

CHAPTER 1

FATHERING: A CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

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

FATHERS AND THE 'MODERN' FAMILY: THE CURRENT PICTURE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES: FATHERS ACROSS COUNTRIES

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

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

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

THE 'CONSEQUENCES' OF THE CHANGES

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

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

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

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

which precede separation and the psychological distress from losing a parent (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Similarly, the adverse outcomes of children in stepfather families might be because men who choose the step-parent relationship are negatively selected (lack of alternative opportunities, less attractive), and so are different from biological fathers in ways that lead to reduced investment and perhaps also more problems for children (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003).

CHILDREN OF LONE-PARENT FAMILIES: THE 'PATHOLOGY OF THE MATRIARCHY' VIEW

In general, empirical studies show lower attainments (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), earlier union formation, earlier entry into parenthood, more extra-marital fertility (Kiernan & Hobcraft, 1997), more partnership dissolution (Kiernan & Cherlin, 1999) and less psychological well-being (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999) in children of lone-parent families in comparison to children in two-parent intact families. This evidence has been used by many to support Moynihan's (1965) 'pathology of the matriarchy' hypothesis that the absence of a father is destructive to children, particularly boys, because it means that children will lack the economic resources, role models, discipline, structure and guidance that a father provides. However, recent studies have reported findings that cannot be neatly construed to fit with a 'pathology of matriarchy' view. For instance, in the USA, Biblarz and Raftery (1999) showed that, in line with an evolutionary view of parental investment, even with a significant socio-economic advantage, the sons from alternative male-headed households in their data (e.g. step-father and single-father families) did not have higher occupational achievements than those from single-mother families, and actually children from single-mother families had some advantages over children from other kinds of alternative families. Similarly, for Taiwan, Han, Huang and Garfinkel (2003) showed that although children in single-parent families had lower college attendance rates than children in two-parent families, when family income was taken into account, single-mother families were not significantly different from two-parent families on the outcome variables, and single-father families had significantly lower college attendance rates and educational expenditure. Earlier, Kiernan (1992) in the UK had shown that although bereaved children were no more likely than children brought up with both natural parents to make educational, occupational and demographic transitions at an early age, young men from stepfamilies were more likely to form partnerships and become fathers at an earlier age than their contemporaries from intact or lone-mother families. Kiernan also showed that for young

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women from both step- and lone-parent families the propensity to form unions in their teens, to have a child at an early age and to bear a child outside marriage was higher than for those who came from intact families, and that young people from step-families formed after death or divorce were most likely to leave home early, and for reasons of friction. Regarding children's psychological adjustment Amato and Keith's (1991) meta-analysis showed worse outcomes for children in stepfamilies than in single-mother families, and decreased well-being in girls (but increased well-being in boys) in stepfather families. Relatedly, studies looking at adolescent health outcomes associated with family structure show similar patterns. For example, Bjarnason and colleagues, who explored the role of family structure in alcohol use (Bjarnason et al., 2003a) and smoking (Bjarnason et al., 2003b) in adolescents from Cyprus, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom, showed that although adolescents living with both biological parents engaged less frequently in heavy alcohol use and smoked less than those living in any other arrangements, adolescents living with a single mother drank and smoked less than those living with a single father or with neither biological parent. Another recent study (Griesbach, Amos & Currie, 2003) comparing data from several European countries showed that although several risk factors were associated with higher smoking prevalence in all countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Scotland and Wales), even after risk factors were taken into account, there was an increased likelihood of smoking among adolescents in stepfamilies compared to adolescents in intact or in lone-parent families. Similarly, Demuth and Brown (2004) showed that although US adolescents in single-parent families were more delinquent than their counterparts residing with two biological parents, adolescents from single-father families were significantly more delinquent than those living in single-mother families. Hoffmann (2002), also in the USA, showed that adolescents who resided in single-parent or step-parent families were at heightened risk of drug use, with adolescents living in single-father families being at risk of both higher levels of use and increasing use over time. Patten et al. (1997) showed that although family structure was not related to depressive symptoms in their US adolescents' sample, significantly higher rates of depressive symptoms were found among adolescents who resided with parent(s) not perceived as supportive than those who lived with supportive parent(s), with girls being particularly vulnerable if they lived in a non-supportive, single-father household. In Finland, Luoma et al. (1999) showed that living with a single father was associated with having more externalising, school-related problems, while living with a stepfather was associated with having more internalising, home-related problems in their sample of 8–9 year olds. Exploring the role of family structure on even younger children's outcomes, Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen

and Booth (2000) showed that US 3-year-old children in two-parent families performed better than their counterparts in single-mother families on assessments of cognitive and social abilities, problem behaviour, attachment security and behaviour with mother, with the associations with separated–intact marital status becoming insignificant after controlling for mothers' education and family income. In England McMunn, Nazroo, Marmot, Boreham and Goodman (2001) showed that although the high prevalence of psychological morbidity among 4- to 15-year-old children of lone mothers was a consequence of socio-economic effects, disappearing when benefits receipt, housing tenure and maternal education were taken into account, socio-economic factors did not explain the higher proportion of psychological morbidity among children with step-parents. The consensus (but see Harris, 1998) is that the deterioration of economic conditions that usually results from family disruption is the major explanation for children's lower ability and achievement, although not necessarily the emotional and behavioural problems (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, Yeung & Smith, 1998). According to studies adopting a life-course adversity mode, a possible explanation for the weak link between a father's absence and a child's psychological adjustment might be that it is not the father's absence *per se* that is harmful for children, but rather that the stress associated with divorce or separation, family conflict, loss of a second parent, erosion of parental monitoring, or drop in family income may account for the relation between the father's absence and the child's outcomes (McLanahan, 1999). Another explanation (usually offered in genetically informative studies) is that, through genetic transmission, mothers and fathers who have a history of mental health problems both tend to form unstable relationships (Emery, Waldron, Kitzmann & Aaron, 1999) and have children who are at a greater risk for emotional and behavioural difficulties (Rhee & Waldman, 2002).

DIVORCE AS 'A BREAKDOWN OF THE MORAL ORDER'

However, although voices have been raised on both sides of the Atlantic (Coltrane & Adams, 2003; Walker, 2003) warning that claims that divorce reflects a breakdown of the moral order, and the portrayal of children as victims of divorce, legitimate the political objectives of specific interest groups and mask underlying issues of gender inequality, the rhetoric surrounding recent UK and US family policies is often dominated by idealised notions of the family of old (Lewis, 2001a) and looks to 'possibly disorienting and little-understood family change as a simple and persuasive explanation for contemporary social problems' (Ni Bhrolchain et al., 2000, p. 68). In linking poor child outcomes to family structure some researchers

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have pointed to the causal role of absent and uninvolved fathers in the development of children's behavioural and academic problems (Blankenhorn, 1995; Popenoe, 1996), leading some policy-makers to conclude that parents should be offered incentives to get married and remain married (Horn, 2001).

However, this has been criticised by many for various reasons, primarily because it offers more ideology than practical measures. For instance, Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) showed that it is not the decline of marriage that is discouraging responsible fathering. Rather, various social conditions inhibit involved parenting by unmarried and divorced men (unmarried teen fathers typically have low levels of education and job training, and so cannot easily contribute to the economic well-being of their children, and divorced fathers cannot sustain a positive emotional connection to their children after the legal system redefines their role from 'parenting' to 'visitation' or 'contact'). Henwood and Procter (2003) suggested that awareness of the various conflicting perspectives of the 'new fatherhood' model makes it possible to appreciate the different values and agendas that are playing out in contemporary discussion of men and family life. They described four such perspectives. The first offers the modest view of a father whose concern with sustaining relationships, rather than meeting expectations for male performance, provides children with the experience of being wanted by both parents. The second attempts to reinstate traditional family values by asserting men's 'rights' to retain their position as head of households over and above any competing claims about women's autonomy and children's needs for protection. The third questions the value society conventionally attaches to men being able to eschew their emotions and remain detached from relationships, but at the same time it adopts fixed and polarised views of what male and female parents can provide. Finally, the fourth reproduces hegemonic masculinity by portraying the image of the new (middle-class) man who is devoted and nurturing at home and successful outside it (thus enjoying the best of both worlds at little cost and much convenience). Empirical psychological research has also recently demonstrated that a narrow focus on family structure without a parallel focus on the quality of care that parents can provide may do some children more harm than good. Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi and Taylor (2003) showed that when fathers engaged in high levels of antisocial behaviour, the more time they lived with their children the more conduct problems their children had, and Foley et al. (2004) found that in two-parent families boys who lived with an alcoholic stepfather had fewer conduct disorder symptoms than boys who lived with an alcoholic biological father, although girls who lived with an alcoholic stepfather had more conduct disorder symptoms than girls who lived with an alcoholic biological father. Bos, van Balen and van den Boom (2004) recently

reviewed evidence showing that, compared to children in two-parent heterosexual families, children in planned lesbian families (two-mother families in which the child was born to the lesbian relationship) show no differences in outcomes such as social competence, behavioural adjustment and gender identity. In fact, studies on parenting behaviour showed that non-biological mothers in planned lesbian families have a superior quality of parent-child interaction than do fathers in heterosexual families (Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua & Joseph, 1995; Golombok, Tasker & Murray, 1997). On the other hand, concerns have been raised that hailing fathers' presence in families 'at all costs' could increase both domestic violence and child abuse rates. (A significant public health concern worldwide with WHO figures has shown that in every country where reliable, large-scale studies have been conducted, between 10% and 50% of women report that they have been physically abused by an intimate partner in their lifetime (World Health Organisation, 2000).)

Second, because the largely causal conclusions drawn in the literature examining the link between parental divorce and child adjustment are not justified, as the (overwhelmingly correlational) evidence is insufficient to allow the inference that divorce causes long-term adverse effects to the children (Ni Bhrolchain, 2001). Although most researchers now increasingly recognise and discuss the difficulties of establishing causal effects from cross-sectional or longitudinal data, there are still some problems with the usual interpretation of the empirical findings on the links between fathers' involvement or fathers' presence and children's 'outcomes', and with the proposed strategies to decrease fathers' absence or fathers' withdrawal in order to increase children's well-being. A problem with this kind of reasoning is that one assumes that father absence or father low involvement *causes* low well-being in children – a thesis not based on evidence. The research shows that fathers' low involvement or absence may be a 'correlate' (a measure somehow associated with the outcome) of low well-being in children, a 'sign' and 'symptom', 'concomitant' or 'consequence' of low well-being, and at best a 'risk factor' (a correlate shown to precede the outcome) for low well-being, but not a 'causal risk factor' (a risk factor that, when changed, is shown to change the outcome) for low well-being. Although terminological imprecision is increasingly avoided, researchers sometimes still seem to expect that 'bad fathering' is a causal risk factor for low well-being. However, causal effects should not be inferred from variations between individuals but should instead be inferred from changes within individuals (Kraemer, Stice, Kazdin, Offord & Kupfer, 2001), and so the term *causation* should only be reserved for variables that may change. Borrowing Loeber and Farrington's (1994) example, a study may demonstrate that even after controlling for other factors, male participants were more likely than female participants to be delinquents,

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which might lead some researchers to conclude that gender is a cause of delinquency.

With all this in mind, the following chapters explore links between fathering and child well-being (or 'good' children's outcomes), and between fathering and its antecedents in Britain. Before this, however, a brief description of what exactly is meant by 'fathering' and 'child well-being' is shown below.

WHAT IS FATHERING?

It is generally accepted that fathering is multifaceted and multidetermined, and more sensitive to contextual factors than mothering (Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998; Gerson, 1993). In the psychological literature, fathering is usually translated into father's presence status, and father's involvement. The empirical research on father absence and child outcomes largely overlaps with that on family structure/parental separation and child outcomes. In father-absent families the fathering dimensions that are usually explored in relation to child outcomes are non-resident fathers' economic support for their children, with US studies starting to also include the regularity of the child support payments, as well as other contributions that do not include the exchange of money, such as the purchase of clothes, presents, medical insurance and dental care. Other non-resident fathers' involvement indices typically include frequency (but also sometimes regularity) of contact (such as visits, phone calls, letters, e-mail, etc.) and, less often, quality of contact. Researchers have also recently stressed the importance of non-resident fathers' quality of parenting, or 'involvement' (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Recently, measures that assess non-resident fathers' involvement often use the same measures applied to resident fathers in intact families (Pasley & Brave, 2004).

In defining involvement, social scientists usually incorporate some of the following paternal functions that are common in many cultures, although the relative importance of each varies by culture. These are: *endowment*, acknowledging the child as one's own; *protection*, protecting the child from sources of potential danger and contributing to decisions that affect the child's welfare; *provision*, ensuring that the child's material needs are met; *formation*, socialisation activities, such as discipline and teaching; and *caregiving* (Gavin et al., 2002).

In many studies in English-speaking countries, father involvement is now usually taken to mean Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine's (1985, 1987) influential 'content-free' construction of *engagement* (direct interaction with

the child in the form of caretaking, play or leisure); *accessibility or availability* to the child (for example, cooking while the child plays), and *responsibility* for the child's welfare and care, which may involve no direct or indirect contact with the child (for example, making a dental appointment). Involvement has been measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Before this formulation the paternal characteristics and behaviours studied in father-present families were largely qualitative such as warmth, responsiveness, power or playfulness (Pleck & Stueve, 2001). Early father involvement measures did not consider endowment and financial support and tended to assume that the fathers were resident (Radin, 1982). In Lamb et al.'s (1985, 1987) formulation involvement is a content-free construct, concerning only the quantity of fathers' behaviour, time, or responsibility with their children. Although in general the assessment of behavioural, cognitive and emotional involvement of resident fathers has been done differently in different studies, behavioural involvement (reflecting the constructs of engagement, availability and responsibility) is usually measured with the frequency of the father's participation in caregiving activities (such as making meals, taking the child to the doctor/dentist/school, etc.), cognitive involvement is measured with reasoning, planning and monitoring, and emotional involvement is measured with warmth, affection and feelings of closeness. Recently researchers have pointed out that frequently studies using these indices, however, do not take into account the developmental stage of the children, and do not capture variations in father involvement across socio-economic and ethnic groups (Cabrera et al., 2004). In addition, numerous scholars criticised Lamb et al.'s formulation of the involvement construct as limited especially because of its narrow focus on time (e.g. Marsiglio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000) and the exclusion of breadwinning or economic providing (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001), especially since father's presence or father's income presence is not always associated with providing for the child (i.e. the father does not contribute to household expenses or his consumption of resources drains the family budget, especially if he spends the family's funds for personal items or services), and subsequently improved child status. In Guatemala, Kenya and Malawi, for instance, children in female-headed households are better nourished than children living with both their biological parents, and in Botswana children in female-headed households receive better education than children in male-headed households (Engle & Breaux, 1998). Although current measurements of father involvement in studies looking at paternal involvement and child outcomes are looking at the qualitative aspects of father-child relations, such as closeness or quality of parenting (Leinonen, Solantaus & Punamäki, 2003a), or father's competence in the father's role (Hawkins et al., 2002), they still tend to exclude breadwinning.

Recently, organised attempts have been made to develop fathering indicators that might be applicable to different populations of fathers (such as married fathers living with their biological children, stepfathers, unmarried co-resident fathers, biological non-resident fathers, non-resident social fathers etc.). The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) Working Group on Fathering Indicators, for instance, identified six fathering indicators. These were: *father presence* (defined as father engagement, availability, and responsibility in relation to the child), *caregiving* (i.e. providing nurturance and performing routine tasks necessary to maintain the child's emotional well-being, physical health and appearance), *children's social competence and academic achievement*, *co-operative parenting* (i.e. establishing a supportive, co-operative and interdependent relationship with the child's other caregiver(s)), *father's healthy living* (providing a role model through healthy lifestyle and appropriate social behaviours that teach work and personal ethics as well as social norms), and *material and financial contribution* (Gadsden, Fagan, Ray & Davis, 2004).

Most of the remainder of the book will explore the role of fathering, and father involvement in particular, in outcomes for *children*. However, some related research has focused on father involvement and outcomes for *fathers* and *mothers*, and it is worth mentioning some of its main findings here. With regards to fathers' outcomes, evidence is limited but some of the findings of the longitudinal studies are very interesting. For instance, Snarey (1993) showed how involvement predicted later generativity in men. Earlier, Hawkins and Belsky (1989) had linked greater father involvement to decreased self-esteem, and lesser father involvement to increased self-esteem (which in their study was measured prenatally and when children were 15 months old). One possible interpretation of their findings was that as fathers were more involved with sons than daughters, and as boys were more difficult to care for than girls, the difficulties that fathers experienced caring for their sons led to decreases in their self-esteem. An alternative explanation was that higher levels of father involvement foster non-traditional development for men (i.e. men decline in masculinity, which is positively related to self-esteem). Regarding mothers' outcomes, low father involvement has been positively associated with mothers' stress levels (Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly & Robinson, 2002), and anger (Ross & van Willigen, 1996), and negatively related to mothers' satisfaction with fathers' help (Simmernan, Blacher & Baker, 2001), quality of the interparental relationship (Olrick, Pianta & Marvin, 2002; Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch & McHale, 2004), as well as (in the case of paternal loss through death or separation) mothers' reduced care (Kitamura, Sugawara, Toda & Shima, 1998). Fathers' acceptance (which is related although it is not equivalent to involvement) has been found to buffer against postpartum depression when infants were highly reactive and when mothers were

aggressive, and to reduce the impact of postpartum depression on mothers' sensitivity (Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2003).

WHAT IS 'CHILD WELL-BEING'?

It is increasingly being accepted that well-being is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The World Health Organisation measures the burden of disease by its consequences on well-being, which, therefore, commits WHO to the view that health and disease matter insofar as they affect well-being. Regarding child well-being, in particular, according to the Department of Child and Adolescent Health and Development of WHO, to promote well-being in children is to reduce death, illness and disability, and to promote improved growth and development. However, there is little agreement on how to measure child well-being (Pollard & Lee, 2003). Objective measures include mortality rates, educational assessments, suicide attempts and delinquency rates, and drug offence rates. Subjective measures of child well-being usually assess single indicators of well-being, such as psychological functioning (to tap well-being in the psychological domain), family and peer relationships (to tap well-being in the social domain), academic motivation (to tap well-being in the cognitive domain), economic hardship (to tap well-being in the economic domain) and physical health measures (to tap well-being in the physical domain) (Pollard & Lee, 2003). In this book, the aspects of child well-being that I looked at in relation to fathering included: objective outcomes of functional significance, such as school achievement, delinquency and employment (Chapters 4, 5 and 7, respectively); subjective assessments of states, such as happiness, life satisfaction, psychological distress, and strengths and difficulties (Chapter 3); academic motivation (Chapter 4); quality of interpersonal relationships, such as quality of relationships with partners and parents (Chapter 6), and relationships with peers (Chapter 5); and parent-reported assessments of emotional and behavioural problems (Chapter 3).

WHY FATHERING AND CHILD WELL-BEING?

Although aspects of parenting are significantly related to child development (Maccoby, 2000), fathering has received limited attention in research compared to mothering (Cabrera et al., 2000). For many years research on children's development and well-being focused on the dynamics between mothers and their children (Bowlby, 1982). Fathers were often assumed to be on the periphery of children's lives and therefore of little direct importance to children's development (Lamb, 1997). However, there are

several reasons why one should expect fathers, especially within the nuclear family model of the Western societies, to be particularly significant in children's outcomes. In fact, the positive role of 'responsible fathering' for children's outcomes has also been recognised in extended matrifocal family systems in which the impression given is that fathers are either marginally present or completely absent from the family scene (Brunod & Cook-Darzens, 2002). Although these studies have stressed that more flexible concepts of 'fatherhood' than those dictated by the nuclear family model of Western societies should be applied in fathering research, they also acknowledge the benefits for children raised with more than one responsible caretaking adult (who usually is the child's father in Western nuclear families). First, a father's engagement with his child will likely exert influences on child development in the same way that a mother's engagement does (Lamb, 1997), and paternal accessibility might similarly offer the child a sense of emotional support (Cabrera et al., 2000). Second, fathers' relationships with their children are distinct from mother-child relations, with fathers encouraging their children to be competitive and independent and spending more time than mothers in playful and physically stimulating interactions with their children (DeKlyen, Speltz & Greenberg, 1998). Therefore, fathers may be particularly influential in the development of certain aspects of child behaviour. Fathers can also indirectly impact on their children's well-being. Fathers' continuing financial support of their children, in particular, can affect child outcomes by influencing the economic structure of the household (Crockett, Eggebeen & Hawkins, 1993). As discussed earlier, father involvement also influences maternal role satisfaction and maternal psychological health (via the effect the involved father has in emotionally supporting the mother) which are related to positive child outcomes (Downey & Coyne, 1990).

In this book, father involvement is explored in relation to children's mental health outcomes (Chapter 3), educational outcomes (Chapter 4), aggressive behaviour – including delinquency – (Chapter 5), family relationships (Chapter 6) and social and economic outcomes (Chapter 7). Chapter 2 explores factors associated with father involvement in two-parent families, and Chapter 8 investigates both the determinants of non-resident fathers' parenting and the children's mental health outcomes associated with non-resident fathers' parenting. Chapter 9 summarises the research and points to new research directions.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discussed how the 'discovery' of the father has been one of the major themes in child developmental research in the past 30 years, and

provided an overview of the existing international research on fathering. It described how macrolevel, social, demographic, economic and technological changes have impacted on the meaning of fatherhood for men and their families, as well as how these changes are altering the nature of father involvement and, in turn, affecting children's developmental trajectories.

Family change in the Western world has been considerable in the past 30 years. For instance, all 15 European Union (EU15) member states have recorded an increase in births outside marriage since the mid-1970s, and current rates of female headship in several developed countries are high – ranging from 44% in Slovenia, 42% in Denmark and Finland, and 37% in New Zealand and Sweden (United Nations, 2000). Furthermore, in 2000 in EU15 among households with two people of working age, those with both partners in the labour force were almost twice as numerous as those with only one, and in the USA only about one-quarter of children lived in two-parent families supported by a single male earner. Although empirical studies show lower attainments, earlier union formation, earlier entry into parenthood and more extramarital fertility, more partnership dissolution, and less psychological well-being in children of lone-parent families in comparison to children in two-parent intact families, such evidence cannot easily support the 'pathology of the matriarchy' hypothesis, or the view that divorce reflects a breakdown of the moral order. First, because the evidence linking family structure and children's adjustment is largely correlational, causality cannot be established. Second, because it might not be father absence *per se* that is harmful for children, but rather the stress associated with divorce or separation, family conflict, loss of a second parent, erosion of parental monitoring, or drop in family income that may account for the relation between father absence and child 'adverse outcomes'. Subsequently, this chapter (as well as the book as a whole) took the view that a narrow focus on family structure without a parallel focus on the quality of care fathers or father figures can provide (always in the context of the social and economic circumstances of each family) could not promote a further understanding of fathering or enhance our knowledge of the relationship between fathering and child well-being. Child well-being was mainly operationalised as objective outcomes of functional significance (school achievement, delinquency and employment), subjective assessments of states (happiness, life satisfaction, psychological distress, strengths and difficulties, and academic motivation), and quality of interpersonal relationships (quality of relationships with partners, parents and peers).