Dads Research

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**Fathers and Early Years Settings**

In the 26 March 2009 issue of Early Childhood Unit Bulletin, it was reported that the Pre-school Learning Alliance published *Where's Dad? Exploring the views of children, fathers and mothers on involving fathers in early years settings*. During a six-month research project the Alliance consulted with 51 children, nine mothers and 18 fathers based at three inner London settings, for their views on getting dads to play a greater role in their children's nurseries and pre-schools.

**Key recommendations include:**

- Settings should routinely ask fathers to come into the setting so that children, especially those who do not have contact with their own fathers, can benefit from their presence.
- The ways that early years settings consult with children should be extended. This could take the form of settings having a policy for children's participation which acts as a reminder to practitioners that they should ask children for their views whenever possible.
- Practitioners could also be encouraged to attend training specially designed to help them extend the way they listen to and consult with young children.

To download the full report or a briefing visit [www.pre-school.org.uk/fathers](http://www.pre-school.org.uk/fathers).

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**Involvement of fathers 'affects children's IQ', say researchers**

"Children who spend more time with their fathers are likely to have higher IQs," *Children & Young People Now* reports. The study, from Newcastle University, also found that fathers who came from a high socio-economic status were more likely to make a bigger difference to a child's development.

Dr. Daniel Nettle, who led the research, said: "It is not surprising that fathers who may have more skills themselves have a greater impact in terms of passing them on, but these results are still very interesting."
The study was published in *Journal of Evolution and Human Behaviour* and examined why some fathers are more involved than others and the effect this has on children later in life. The researchers analysed data from the National Child Development study (NCDS), a long-term study that followed 18,000 British-born children in 1958 through to adulthood.

Researchers concluded that fathers need to be actively involved with their children in order to make a difference to a child's development and improve an infant's IQ. Adrienne Burgess, Research Manager at the Fatherhood Institute said: "This means that fathers' involvement is not some kind of optional extra; dads play a significant role in their children's development, and when they do not do this within their families they have as little effect as fathers who do not live with their children."

*(Children & Young People Now, 9 October 2008)*

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**Maternal and Infant Health in the Perinatal Period: The Father's Role**

This report from the Fatherhood Institute is a review of research literature on the father's role. The review is summarised under the headings - *Trends in father involvement*, *Why involve expectant/new fathers? Information and support for fathers* and *Fathers' impact on their children*.

Language and attachment is directly referred to in the final chapter about fathers' impact on their children. For more information and to download the report visit [www.fatherhoodinstitute.org](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org).

*(April 2008)*

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**The Dad Deficit: The Missing Piece of the Maternity Jigsaw**

A report from the Fatherhood Institute that highlights the benefits for a child and parents when fathers have positive and active involvement from birth. It is based on research *Maternal and Infant Health in the Perinatal Period: The Father's Role* and calls for 12 key changes to involve dads more fully.

Download the report at [www.fatherhoodinstitute.org](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org).

*(April 2008)*

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**The State of the Modern Family**

*The State of the Modern Family* is an analysis of the Millennium Cohort Survey (MCS) and other recent research to identify key trends in the shape and behaviour of new families in the 21st century. Below are extracts relevant to dads and fatherhood.

**A social revolution in fatherhood is taking place.**

The MCS illustrates how crucial fathers' roles and behaviour are to their children's development. This comes in the midst of a social revolution in fatherhood, when dads report feeling as confident at caring as their partners and want to spend more time
with their children. Family policy must therefore look at the roles and needs of both parents if it is to fully benefit children. The MCS found that developmental problems at age three were more common where the father took no time off at the birth of the child or did not use flexible working. Millennium dads were heavily involved with their three-year-old children; half read to them daily and over three-quarters played with them daily. The EOC report *Dads and their Babies* found that four out of five new fathers said they would be happy to stay at home and look after their baby. 70% of new dads want to spend more time with their children. In 2005, only 44% of mothers with babies believed that women are naturally better than men at childcaring.

**Both parents want time off with the baby**
Income was a crucial factor in determining how much paid time off millennium families had with their babies. In poorer families, mothers returned to work earlier and dads had less access to paternity leave. New rights to longer paid maternity leave and paid paternity leave have reduced this divide, but many dads in low-income families are still unable to afford time off. The MCS found that in 2001, 49% of mothers employed in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations returned to work within three months of the birth compared to 28% of mothers in managerial and professional occupations. 80% of dads took time off around the birth of their child. *Dads and their Babies* found that in 2005, two years after new entitlements to paid leave came into force, 90% of mothers took at least six months leave while 94% of dads in work took time off around the birth of their child. 76% of working dads in high-income families took at least two weeks leave compared to 64% of dads in low-income families. Despite having less access to family-friendly policies, the MCS found that low-income fathers were more likely to use flexible working where it is available and recent research shows they are keener to use additional paternity leave.

*(The State of the Modern Family)*

**British Dads are Europe’s most playful**
*Sure Start* magazine reported on research commissioned by Persil that showed that British dads spend more time playing with their children than dads in Europe. The article highlighted that the research revealed dads spend eight hours a week playing with their children which is equivalent to a full day at work. According to the research this was twice as much as French fathers and also more than Dutch and Swiss fathers.

It was also reported that the research showed the British dads’ favourite pastime is playing with their children. 7 out of 10 dads wished they could devote more time to playing with their children.

*(Sure Start magazine, Spring 2006)*

**Dads and their babies; the mother’s perspective - research from the Equal Opportunities Commission (October 2005)**

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is calling on the government to let parents decide for themselves who looks after their children. This is backed by research launched in October 2005, which the EOC says uncovers a social revolution in attitudes towards fatherhood with the majority of new mothers no longer
considering care to be a “mum’s” job.

Over three-quarters of the mums surveyed felt that their partner is as confident as they are at caring. This backs earlier EOC research findings that showed that almost 9 in 10 new dads feel as confident as their partners at caring. The EOS believes the government should let parents decide for themselves who looks after their children by introducing “shared parental leave”.

Over three in five new mums (62%) reject the idea that a dad's main role is being that of a breadwinner, yet according to the EOC current leave arrangements reinforce this old stereotype by preventing fathers from spending time with their children. New fathers currently receive just two weeks' statutory leave, compared with 52 weeks for mothers, giving the UK the most unequal parenting arrangements in Europe. Nearly 8 in 10 new mothers support the option of transferring some of their maternity leave to their partner; over 8 in 10 dads back this policy.

Dads and their babies; the mother's perspective was carried out by GFK NOP Social Research with 920 mothers of babies aged between four months and 16 months. For more information visit www.eoc.org.uk.

(Equal Opportunities Commission, 10 October 2005)

Fathers' Involvement in Early Years Settings
by Tim Kahn
Pre-School Learning Alliance

Executive Summary
The Pre-school Learning Alliance is committed to parental involvement in early years settings and sees such involvement as positive for both a child's and a parent's learning and development. The Pre-school Learning Alliance is a leader in the field of equal opportunities and a driving force for the inclusion and involvement of all children and their carers in early years settings. In the current climate there is a growing awareness of the important role that fathers play in their children's learning and development. Including fathers in early years settings and in their children's early years is in line with the inclusion agenda advocated and implemented by Government and other organisations and agencies. Fathers' involvement is a fundamental component in the inclusion agenda and has been the impetus for the current research project examining the involvement of fathers in early years settings and addressing ways of furthering fathers' inclusion.

This report brings together the findings from the two strands of the research: quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative data from focus group interviews with staff, volunteers and fathers. Currently men are playing an increasing role in the care of their children in the private sphere and according to Fisher et al. (1999) this has increased "at a much faster rate than the increase in time that women
spend with their young children" and they are now "responsible for around one third of all child-care activities".

However, this increase of involvement is not reflected in a growth in the number of men in the childcare workforce. In fact, according to the Daycare Trust, the number of male nursery nurses has remained at around 1% for the decade up to 2001 (Daycare Trust, 2003). Furthermore, according to the Sure Start Unit, the number of male staff in playgroups and pre-schools is 1% (Sure Start, 2004a) and in day nurseries and other full daycare provision is 2% (Sure Start, 2004b). Pre-school Learning Alliance figures from the 2004 Group Membership Questionnaire indicate that male staff in Alliance settings is greater at around 5% (Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2004) and perhaps this is due to the importance that the organisation attaches to inclusion and equal opportunities. It appears from observational evidence that when men set foot in early years settings as fathers, their role is often restricted to “gender appropriate” activities such as doing jobs around the setting or being involved in outdoor games and construction play. However, evidence suggests that children do better educationally, psychologically and socially when their fathers are involved with them (National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services, 2004; Lewis, 1997).

Research has also indicated that it is not just the amount of time that the father spends with his child that is beneficial, but that the quality of interactions is of central importance (Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004). Although there is limited evidence of the effect on children of fathers’ involvement in family service agencies, the evidence suggests that those interventions that involve fathers in public service agencies "may be more effective in enhancing parental sensitivity and children's attachment, than [those] involving mothers alone", (Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2003). Furthermore, research evidence suggests that such benefits may have a long-term impact (Fagan and Iglesias, 1999).

(Extracted from the Executive Summary, Fathers' Involvement in Early Years Settings, April 2005)

To download the full executive summary and the full report visit www.preschool.org.uk/research/.

Dads on Dads - Needs and expectations at home and at work
by Warren Hatter, Louise Vinter, Rachel Williams
MORI Social Research Institute and EOC

Executive Summary
Introduction
Both research and policy on balancing work and family have tended to focus on women's lives. As a result, men's fathering roles have often been neglected. However, the issues are indivisible: a more equal balance in family responsibilities is key to greater equality between women and men in all spheres. This research aims to help fill the gap in current knowledge by looking in detail at fathers' roles at home and at work, specifically to explore:

- How involved fathers are in the lives of their families.
- Men's attitudes towards what it means to be a father and how fatherhood relates to the reality of men's lives who are in employment.
The barriers faced by men who wish to balance their work and family life.
Why men do not demand more access to, and use of, family-friendly policies and practices.

Methodology
The research was conducted in two stages:
61 qualitative in-depth interviews with fathers, their partners and Human Resource (HR) managers. These were conducted in six different case study organisations between 25 April and 14 June 2002. Three focus groups among fathers were conducted on 24 and 26 June 2002, to explore the emergent issues in greater depth. The case study organisations were carefully chosen to ensure that the research covered fathers in a range of employment sectors, size of employers and location.
Interviews were conducted with six or seven fathers in each case study organisation, as well as one HR manager, plus follow-up interviews with wives or partners of some of the fathers (around three in each case study organisation). The focus groups were conducted in North West England with fathers of young children (i.e. at least one child aged 10 or under), covering a variety of working patterns.

Dads on Dads: Needs and expectations at home and at work
Key Findings
The research findings covered fathers' role at home, their attitude to work, how they currently balance work and family life and the role that family-friendly policies at work could play.

Fathers' role at home
How fathers think about fatherhood helps towards an understanding of their motivations and aspirations both at home and at work, as well as the way they manage their work-life balance. Fathers are not a homogeneous group and there is wide variety in the roles that they adopt. Many fathers cite the breadwinner role as their main family commitment, both for practical reasons and psychological ones. Being a provider for the whole family gave these fathers a clearly-defined role. However, many also emphasise the importance of “being there” for their children, and spending time with the family. To some extent there is a tension between these two demands.

There is widespread acceptance of traditional gender roles in parenting: the father provides financially, the mother looks after the children and home. For a significant minority, these roles are seen as rooted in the natural abilities of men and women. In contrast, around half the fathers interviewed feel that mothers and fathers are equally capable of caring for children. They point out that men's lack of childcare experience, prior to becoming fathers, means that they are less likely to develop the relevant skills. Some fathers suggest a need for parenting classes. Four broadly different types of working father can be identified:

“Enforcer dad”
“Useful dad”
“Fully involved dad”
“Entertainer dad”

"Enforcer dads" take an overview role in the family and have prime responsibility for discipline. This was perhaps a more common image of the father for previous generations and very few of those interviewed were of this type. Many of today's fathers appear to be either "Entertainer dads" or "Useful dads". The former defined involvement with their children mostly in terms of play and leisure activities. The latter
perform many childcare tasks but generally as a helper to their partner. Many “entertainer” and “useful” dads have minimal involvement with their family during the week, but put their weekends aside to spend with their children. In contrast, the “Fully involved dad” takes the lead in childcare and the tasks associated with it for substantial parts of the week.

A variety of factors affect a father’s level of involvement in the family, including financial considerations (it often makes practical financial sense for a father to work full-time), motivational (whether they want to be involved), career aspirations, skills and confidence, the age of the children (some fathers play a larger role as children grow older), the number of children, their partner’s hours of work, and the availability of informal childcare support. Some factors may both enable involvement and act as a barrier against it. Finally, it is important to note that the majority of fathers in the study report feeling satisfied overall with their current level of involvement with their children. A substantial minority, however, clearly do want to spend more time with them. There is also a broad feeling that fathers these days want to feel more involved in their children's lives.

(Extracted from Dads on Dads, needs and expectations at home and at work)

To download the full report visit www.eoc.org.uk/.