



TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Parental Engagement In Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): Fathers, low-income families and the move to a systemic analysis.

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Introduction

The aim of this background paper is to raise some points for discussion for participants that the third meeting of the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years to be held in Lisbon in January 2014. It raises the issue of the father's role in families with pre-schoolers living in difficult circumstances.

The literature on fathers is massive, with over 700 journal articles per year identified on large search engines like ISI and SCOPUS. This paper attempts to draw attention to issue to do with the roles of fathers in young families, the correlations between paternal involvement and outcomes in child mental health and education, fathers' involvement following migration or in the event of poverty, and the attempts to increase paternal involvement through Health, Social and Education Services. As this review will necessarily be brief and selective, it starts with a list of texts which cover more of the issues which we will touch upon – those with an asterisk (*) are the top pick for policy makers with limited time.

[1] Edited volumes summarising the literature on father-child relationships

Lamb, M. E. (2010) *The Role of the Father in Child Development*. (Fifth Edition). Chichester: Wiley.

Tamis-LeMonda, C. S. & Cabrera, N. (2013). *Handbook of Father Involvement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. (Second Edition). New York: Psychology Press.*

Shwalb, R. D. Shwalb, B. & Lamb, M. E. (2013) *The Father's Role: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

[2] Journal special issues on fathers and diverse/transient populations

Doucet, A., Edwards, R., & Furstenburg, F. F. (2009). Fathering across diversity and adversity: International perspectives and policy interventions. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 624, 1-254.

Fitzgerald, H. E., & Bradley, R. H. (2012). Family relationships, environmental risk, and risky behaviors: Children's social behaviors. *Family Science*, 3, 141-236.

Newland, L. A., Coyl-Shepherd, D. D. & Paquette, D. (2013). Unique contributions of mothering and fathering to children's development, *Early Child Development and Care*, 3-4, 337-570*

[3] Briefings on interventions with fathers with preschool children

Bradley, R. H., Shears, J. K., Roggman, L. A. & Tamis-LeMonda, C.S. (2006). Lessons Learned from Early Head Start for Fatherhood Research and Program Development. *Parenting: Science & Practice*, 6, 259-271.

AND

Raikes, R. R., Summers, J. A., & Roggman, L. A. (2005). Father involvement in early head start programs. *Fathering*, 3, 29-58.



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Burgess, A. (2010) *Fathers and Parenting Interventions: What Works?* London: The Fatherhood Institute.*

Tehan, B.& McDonald, M. (2010). *Engaging fathers in child and family services*. Children and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) Practice Sheet, September.

The problem and aims

One of the key aims of the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years is to drive policy for the care of preschoolers in vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, notably those from low incomes or ethnic minorities. Provision of ubiquitous and fair ECEC has been seen as an essential step towards safeguarding such families from further social exclusion and continuing poverty (Council of European Union, 2011). Previous briefing papers (e.g., Vandenbroek & Lazzari, 2013) have examined the constraints on programmes which aim to reach these populations, showing that take up of ECEC resources is patchy and incomplete. It is important to assess outcomes in child development in their attempt to stop recurring problems in migrant families, the poor and socially excluded. The family, particularly parents, remains the main provider of ECEC and, with increasing maternal employment, it is important to understand the contribution of fathers to this provision in terms of both their on children's development and the family as a changing and dynamic system.

This paper examines the role of the father in the care and development of preschool children. As researchers, Michael Lamb and I started our studies and analyses of paternal roles because there was a gap in the literature within developmental psychology and family studies treated the role of parent synonymously with that of mother. This is no longer the case with large numbers of research studies that have contained fathers over the past forty years. However, the gap still applies to fathers in terms of the services offered to support families with preschool children. In general men are a hard population of parents to reach within an ECEC perspective, particularly as their contribution may be made at times and in places where they are less visible.

This report therefore has three aims. First it will summarise what we know about the influence of paternal involvement in child development. We have summarised the literature repeatedly over the past 30 years and this continues to show that men's involvement is an important barometer of family and child functioning. Our data-led analysis fits in with the European Commission's (2010; See also EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018) emphasis on evidence-based intervention. The second part examines families in social and ethnic groups that are particularly vulnerable, to see whether fathering in such populations should be treated as different to that in more geographically stable and affluent communities. Thirdly, I consider programmes aimed specifically at fathers, or inclusive of men, in such vulnerable groups to enhance their contribution to parenting and the child's early development. As Sigle-Rushton, Goisis & Keizer(2013) suggest, EU policy makers have supported attempted to increase participation by fathers in the home as part of its moves towards sexual equality in the workplace, greater financial security for families and child-well being. While its measures of female participation are relatively clearly defined, men's and women's contributions to unpaid work and care have been less well measured, or even defined.

[1] Paternal sensitivity to infant and child needs

Why are fathers of interest to the ECEC agenda?

One reason why fathers have increasingly been included in policy has been the increase of mothers with young children in the workforce across most major economies. Within the UK, 57% of women with children under five are now in paid work (ONS, 2008). This has been matched by an increase in paternal involvement in childcare. Even twenty years ago, fathers cared for their pre-schoolers more than any other individual or crèche while their partners worked, particularly in blue collar families (Ferri & Smith,



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1995). Mothers still have a greater involvement (4.5 hours each day compared with 3 for fathers: O'Brien, 2005), but there has been an increase in paternal care over the past generation (O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003).

Mothers' and fathers' sensitivity to infants

How similar are men to women in terms of their propensity to care for young children? The evidence suggests that fathers adapt positively to parenting, yet in several ways (Henwood & Proctor, 2003). Even following IVF, Swedish expectant fathers reported feeling attached prenatally, and the strength of these feelings predicts lower anxiety and problems in adjusting to having a baby around (Hjelmstedt & Collins, 2008). Like mothers, fathers adjust their language to their infants, with slow, modulated and shorter utterances, with a high proportion of redundancy and imitation (Gleason, 1975; Kokkinaki, 2008). Observations show that both parents are reported to be sensitive to their one-year-olds (Schoppe-Sullivan, et al., 2006), although some show greater sensitivity in mothers (e.g., Harrison & Magill-Evans, 1996). Such small differences may arise because most men spend much less time with their children rather than reflecting any basic difference between men and women.

The origins of this sensitivity may be in childhood. Fathers who reported having secure relationships with their parents were more sensitive, attentive, and involved (Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, & Cabrera, 2006). For example, in one UK longitudinal study, expectant mothers' and fathers' reports of their attachments to their own caregivers predicted their closeness to their infants a year later (Steele, Steele, & Fonagy, 1996). However, there are also data to suggest that some men become highly involved in order to compensate for their own fathers' lack of involvement (Bretherton et al., 2006).

Paternal responsiveness often relates to the degree to which men participate in infant care (Donate-Bartfield & Passman, 1985) and such data have been used to explain why low income American fathers resident with their infants appeared more sensitive than those who live elsewhere (Brophy-Herb et al., 1999). I will return to this issue below. This may occur because interaction with, and care for, an infant relates to the hormonal changes experienced by new fathers – with the release of prolactin in new fathers (Storey et al., 2000; Feldman, et al., 2010), and a gradual increase in progesterone over 70 minutes of father-child interaction (Gettler et al., 2013). In an intriguing recent double blind intervention study, fathers interacting with their five month olds were administered a nasal spray of oxytocin, which inhibits the production of testosterone. The gradual decline in salivary testosterone was correlated with greater father-child social gaze, positive affect, touch, and synchrony between their vocal gestures (Weisman, Zagoory-Sharon, & Feldman, 2014).

These findings might suggest that fathers who have sufficient contact seem to alter their behaviour towards their young children and that their physiological state changes concurrently. Men who have extended contact with their infants, for example taking leave in the early days, became more involved with them and, interestingly, their contribution to paid work was evaluated more highly (Feldman, Sussman & Zigler, 2004).

Father-infant attachment

Research on infant attachments over the past 50 years has shown clear patterns of closeness with both parents (Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). For example, Frascarolo-Moutinot's (1994) analysis of Swiss infants showed that they used fathers and mothers as "secure bases". In this study such preferences were made for the men who were highly involved in daily care and interaction. Nevertheless over a variety of cultural settings, about 66% of infant attachments to either parent are rated as secure (for meta-analyses, see Ahnert, Pinguart & Lamb, 2006; Van IJzendoorn & DeWolff, 1997). Analyses of father-child attachment show statistically significant correlations between 12 and 36 months, although infant-mother attachments have slightly greater predictive power (Brown, Neff, & Mangelsdorf, 2012).



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Interaction and play styles

In the 1970s research on parenting styles in the USA suggested that mothers and fathers may differ in their interaction skills and strategies. Men were seen to use more emphatic interaction styles (Yogman, 1981) and to specialise in play (Lamb, 1976). This pattern has been replicated in France and Switzerland (Frascarolo-Moutinot, 1994; Labrell, 1994), but not in many other cultures. Michael Lamb found that Swedish fathers were not notably more playful than mothers (Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, & Frodi, 1983) and this has been replicated in other northern (e.g. Germany: Best et al., 1994), and southern (Portugal: Monteiro et al., 2010) European cultures as well as the Aka hunter gatherers in Cameroon (Hewlett, 1991), whose division of parental care is more equal than in industrial cultures.

The amount of differentiation between mothers' and fathers' interaction styles with pre-schoolers seems to be related to the division of labour outside and inside the home. Wider cultural practices play a part – for example, in Taiwan fathers say they rarely play with their children (Sun & Roopnarine, 1996), although my observation is that they do. Social class also correlates with what men do with their children (Lewis, 1986). Like their Euro-American counterparts, middle class African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans play with their infants more than engaging in care, or feeding, even though they subscribe to the belief that parents should share child-care responsibilities (Hossain et al., 1997).

The evidence thus suggests that the interaction styles of men with children are channeled through the lens of culture. This includes general belief systems (often marked by a clear division between public and private involvement in fathering), individual differences and factors within the relationship between the parents that promote or inhibit paternal involvement. Twenty years ago, for example, Jane Wheelock (1990) studied a group of men who were highly involved in the daily care of their young children as a result of the decline in heavy industrial jobs in the north-east of England and the rise of the service sector, which employed more women than men. When they came to justify this involvement, they claimed that they contributed their [major] share to 'help out'.

The family as a developing system within a network of relationships

The past 20 years have witnessed a rise in complex analyses of the passage of relationships and individual relationships over time. These are hard to conduct particularly as many fathers are difficult to reach and maintain an involvement (Mitchell et al., 2007). Yet many studies have overcome this difficulty and now longitudinal patterns are commonplace in studies of family development (e.g., Fitzgerald, Bradley & Roggman, 2007; McHale, 2007).

A man's perceptions of his own and his infant's abilities have been found to relate to later patterns of paternal involvement. Men who were more perceptive and sensitive during their partners' pregnancy, later showed greater involvement in caretaking with their 9-month-olds (Levy-Shiff and Israelashvili, 1988). Similar patterns hold for transitions between infancy and toddlerhood. So, fathers who perceived themselves as more skillful were more involved with their children when they were older (McHale & Huston, 1984).

There are sufficient numbers of studies to show that patterns of father-child care and interaction in the preschool period predict the child's later psychosocial adjustment. An analysis of the collected data from twenty-four longitudinal studies, and involving 22,300 children, found that that greater paternal involvement was related to fewer behavioural problems in boys and lower intensity of psychological problems in girls in later childhood. Paternal involvement was also associated with enhanced cognitive development in 21 of 22 studies (Sarkadi et al., 2008).

Paternal 'influences' like these should not be taken in isolation. Some of the correlations with paternal involvement do not hold when the family's socioeconomic circumstances are taken into account and other factors, like the father's residence, also reduce the paternal 'contribution' to the analyses. However, they show that paternal 'input' is influential in some way and there is evidence to suggest that



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these influences are profound. For example, in their study in Germany Klaus and Karin Grossmann found that it was not parent-infant attachments that correlated with psychosocial functioning beyond the age of 10, but father-child play at age 3 predicted the child's representations of self and relationships at 16 and 21 (Grossmann et al., 2002). Paternal styles when the child is young also appear to relate to later social interaction styles, even the latter's adjustment to later spousal relationships, and their self-reported parenting skills (Burns & Dunlop, 1998; Franz, McClelland & Weinberger, 1991).

The influences of a father discernible in these long term associations do not necessarily reveal a unique transfer of paternal 'input' into the child's behavioural repertoire. Rather it is likely to relate systemic influences that range from the microbiological to the macro-sociological. On the more biological level, Boyce et al. (2006) found patterns of influence of the father's involvement in infancy related to the child's behaviour problems at the age of nine. These were moderated by that child's own psycho-physiological functioning at seven years. Less father participation in infancy had an interactive effect with the child's high autonomic, adrenocortical and behavioural reactivity, jointly to predict later mental health problems in these children. This was exacerbated when the mother had been postnatally depressed.

On an interpersonal level the outcomes for children have been best predicted by the relationship between the parents' closeness, as a strong predictor of both the skills in a parent and the child's psychological well being (see e.g., Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Raymond, 2004). Recent analyses have examined the relative influence of the relationship between the parents and each parent's responsivity as a parent, and their long-term influence upon each other (e.g., Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2009). McBride & Rane (1998) using the term 'parenting alliance' (more recently termed 'coparenting') found that this relationship (what has come to be termed co-parenting) influences how men act as parents, and is more predictive than measures assessing relationship between the parents. Kramer Holmes et al. (2013, p 440) define this as 'Co-parenting refers to the quality of the co-ordination (undermining or encouraging) between partners in their parenting roles.' Research on these patterns suggests that maternal undermining of fathers' parenting in infancy predicts the latter's behaviour problems six months later (LeRoy, et al., 2013) and a grasp of the other parent's skills in infancy predict the quality of the relationship between the parents at the ages of 2 and 4, but the opposite effect is not in evidence (Fagan & Cabrera, 2012). So, the co-ordination of parenting between mother and father appears to have a strong influence on their later relationship.

Paternal co-residence

One of the key questions asked since the rapid increase in divorce and separation over the past fifty years concerns the impact of parenting on children whose parents either do not form a cohabiting relationship, who separate and/or form a complex series of ties, with blends of 'step' and 'biological' children. In one recent analysis of the British Household Panel Survey, Kerry Lee (2008) identified over 73 different family types, from single parents who never have partners to those in multiply blended families within a sample of 5000 households. While such complexity is hard to model, research that simply examines the presence or absence of a father in the home should be examined in the light of this complexity. However, the message from research on family breakdown is consistent. It shows that men's involvement with their children following a separation continues to correlate with later psychosocial functioning in the latter (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). For example, a meta-analysis of 52 studies found that positive engagement by non-resident fathers, rather than financial provision and amounts of father-child contact, were associated with benefits for children's social and emotional well-being, academic achievement, and behavioural adjustment, particularly if the man was involved on a number of fronts (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013).

Why do some studies, cited above, show that co-residence is important? The answer may well lie in the nature of paternal involvement. Social factors like paternal co-residence can be examined in terms of specific influences on the child. For example, Tither and Ellis (2008) found that co-residence with both parents delayed the timing of menarche a sample of girls. This influence has to be seen within other



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contexts, like the even larger effect of 'paternal dysfunction'. Their data suggest that exposure to serious paternal dysfunction in early childhood was predictive of menarche almost a year earlier than girls from disrupted families who were not exposed to such dysfunction.

[2] Fathers, migration and poverty

The topics of transnational migration and poverty have both been well studied, but with few exceptions (e.g., Antonucci, 2006; Chuang, S. S., & Tamis-LeMonda, 2009), this literature is disparate. This makes it hard to pull together evidence which is even more diverse than that on fathers in more affluent sub-populations. It is assumed in groups as diverse as Chinese immigrants to Canada (Cabrera et al., 2009; Tamis-Le Monda et al., 2009), Sudanese immigrants to Canada (Chuang & Su, 2009) and Punjabi British families (Warin et al., 1999; Salway, Chowbey, & Clarke, 2008) that fathers dedicate themselves [and are expected to do so] to the role of economic provider, at the expense of his role as carer and time spent in play and teaching. This is often attributed to cultural 'differences' (often in a negative way), but may also reflect factors like the migrant's economic circumstances and the stereotypes of the dominant culture. In this section I examine some of the factors that should be considered.

It is clear that men in migrant families often commit themselves to long hours of employment, or they are expected to do so. A long tradition has shown that parent-child relationships are influenced by the parents' involvement in paid work. In particular, paternal involvement is related positively to the hours and nature of mothers' paid work (O'Brien, 2005; Sidle, Fuligni, & Brooks-Gunn, 2004). It has long been reported that dual-income employment is correlated with increased paternal involvement in childcare but poorer ratings of the relationship between the parents (e.g., Crouter et al., 1987; Siddle et al., 2004), but the addition of culture and ethnicity adds complex dimensions to the research findings. In the USA, where there are many programmes and cohort studies, child care patterns vary across different ethnic groups. When mothers are in paid work, African Americans tend to be in centre care, Hispanic preschoolers are more likely to be cared for by maternal kin, while White children are more likely to be cared for by their fathers. In a sophisticated analysis of these patterns, Radley and Brewster (2007) reported that these trends are linked to the mothers' socioeconomic, household employment patterns, family finances, as well as cultural practices. Such patterns show that we need to understand fathers and their influences within multiple interacting layers of understanding from the biological to the macro-social.

Taking migration, ethnicity and differential fathering seriously

I will focus briefly in this section on the UK to illustrate some of the diverse patterns within the past half century. So rapid has the change been that the complexities of fathering of these groups have not been charted. It is easy to rely on stereotypes. Many social commentaries assume that fathers of African Caribbean origin are in many ways different from their white co-workers. However, Williams (2004) identified similar patterns of health, financial difficulties and social relationships in a comparison of African Caribbean and White working class fathers, with no ethnic differences. Where differences between African Caribbean and other groups are reported, these co-vary with a range of factors, notably the fathers' residence (Guishard, 2002).

Recent research has shown that we need to be very careful of inferring too much from general patterns or beliefs. In a small scale study Asian British fathers seemed to fit the role of men as family providers (Warin et al., 1999), supporting a popular belief. However, more recent research has been more vigilant in analyzing how fathering patterns in these communities are more complex. Salway, Chowbey and Clarke (2009) compared fathers in four South Asian groups, to explore possible diversity among migrant populations who had been identified as similar given the proximity of their point of origin: Bangladeshi Muslims, Pakistani Muslims, Gujarati Hindus and Punjabi Sikhs. The study considered whether their economic, religious and social backgrounds might influence paternal involvement and men's experiences. While all four groups placed high importance on the father's role of economic provider, two of these subsamples (Punjabi Sikh and Gujarati Hindu) also reported this attribute as an



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integral part of mothering. Fathers in every subsample stressed that care for, and psychological relationships with, their children as crucial features of fathering. Indeed many commented adversely on the stereotype of the “typical Asian father” – the emotionally detached, economic provider. As in the non-migrant population, if the mother was employed, the father was more involved in child care (particularly among Gujarati Hindu and Punjabi Sikh families), often accompanied by feelings that this was not socially supported by kin and friends. This study highlights two important patterns. First, there is wide diversity of paternal involvement among immigrant populations that are typecast in a somewhat homogeneous way. Secondly, Asian fathers seemed to be more like white British men and the variations reflected the more general influences of work-family relationships across different ethnic groups.

Similar patterns of class differences among a minority population are seen among African Americans. Roopnarine, et al. (2005) examined the social interactions of Black infants’ in early upper, middle, and lower class families. The lower the family’s income the more likely was there to be restricted contact with their fathers, and the greater the chance that they would interact with a variety of carers. We have long known that the impact of fathers on their children needs to be assessed in terms of direct and indirect effects. Crockett, Eggebeen&Hawkins (1993) examined the long-term patterns of the residence of a father figure in a large poverty sample with a large proportion of African Americans. They found that the number of months that a father figure (not necessarily one man) was resident correlated with the child’s behaviour problems, but this effect was no longer in evidence when family income was taken into account.

The experiences of migrant families are often difficult. For example, research on refugee fathers is sparse but we know that they do less child care particularly where family members experience post traumatic stress (Ee et al., 2013). Likewise analyses of families split by paternal migration for work (Harper & Martin, 2013) show that this arrangement is correlated with increased educational attainment in the children (Antman, 2012) but interviews with the adult children who grew up under such arrangements report conflict between the parents despite any economic and educational advantage (Salazar Perrenas, 2008). The ‘social system’ that I have depicted may have to cross national boundaries.

Systemic factors: Timing of parenting, poverty and paternal depression

Studies of fathers in or near the breadline suggest that the everyday issues of parenting that they report are similar, in many respects to those of more affluent fathers (Summers et al, 2006). The Early Head Start initiative set up the Fathers Involvement with Toddlers Study (FITS: Boller et al., 2006; Roggman et al. 2006). The study was targeted at specific low-income samples, particularly in ethnic minority groups and where high degrees of paternal non-residence were recorded. Nevertheless 80% of two year olds in the evaluated programs had some contact with the ‘biological father’ (Boller et al., 2006), echoing the finding that many fatherless families are wrongly described as there is some contact with the father in many of these families, and 50% co-residence by the child’s birth (McLanahan & Beck, 2010). The children were followed up until they were 10 years of age (for a review, see Fitzgerald & Bocknek, 2013) and the results intriguing. For example, Mckelvey et al. (2011) found that when family circumstances were controlled, father sensitivity in interaction with the child at age 2 (but strangely not age 3), predicted children's receptive vocabularies at ages 5, 7, and 10; arithmetic skills at ages 5 and 7; and reading skills at age 5. More generally fathers' support of their children's emotion and behaviour regulation seemed to contribute to long-term influences on children's academic skills. This echoes some of the longitudinal patters that I reported about samples representative of the whole population.

As with more affluent households, research on poverty and migrant families shows that men’s parenting commitments are embedded in a network of other familial and extra-familial relationships. Some of these extraneous factors are very different. For example, Fitzgerald and Bocknek (2013) report that risk for neighborhood violence at the age of 3 was a stronger predictor of children’s externalizing behavior at age 10 and, particularly, poorer school performance, than was earlier involvement of the father.



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Analyses of the factors which may protect or make children susceptible to adversity have long shown that combinations of events and influences enable us better to predict the outcomes of early care (Rutter, 1989). The timing and origins of life experiences have an equal effect on men and women and similar effects on children. We know, for example, that poverty is associated with the early onset of parenthood. In their analysis of over 1,000 families over the transition to parenthood, Bronte-Tinkew, et al. (2009) found that a mistimed or unwanted pregnancy was a major predictor of paternal depression, a poorer mother-father relationship and increased conflict between the parents. This has negative effects on father infant-interaction (Kaplan, Sliter, & Burgess, 2007). Similarly, depression early in fatherhood is associated with both less involvement (both interaction and child care) with infants and cognitive delay in the child (Wanless, Rosenkoetter & McClelland, 2008).

The ALSPAC dataset from the south-west of the UK sets into relief the possible long-term effects of these early patterns. Depression in fathers eight weeks after the birth, predicted behaviour problems or hyperactivity in children at age three, particularly in boys (Ramchandani et al., 2005). This link remained even when maternal depression was factored in. It also related to the father's history of depression before the birth (Ramchandani et al. 2008), suggesting that the event of depression in parenthood is a marker of longstanding problems in the man rather than of the effects of postpartum depression by itself. These links are in evidence beyond infancy. For example, Dave, Sherr, Senior and Nazareth (2008) found that paternal depression in the late preschool period predicted a large increase in the likelihood of behaviour problems and an even greater increase in peer interaction problems in their children when older.

The family system is intricately related to other connected social networks. So, fathers whose wives are unemployed or work part-time have been found in some studies (e.g., Grych and Clark, 1999) to be more sensitive during their contribution to child care, while men with partners who are in full-time paid work may appear to interact more negatively, presumably because of the additional stress that child care imposes on such men. We need to add to this equation the likelihood that different minority and migrant groups will have access to different types of work with different influences on, and influences from, the family. Goodman et al's (2008) finding, that low-income American men in relatively unsupportive work settings were correlated with less sensitivity and engagement in fathering, is an example of the trade-off between work and family life.

It seems, therefore, that differential patterns across migrant or ethnic groups may be attributable to their relative access to jobs and finances. Given their precarious position in the labour market, minority ethnic groups seem less embedded and connected with wider social support. As a result in such families the patterns identified in the first section above, especially co-parenting (Fagan & Lee, 2012), seem to be accentuated across these groups. However, we must be cautious in the assumption that the same patterns fit all subcultural groups. There are clear cultural differences which need to be discerned. For example, one randomized study of a poverty sample of young parents in the USA that goes against the pattern that paternal residence is a major predictor of paternal involvement (e.g., Castillo, Welch, & Sarver, 2011). This showed that both African American and Hispanic men who developed a greater sense of co-parenting with their adolescent partners showed higher levels of paternal involvement with their infant, regardless of residence (Fagan, 2008).

[3] Programmes for/with fathers: A panacea?

Men in ECEC projects: The sample case of the UK over the past 10 years

The UK provides a somewhat typical example of the complexities of both the extent of provision for fathers in parenting programmes and men's involvement in this provision. In its last term in government (1997-2010), the Labour Party set up a national provision for children and families in areas of severe



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economic disadvantage. The Sure Start initiative set up centres in these areas with a relative degree of autonomy in terms of determining local needs.

Two early analyses (Ghate, Shaw, & Hazel, 2000; Lloyd, O'Brien & Lewis, 2003) identified that even specialist services for fathers under Sure Start, with a brief to involve fathers, were not very successful in drawing men in. Lloyd et al. (2003) reported that Sure Start involved more men in centres where the director was keen to do so and the programme included a dedicated "fathers' worker". There were some example of excellence with many men involved at various levels (Potter & Carpenter, 2008) and the activities transferred to Children's Centres and other provision (Potter, Walker & Keen, 2013).

Despite these examples of services reaching out to men, ECEC provision is not seen as a natural habitat for many fathers, despite their commitment to their children. This is partly because parents turn to family before professional help (Edwards & Gillies, 2004). About 40% of British fathers have some contact with preschools in general (not including Sure Start), but this includes dropping their children off in the morning or picking them up. Given that only 2% of employees at day nurseries and 1% at playgroups in Sure Start are male, men do not clamour to become involved in their activities (Kahn, 2005). When asked why they are reluctant to participate, fathers report that these services are run by women for women, touching on men's problems rather than the positive aspects of their parenting skills (Cavanaugh and Smith, 2005). In the UK context successful take-up by men is predicted by the use of a 'gender differentiated approach' and a commitment by the senior centre managers (Lloyd et al., 2003; Potter & Carpenter, 2008). However, some US research suggests that American fathers prefer mixed groups (reviewed in Asmussen & Weitzel, 2010), suggesting that there may be cultural differences in take-up. As in the early years at school (Goldman, 2005) fathers' involvement is predicted most strongly by their partner's involvement in the project.

The Wider Context

Since its early origins in the Nordic countries in the early 1970s, in Europe much effort has been placed to increase maternity leave and include fathers within the framework. Whether this has had an effect has been a question of great interest. Early research in Sweden suggested that it is the duration of a man's leave that predicts his later involvement (Haas & Hwang, 2008). However, a recent analysis of over 29,000 fathers across the EU showed that, in 2005, whether or not men take up leave [32% do] was related to later involvement in child care and, to a lesser extent, their involvement in housework, even when other family factors were taken into account (Meil, 2013). There are several possible explanations for this finding. The link between paternal leave and child care concerned the number of jobs performed rather than an additional time commitment.

The patterns of men's involvement in preschool education and care seen within the UK seem to match those across the English-speaking world and Europe. In the US, for example, much of the research on fathers has been within the Early Head Start programme. Following a moral panic about 'Fatherless American men became central to programme policy in the 1990s and have remained there. However, as in the UK, it has been difficult to engage with men in centre-based activities designed in part or whole to include them. One third of fathers took part in one or more home visits, but only 6% took up the offer of activities just for fathers-and-children, even those directed only at men (Raikes, Summers & Roggman, 2005).

There are a host of reasons why men do not take up the opportunity to take up offers of help with parenting. For a start they often subscribe to the idea that women are the 'natural' carers for their children in both research on the topic both in studies of fathering (Beitel & Parke, 1998) and in programmes for fathers (Palm & Fagan, 2008). Such feelings may be particularly felt in migrant ethnic groups who may not have extended support networks (Higginbottom et al, 2006). These feelings are reported particularly in a father with a disabled child (Lamb & Billings, 1997). In addition mothers have long been depicted as the 'gatekeepers' of their partners' access to parenting for co-resident (Allen &



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Hawkins, 1999) and non-resident (Castillo & Sarver, 2012) fathers. Burgess (2010) summarizes three additional factors from the literature. The first is compatible with the gatekeeping hypothesis. When seen in a couple relationship, the man may see his role as one of providing support to his partner, rather than front line parent – at least in terms of public care of children (Lewis, 1986). Secondly, men may see themselves as more ‘expert’ when it comes to older children (Warin et al., 1999). Thirdly, Burgess reminds us that institutional practices may appear to act against the involvement of men. They usually operate when fathers are at work, or either expected to be there or to be looking for employment. A service may appear to be on offer by the ethnic majority for a service targeted at an ethnic minority; or service providers may be seen to overlook or exclude men, for example.

Recent analyses of men in programmes repeat much of what we found over a decade ago. African American Men appear to be more positive towards becoming involved in parenting programmes if they are not singled out for this. The factors that have been linked to greater interest in involvement are that the fathers programme/activities are that these are part of an overall service particularly in helping men in poverty samples to find employment, but also if assistance to get them into the programme like transport is on offer (Stahlschmidt, et al., 2013). Such suggestions from fathers themselves may lead to increased take-up but we should be aware of cultural and subcultural influences.

Issues in the involvement of fathers in ECEC programmes

In this section I will briefly review the somewhat diverse literature on programmes to support men as parents. These are predominantly targeted at families within an ECEC age span (for exception see, for example, the Parenting NI ‘Parenting Your Teen’ programme for a representative example from the UK: <http://www.parentingni.org/projects/parenting/individuals.asp>). Before analyzing the evidence on interventions involving men in preschool settings, it is important to raise two issues that have been discussed over the past forty years.

The first is the general point that parental training carries with it a number of expectations about whether training is needed, how ‘parenting’ should be done and which aspects of the overall task should be focused upon. It has been asked by many that if men are included in parental support, does this take resource away from mothers? Through the 1990s and 2000s fathers became more central in discussion in programmes and initiatives. As Gillies (2009) points out with reference to the United Kingdom, family policy has increasingly placed fathering as a social issue. She was equivocal about the assumptions underlying a father-centred approach, in particular the suspicion that the version of ‘fathering’ that is stressed in UK policy has been from a somewhat privileged perspective – around education and play rather than care. She claims that in promoting a specific role for fathers as ‘educational facilitators’, policy disregards more mundane aspects of everyday care that, as a result, remain associated with mothers and mothering. I will not address this issue directly, although it is obviously important. In a related fashion, much of the literature derives from programmes in the US but in Europe there is a bigger picture. Drawing upon European data trends, Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny (2011) suggest that the moves to establish gender equality at work appear to be midway through a 70-80 process of ‘convergence’ – much slower than many policy makers would like but heading in the ‘right’ direction. They argue that one of the forces of conservatism is the gender segregation of domestic roles, with men spending relatively little time on routine care and, particularly, housework. Helping fathers to increase their involvement in care thus seems to be a worthwhile move towards gender equality in the home.

A second, more complex, issue also needs to be addressed here. This is that interventions involving fathers are usually part of wider political debates with several levels of understanding. Social commentators have long discussed a basic division between North America, where there are ‘*Public concerns about early and unmarried parenthood, increasing numbers of fathers living apart from their children, and the role of (biological) fathers in family life*’, while on this side of the Atlantic ‘*fathers were incorporated into European Union (EU) debates about how best to promote equal opportunities, to increase female labor market participation, and to improve child outcomes*’ (Sigle-Rushton, Goisis &



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Keizer, 2013, p 81). These differences play out in different ways in both continents, with the twin foci in the US being on reducing 'father absence' and supporting marriage as an institution. In Europe there is a general focus on discourses of quality and parity.

Kan et al. (2011) show that simply to depict the US and EU as different is to over-simplify. They refer to a number of social policy models that bisect Europe and link the US. For example, the UK, the US, Canada and Australia seem to subscribe to a '*modified breadwinner*' ideology, in which most women are now employed but are still expected to fulfill the major domestic caring role for the household and children, unless they use 'market-based childcare solutions'. This approach contrasts with the approach taken in 'social democratic countries', Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, where the state plays a leading part in providing services and benefits for the majority of the population on the grounds that it is its duty to allow all citizens have an equal right to participate in the labour force. A third model of 'Continental Catholic European countries', notably France and Germany, is described as a *social capitalist* (or conservative/corporatist) policy cluster', in which the state provides social insurance programmes to give people access to care, but does not also attempt to diminish social inequalities. Finally, in the *southern or Mediterranean cluster*' social security support is less well developed and gender differences at home and in the workplace remain strong.

Kan et al. (2011) point out that the differences between the clusters above are greater for 'routine' housework than child care. They suggest that the policy literature has concentrated on early childhood education and care without paying attention to where the greatest discrepancies between men and women are to be found. We can draw two conclusions from their analysis. First, it may well be the case that a focus on ECEC distracts us from the real issues of gender in/equality. They argue forcefully that we need to approach these issues in terms of deeper gender ideologies. Secondly, their geographical clusters highlight the fact that there is most likely no one-model fits all approach to programmes designed to facilitate parental care and relationship skills, given their different commitment to ECEC. Rather than addressing these issues further, I will turn now to the evidence base which focuses on the training of men in child care. We must bear in mind that there may not be automatic transfer from one of these diverse and complex cultures to another, but I wish to make more general points about the issues we should consider in an evaluation of whether to include men within an ECEC framework.

What do we know about successful ECEC programmes involving fathers

Despite all the caveats which must be stated about the transfer of knowledge from one cultural setting to another, and the worth of targeting fathers alone or as part of the care 'team' for infants in targeted populations, I turn now to examine what the evidence shows us. Given the disparate nature of 'programmes' for fathers I will collapse the outcome data from off-the-shelf parenting training in pregnancy, courses to prepare or help parents cope with relationship stress during the ECEC years and early parenting courses and support aimed specifically at fathers. Early research suggested that short-term interventions for new fathers did not seem to influence paternal behaviour or involvement (Belsky, 1985; Pannabecker, Emde, & Austin, 1982). However these interventions were brief and one such study (Myers, 1982) reported that fathers showed greater knowledge and involvement with their newborns.

More recent research has focused on more concerted interventions based on a variety of models of parenting, few of which have been tested using randomized control trials, let alone compared with one another. Yet, on the whole, the results have been more positive. Individual examinations of parenting interventions with fathers and ECEC, like those of Brent McBride (1990), have long identified that for those men who attend reported greater confidence in their skills as parents. Kramer Holmes et al (2013) suggest that three types of programme are identifiable. McBride's study fits in with the early wave of projects specifically targeted at men within the time-period 1980-2000. These 'Responsible fatherhood programs' aimed to help men to become better able to care for and interact with their children and, particularly, to provide for them. Kramer Holmes and colleagues report that it is 'not surprising' that they did not seem to lead to gains in the child or increases in the father-child contact. Secondly, and



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particularly within the US context, 'Marriage and relationship education' (MRE) emerged following the concern with fatherlessness in the USA (Blankenhorn, 1995). These programs were aimed at the parents. They convey a much brighter picture of the effects on fathers, but we must be cautious as the populations studied are not usually poverty samples. The third is a hybrid combination of father- and couple-centeredness.

The results from these studies suggest that men's involvement works best if their partners are also involved. Raikes et al. (2005) show clearly that men's attendance in special activities for fathers is related to the participation of their partners in mother and couple-centred activities. There are several possible reasons why this may be the case. It could simply reflect the gatekeeping hypothesis – that men will take up the training and counseling available if their partners allow or encourage. Reinks et al (2011) conducted a rare randomized control study in which a control (no programme) group was compared with two other interventions. Being in the control did not predict later paternal involvement. In the 'one parent' attendance group, in which that parent was instructed to inform the other about what they learned, there was less later involvement by the father. Only when couples attended together was there greater subsequent paternal involvement in with the infant.

The evidence suggests that participation has an influence on later child care. For example, Robbers (2009) found that two years after participation in a programme, men were practicing more child care. However, Wood et al. (in Kramer-Holmes, 2013) show that when other factors are added to the equation they also correlate with both the parent training of men and their involvement with the child. In a poverty sample, attendance was also related to the father providing more financial support for the mother, more co-residence of the parents and reports of both parents of a more harmonious relationship. So, further research is needed to tease apart causal influences here.

Conclusion

In this report I have attempted to argue that fathering is a barometer of family functioning. Men's involvement with preschool children has grown in keeping with their partner's re-entry into the labour force following parenting (O'Brien, 2005), although there are persistent inequalities in parents' commitments to domestic work (Kun, et al., 2011). Preschoolers live in a network of relationships and not only do men play a role in child care in many households (over an above the role of provider that I have not discussed here), this seems important because the nature of the man's care and interaction predicts many aspects of the child's psychosocial functioning, even many years later.

Fathering in poverty/migrant samples is similar to that in more affluent families, but the social system is often more complex. I am sure that I am not alone in assuming that ECEC policy makers need to be aware both of the patterns of relationships within households but also how they interact with life experiences that work against successful family development.

I have attempted to argue that Intervening with fathers does not detract from the needs of mothers: indeed the evidence suggests that a whole family approach is advantageous. Programmes involving fathers also appear to show a link between participation by parents and the man's subsequent involvement with the child. Getting men involved in such activities is difficult (as we see in low take-up rates) but programmes dedicated to helping both parents do influence the network of relationships in which they operate.



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