notion of additional (well-remunerated) parental leave that could be used only by the father, along the lines of some Nordic schemes – has been rejected. Yet in Sweden, for example, the only leave policy initiative which has had any real impact on fathers has been these 'daddy months' (there are two now); not many men take much parental leave *except* for these months.

## Family separation

Separation often occurs in a climate of animosity, and presents problems for both resident parents (usually mothers) and non-resident parents (usually fathers) in adjusting to new roles and responsibilities. Whilst governmental responses have tended to focus on the legal system, there is a need to recognise and engage with the (gendered) psychological dimensions and complexity of these issues, whether in relation to the process of separation itself or the scale of depression which separation causes for resident and non-resident parents.<sup>289</sup> It is important to broaden the debate, from the narrow issue of legal rights and the enforcement of payments, towards improving support for relationships between both parents and their children before, during and after the emotional traumas of relationship breakdown.

It has been estimated that there are around two million non-resident fathers in the UK.<sup>290</sup> The nature and extent of the contact between non-resident fathers and their children varies and shifts over time. In the Millennium Cohort Study,<sup>291</sup> for example, 64 per cent of non-resident fathers were still in contact and involved with their nine to ten month old child. Overall, approximately 36 per cent of non-resident fathers paid maintenance for their nine to ten month old child, but where the father had more contact, he was also far more likely to pay maintenance. By age three, just under one-third of non-resident but involved fathers had drifted away from their earlier involvement. In contrast, some of those fathers who were described as having little or no interest when the child was aged nine to ten months (36 per cent), were said to be interested or very interested in their three year old child.

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287. EOC (2007) *Fathers and the Modern Family*

288. Nicola Brewer's speech at the launch of 'Working Better' consultation, Immarsat Conference Centre, London, 14 July 2008

289. Collier R., Sheldon S. (2008) *Fragmenting Fatherhood: A Socio-Legal Study*, Oxford: Hart Publications

290. Bradshaw J., Stimson C., Skinner C., Williams J. (1999) *Absent fathers?*, London: Routledge

291. Dex S., Ward K. (ibid.)

In recent years, ‘fathers’ rights’ groups have increasingly argued that fathers are the ‘new victims’ of family law systems, which have moved ‘too far’ in favour of mothers.<sup>292</sup> There is little doubt that politicians and policy-makers have taken notice of the growing ‘father’s rights’ movement, and that the movement has influenced the broader cultural context and increased the pressure for reform. Under the 2006 Children and Adoption Act, there is a responsibility on the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) to enforce contact orders,<sup>293</sup> if necessary by imposing penalties such as community service on resident parents. However, the Government has rejected the central demand of fathers’ rights groups for the introduction of a legal presumption to contact and shared responsibility. This refusal is supported by child welfare organisations, who have argued that a legal presumption prioritises the rights of adults and sidelines the views and best interests of children.<sup>294</sup>

Despite the claim that family courts favour women, in practice a pro-contact philosophy is increasingly common, both here and in many Western countries.<sup>295</sup> Indeed, judicial statistics show a low number of applications for contact are refused by the courts – less than one per cent, a figure that appears to be reducing over time. Whilst some argue this trend is enhancing child welfare by recognising the importance to children of sustained and substantial contact with both parents after separation, others believe it also gives cause for concern in the context of what is known about the extent of domestic violence.<sup>296</sup> Government guidelines do emphasise the need to take account of these risks in considering contact applications, but there is evidence of some children being put at risk through court decisions to order contact. Violence to mothers and children can not only occur when a father is resident, but can continue after they have left violent homes, and has a damaging effect on children who witness it. Figures from the 2001 British Crime Survey show that for more than one-third of women experiencing domestic violence (37 per cent), the abuse continued in one form or another, including stalking, after leaving the relationship.<sup>297</sup> There is also evidence of considerable overlap between men who are violent to their partners and who are also violent (physically and/or sexually) to their children<sup>298</sup> (see section on ‘Violence’, page 123).

Another source of huge tension has been child support arrangements. Prompted by the failure of the Child Support Agency and reflecting shifts in the social and legal climate (e.g. increasing public debate around parenting, responsibilities and rights, and childhood), in 2006 the Government proposed a new system. This will encourage parents to make their own arrangements, rather than apply a state-defined formula. Whilst this may work well for the small number of amicable separations, there are fears that in many cases lone parent mothers will get inadequate advice and support, and will feel pressurised into accepting inadequate financial support. Enforcement mechanisms against non-resident non-payers (usually fathers) will also be strengthened to include,

292. There is, however, considerable diversity between these groups. See for example Collier R., Sheldon S.(ibid.) and Featherstone B. (2009), *Contemporary Fathering: Theory, Policy and Practice*, Bristol: Policy Press

293. Although the impact of fathers’ rights groups has been limited, it could be argued that the contact provisions in Part 1 of the Children and Adoption Act 2006 (e.g. around enforcement) were a direct result of the reframing by Fathers4Justice of the debates/interventions by some judges.

294. See for example, Smart C., May V., Wade A., Furniss C., *Residence and Contact Disputes in Court: Research Report 6/2003*, Department for Constitutional Affairs and Smart C. (2004) *Equal Shares: Rights for Fathers or Recognition for Children*, Critical Social Policy, vol. 24(4). For further analysis of arguments in relation to the legal presumption, see Flood M. (2003) *Fatherhood and Fatherlessness*, The Australia Institute

295. Hunt J., Roberts C. (2004) *Child Contact with Non-Resident Parents*, Oxford: Family Policy Briefing 3, University of Oxford

296. Harrison C. (2006) *Damned if you do and damned if you don’t? The contradictions between public and private law*, in Humphreys C., Stanley N. (eds.), *Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Directions for Good Practice*, London: Jessica Kingsley

297. Of the female victims who had seen the perpetrator because of their children since they had split up, 29 per cent had been threatened, 13 per cent had been abused in some way, two per cent had had their children threatened, and in one per cent of cases the perpetrator had hurt the children. See Walby S., Allen J. (2004) *Domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking: findings from the British Crime Survey*, Home Office Research Study 276, London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate

298. Hester, M. (2006) *Making An Impact, children and domestic violence: a reader*, 2nd edition, Jessica Kingsley

for example, powers to take away passports or confiscate driving licences; some fathers' groups argue that such measures will undermine earnings and inhibit ability to pay maintenance.<sup>299</sup>

There is evidence that non-resident fathers on low incomes are often unable to afford appropriate accommodation post-separation in order to maintain contact with their child, or are pushed into poverty by funding second families. It is also important to recognise the continuing evidence that 'parents with care' (usually mothers) are parenting on low incomes too – and currently two-thirds of non-resident fathers pay no maintenance at all. Robust enforcement of child support, as part of the child poverty strategy, should sit alongside better provision for non-resident parents to develop and sustain their relationships with their children.

In contrast to the UK system, interest is rising in the more rounded approach of the Australian model, under which the formula for payments is based on a rational calculation of children's needs, and also offers support for many of the problems separated families face in terms of housing, work, benefits and relationships. The Australian model also involves the setting of a network of 'family relationship centres' and a national service to help fathers stay connected with their children.<sup>300</sup>

### Fathers on the birth certificate

If a child is born to an unmarried mother, the birth certificate can include the name of the father – and give him legal 'Parental Responsibility' with the mother – if he either attends the birth registration<sup>301</sup> or submits a form declaring he is the father. Both methods require the mother's agreement. If parents are married, then both names are added to the certificate automatically. At present around seven per cent of births are sole registered in the mother's name – 17 per cent of births among the unmarried.

In 2007, a Green Paper proposed to replace current arrangements with a system of automatic legal joint birth registration (with some exemptions). A research study commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions<sup>302</sup> argued that a legislative approach could be problematic,<sup>303</sup> and that non-legislative measures (including, for example, enhanced information, advice and support about birth registration) should be preferred.

However, the subsequent White Paper in June 2008 confirmed that legal changes would be introduced to make joint birth requirement a legal requirement for all unmarried parents, unless this is decided by the registrar to be '*impossible, impracticable, or unreasonable*'. Alongside this, the Paper sets out a series of non-legislative measures to support joint birth registration, and gives mothers a right to insist that the father registers on the birth certificate. It also gives a father a new right to insist that he is registered. There is no proposal for any sanctions against either parent for not identifying the father.

Opinion is divided as to the merits of some of the Government's proposals. There is a broad measure of agreement about the non-legislative proposals. For instance, the Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) strongly supports increasing the availability of information to help parents understand the implications of registering a birth jointly, and their responsibilities. The Fatherhood Institute (FI) argues that engaging with fathers around the birth is the 'golden opportunity moment' for intervention with them, and that these proposals may have a substantial knock-on effect in terms of fathers' engagement with services – and in their children's lives. The FI believes that the non-legislative proposals will impact significantly on culture and practice in maternity and teenage

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299. Robins J., 'DIY child support deals will hurt lone parents, warn campaigners', *The Observer*, 2 March 2008

300. Information from presentation by Professor Patrick Parkinson on child support in Australia, IPPR, 11/01/08

301. A change that was introduced in 2003.

302. Graham G., Creegan C., Bernard M., Mowlam A., McKay S. (2007) *Sole and joint birth registration: Exploring the circumstances, motivations and choices of unmarried parents*, Department for Work and Pensions, Research Report No. 463

303. Among the reasons given are that: for some mothers, sole registration is seen as being in the child's best interests; and a legislative approach would not be practical or appropriate, and would often result in the need for exemptions.

pregnancy services towards engaging with fathers in the antenatal period. The Institute supports the government proposal that, once every unmarried father is subject to a legally-enforceable duty to register his name on his baby's birth certificate, all these services must have a conversation with the mother about this fact, and must seek to engage with the father.

However, there is no consensus about the proposed legislative changes. Some organisations have argued that there is no compelling evidence for compulsory registration, and are concerned about the impact of legal intervention. For example, the FPI suggests that if a mother claims the father is abusive or violent and therefore seeks an exemption, and the father goes to court, it could put undue pressure on the mother when she is caring for a newborn baby and recovering from the birth.<sup>304</sup> Registrars themselves have also raised concerns about changes to their role and relationship with clients, moving them from being trusted recorders of facts to being investigators – and giving them power over decisions for which they feel ill-prepared. However, the FI argues that there would be sufficient safeguards in place. The new measures include provision for registrars to permit sole registration, and for a professional to advocate for this on the mother's behalf.<sup>305</sup> It believes the new legislation should prompt official intervention to minimise risk to the mother and child, and to change the father's behaviour, where necessary.

## Reproductive technologies

'While it was once entirely normative to treat paternity as a matter of pragmatics rather than biological truth, it is now almost impossible to keep secrets about biological paternity; those who seek to do so are increasingly identified as being outside appropriate moral boundaries'.

Smart C. (2007) *Personal Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press

For most of the twentieth century there was a preference for keeping family 'irregularities' secret, which has now been reversed to some extent.<sup>306</sup> It was felt for long periods that it was in the child's best interests for the husband simply to claim paternity, and indeed it was made lawful for husbands to register their legal paternity after the introduction of the Human Fertilization and Embryology Act (1990). The parents of children born through heterologous artificial insemination (AID) were also actively discouraged from telling their offspring about the nature of their conception. As late as the 1990s, the English courts were making decisions about paternity disputes which meant that the children could not undergo blood tests unless mothers were willing to expose their children to the possible knowledge that the man they thought was their father was in fact not biologically related to them.

Ideas about keeping paternity secret have changed, with increasing emphasis not only on the child's legal right to know the truth, but also on the belief that it is a psychological need. Fathers have become increasingly interested in establishing paternity, partly because proof can ease doubts, but also because it can provide relief from child support obligations.

In 2005, amendments to the Human and Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2005 allowed adult children of gamete donors access to identifying information about their donor; Donovan<sup>307</sup> suggests this reflects a shift in social trends in favour of the importance of genetic fathers. Diduck has also

304. National Family and Parenting Institute (2007) *Joint birth registration: promoting parental responsibility*, Green Paper response

305. This is similar to safeguards in child support legislation in many jurisdictions, where resident parents have been generally expected to provide the names of their children's other parent – unless their own or their children's safety would be compromised.

306. Smart C. (2007) *Personal Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press

307. Donovan C. (2006) *Genetics, Fathers and Families: Exploring the implications of changing the law in favour of identifying sperm donors*, *Social and Legal Studies*, 15(4)

308. Diduck A. (2007) 'If only we can use the appropriate terms to use the issue will be solved': *Law, identity and parenthood*, *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 19(4)

noted<sup>308</sup> that knowledge of one's genetic origins is said to be not only in the child's best interests but also their right under Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 and Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights 1950.

As far as genetic truths are concerned, the law and family policies have shifted to accommodate the new trend with remarkable speed. The encouragement of contact is one example. The practice of step-parent adoption has fallen out of favour (a new stepfather could adopt his wife's child by a previous marriage, thus legally excluding the biological father). Now the idea of multiple parents is common, with more than two adults able to apply for 'parental responsibility'. Smart notes both the possibilities, but also the vulnerabilities, this can create for all concerned trying to manage the complex relationships in these 'new' families.

Academic opinions vary on the increasing 'fragmentation' of fatherhood. This trend opens up new possibilities. For example, separating 'fatherhood' (the status of being a father) from 'fathering' (the practice of being a father) can be viewed optimistically,<sup>309</sup> emphasising what fathers, of all kinds, do rather than who they are. However, there are also dilemmas. In particular, the concern with genetic 'truth' can be restrictive,<sup>310</sup> re-emphasising the primacy of biological paternity over other forms.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill aroused great controversy in 2008. A key issue has been the provision that that IVF clinics no longer need to consider 'the need for a father' so formalising the right of lesbian couples to have test-tube babies.

## Service provision

'...much more can be done to release the potential improvements in outcomes for children through better engagement between fathers and services for children and families. This requires a culture change – from maternity services to early years, and from health visitors to schools – changing the way that they work to ensure that services reach and support fathers as well as mothers'.

HM Treasury/Department for Education and Skills (2007) 'Aiming High for Children'

A common criticism of services working with children and families is that staff spend most of their time working with mothers, and fathers and other male carers tend not to be engaged with<sup>311</sup> (especially if they lack legal 'parental responsibility' and/or are non-resident). On the one hand, it is argued that workers see women as ultimately responsible for caring for and protecting children, in a way that men are simply not expected to be. On the other, that fathers are denied effective support for their parenting role, and meaningful involvement in major decisions about their children, by not being engaged enough in statutory processes.<sup>312 313</sup> There is also sometimes a lack of confidence in children's services to engage with both mothers and fathers when they are in conflict.

It is important to recognise and respond to some of the tensions greater involvement of fathers in services may cause; for example, an increased male presence in what were formerly female-dominated services is likely to have significant implications for women and children – particularly those who have experienced violence from men. There are also issues for female workers in such

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309. Sheldon, S (2005) *Reproductive Technologies and the Legal Determination of Fatherhood*, *Feminist Legal Studies*, 13

310. Diduck A. (ibid.)

311. For a discussion of this in relation to child protection and domestic violence, see Farmer, E. (2006) *Using Research to Develop Child Protection and Child Care Practice*, in Humphreys C. and Stanley N.(eds.)(2006) *Domestic Violence and Child Protection*, London: Jessica Kingsley

312. Scourfield J. (2006) *The challenge of engaging fathers in the child protection process*, *Critical Social Policy*, Volume 26(2)

313. Ashley C., Featherstone B., Roskill C., Ryan M., White S. (ibid.)

settings.<sup>314</sup> And on the basis of the evidence from various caring professions that male workers are often promoted much more quickly than women with comparable skills, increasing the numbers of men in such professions may well mainly result in more male managers and not many more front-line male practitioners.

The 2007 Children's Plan<sup>315</sup> argues there is a '*need for public services to engage with both father and mother except where there is a clear risk to the child to do so*'. In line with this approach, a range of mainstream health,<sup>316 317</sup> education and child welfare services<sup>318</sup> are being encouraged to engage more actively with fathers, and various publications have emerged<sup>319</sup> on how to do this. But there are other services that engage with men as adults, but do not address them as fathers (e.g. mental health services, job centres and employment training provision).

One positive new parenting initiative ('Think Family'<sup>320</sup>) attempts to 'join up' local services more coherently in support of families 'at risk', based on the principles of a 'whole family' approach, the tailoring of support to particular needs and the building of family strengths and resilience.<sup>312</sup> This approach has the potential to support the parenting of disadvantaged fathers, and to tackle the factors that can lead them to be violent. The newly expanded role for Family Intervention Partnerships (which work holistically with families with serious social and family problems) also has great potential to expand effective and robust engagement with fathers in disadvantaged families.

The new Child Health Promotion Programme (2008) also emphasises the importance of maternity and child health services '*working routinely with both mothers and fathers (whether they are living together or not)*'. It requires that fathers and expectant fathers '*should be routinely invited to participate in child health reviews, and should have their needs assessed*'.

A recent development in working with violent men has been that of engaging with men simultaneously as perpetrators and fathers. This has been controversial as perpetrator and fathers' projects often have different emphases – the former prioritising control, the latter support.<sup>322</sup>

314. Featherstone B., Rivett M., Scourfield J. (2007) *Working with Men in Health and Social Care*, London: SAGE

315. Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) *The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures*, Cm 7280

316. For example, The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (DoH, 2004) '*supports a cultural shift in all service provision, to include fathers in all aspects of children's well-being*'.

317. *Teenage parents: Next Steps* (DCSF, 2007) emphasises the need to develop a positive approach that assumes that young fathers being involved during the pregnancy and birth period is beneficial for the mother and child.

318. One of the performance indicators for Children's Centres is that they address the issue of how far they are reaching the most excluded fathers. See the Sure Start Children's Centre Practice Guidance and Planning and Performance Management Guidance (DCSF, 2006)

319. Bartlett D., Burgess A. (2005) *Working with Fathers: Six Steps Guide*, London: Fathers Direct; Fatherhood Institute (2007) *Toolkit for Father-Inclusive practice*; Lloyd T. (2001) *What Works with Fathers?*, London: Working With Men

320. Social Exclusion Unit (2008) *Think Family: Improving the life chances of families at risk*, London: Cabinet Office

321. In practice, the initiative commits £16m to the establishment of a series of 'Family Pathfinder' projects to test and develop the 'think family' model and generate and share evidence of what works on the ground. It also embeds early intervention and prevention within the existing system of support and extends tailored family services to reach a wider range of vulnerable families (e.g. through Family Nurse Partnerships and Family Intervention Projects).

322. Featherstone B., Peckover S. (2007) *Letting Men Get Away with It?*, *Critical Social Policy* 27(2)

**North Solihull Children's Centres Network:** in North Solihull, Action for Children increased the number of fathers and male carers reached through its network of Children's Centres, and improved the service offered to fathers by a combination of three strands of development activity:

- promoting awareness of Children's Centre services in partnership with the Campaign for Learning to 'put dads in the picture' – free family photos for fathers and male carers out shopping, and information-sharing about available services;
- working with fathers and male carers to make existing services more father friendly;
- increasing the recruitment and the capacity of workers to respond through training and local networking.

As part of the Early Learning Partnerships Project, funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the aim was to widen father's participation in service delivery, increase their take-up of Children's Centre services to have a positive impact on their parenting skills and ability to help their young children learn and develop. To date, the project has engaged with over 500 fathers and male carers. Each activity, group, trip and mini project was developed and managed by fathers and male carers. The project has also disseminated best practice to professionals locally and nationally. The work North Solihull has been undertaking with fathers has been evaluated by the University of Oxford.

#### **Working with Pakistani Fathers and Children**

At Bradford YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), the (female) Parenting Project Worker involves fathers successfully in courses for the parents of young offenders but also works regularly with Asian dads in schools and community settings. To reach the Asian dads, she worked closely with a community leader, who encouraged some dads to come. They were mainly from one area in Pakistan, about the same age and worked together. They started with just an hour's workshop and an activity, something they 'wouldn't normally feel comfortable with': bowling, swimming, taking their kids to the cinema. Gradually the fathers took ownership, with the facilitators becoming the 'invited guests'. Four pilot sessions proceeded into a full eight-week 'Dads and Lads' course (although adapted to 'Dads and Kids' as girls were involved), then to a follow-on course, then snowballed into other courses with other fathers. Some were found via Learning Mentors at a local primary school, who identified boys with behaviour concerns (including lack of self-confidence) and contacted their dads.

Eight courses, reaching more than 100 fathers, have now been held. Had funding not been so scarce, there would have been more, as there's no shortage of interested fathers. One has trained as a 'Dads and Lads' facilitator; others deliver some workshop elements – the beginnings of capacity building and community cohesion. This autumn, fathers from one mosque, worried about local lads' progress, obtained their own funding – and approached YMCA Bradford to run a course for them.

## Recommendations

**The Government should implement concrete measures to encourage men to share parenting and other care responsibilities with women**, by developing leave entitlements and encouraging men to take them up, creating financial incentives for caring work by men, and establishing information and awareness-raising initiatives, as recommended by the EU Council of Ministers.<sup>323</sup>

**The Department for Children, Schools and Families should take a lead role in developing a cross-departmental strategy to support men's positive and active involvement in their children's lives**, in order to implement the strong policy framework provided by the Children's Plan and 'Every Parent Matters'.

323. Council of the European Union, Conclusions on Men and Gender Equality, 30 November and 1 December 2006

**The Government's plans to introduce Additional Paternity Leave should be implemented as rapidly as possible so that parents can choose which of them takes leave to look after their baby.** However, without remuneration at above income support level, this is likely to have very limited impact. The most effective policy for increasing fathers' engagement would be the introduction of a number of months of paid leave that can only be used by fathers – based on successful models for 'daddy months' in Scandinavia.

**Statutory paternity pay should be increased substantially to enable lower-paid dads in particular to take time off.** Entitlement to paternity pay should be extended to self-employed fathers, and made more flexible in its operation.

**Easily accessible relationship support should be made available to all families,** at whatever stage, and in whatever format, for those who want help to deal with relationship problems or to pre-empt them. This includes couple and family counselling.

**In relation to child support, the formula for payments should be based on a rational calculation of children's needs.** In addition, the Government should explore the lack of availability of suitable affordable housing where non-resident fathers can have their children to stay, and of sufficient 'contact centres' where they can meet with their children in a supportive environment.

**Central government should increase efforts to bring about a culture change in children's services.** These should include: detailed written guidance for local commissioners of children's services, and for operational managers and staff; an adequately resourced national promotion strategy; the piloting of approaches to developing father-inclusive children's services in a small sample of local authorities; and central funding to support local implementation.

**Training for all those working with children and families should equip them better to engage with women and men around their relationships,** changing roles and responsibilities and commitments to children – and in particular to address the tensions and strains in intimate relationships.

**Strategies for the children's workforce (and for those working with parents) should be developed to create a workforce capable of delivering father-inclusive services.** This would include amending relevant professional training and in-service training, and occupational standards.

**Antenatal, child welfare, education and health services should engage with fathers actively and routinely (whether abusive or not) and support them to fulfil their responsibilities,** whilst recognising the continuing importance of safety issues for mothers and children. Public service providers should use the Gender Equality Duty as a positive tool to design services around fathers' and mothers' diverse needs. Inspection and assessment processes should evaluate the effectiveness of local services in supporting father-child relationships. Local authorities should be required to publish data on how they are engaging with fathers, including those in socially-excluded groups.

**The issue of men's violence to women and children need to be addressed in all policies and programmes on fatherhood,** and in particular in relation to fathers' contact with children after divorce or separation. Whilst there is evidence that some perpetrator programmes are effective in achieving behaviour change among some (but not all) men,<sup>324</sup> there is a need for more programmes – and further evaluation of such programmes – that seek to address violent men as fathers.

**The Department for Children, Schools and Families should establish a research programme to improve understanding of fatherhood issues.** Research priorities should include: how fathers engage with social care services; understudied groups (e.g. stepfathers, non-resident fathers, fathers from black and minority ethnic or faith backgrounds, fathers of disabled children); the impact of fathers' involvement on outcomes for children in vulnerable families; children witnessing fathers' violence; and children's perspectives on fatherhood.

324. Gondolf E. (2002) *Batterer Intervention Systems*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE