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CHAPTER 5

Which Fathers Are Involved in Caring for Preschool-Age Children in the United Kingdom?

A Longitudinal Analysis of the Influence of Work Hours in Employment on Shared Childcare Arrangements in Couple Households

Colette Fagan and Helen Norman

INTRODUCTION

Fathers still put less time than mothers into the domestic tasks involved in looking after their children but across European countries, Australia, and North America, they are more involved than was the case for fathers 20 or 30 years ago (Hook, 2006). Gender inequalities are less pronounced in some countries, for example, Sweden, compared to other Western states (e.g., Craig and Mullen, 2011; Sullivan et al., 2009; OECD, 2010; Hook, 2006) and there is household variation within countries (Raley et al., 2012; Norman et al., 2014).

This chapter examines fathers' involvement in the domestic tasks of caring for their preschool children in the United Kingdom. The paternal involvement of direct engagement in childcare tasks is distinct from economic provision for the child's well-being via employment (Dermott, 2003; also see Norman, 2015). We focus on the effect of the fathers' and mothers' employment hours on paternal involvement in childcare, and whether the way that parents' organize their work and childcare arrangements in the first year of the child's life influences paternal involvement as the child grows up.

First we summarize the findings from previous research, followed by a description of recent developments in the United Kingdom's statutory work-family reconciliation policies to support paternal involvement. Then we introduce the longitudinal Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), which we use to analyze father's involvement in looking after their child at nine

months after the birth and when the child is three years old. The analysis explores the impact of hours of employment, gender role attitudes, occupational class, and other household characteristics on paternal involvement. The conclusion discusses the policy implications.

THE DIVISION OF CHILDCARE BETWEEN PARENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM
Sen's (1992) capability framework elaborates how state and workplace policies, social norms, and household economic and demographic circumstances shape men's and women's options, decisions, and behaviors. It can be applied to theorize how social, economic, demographic, and cultural factors shape the gendered allocation of childcare (Hobson, 2014). Family and labor market policies, the work practices and expectations associated with men's jobs and workplaces, and other household circumstances hinder or enable fathers' capabilities to be involved (for a review of the international evidence from previous research, see Norman et al., 2014; Norman, 2015). As we argue elsewhere, the relative importance of these factors in shaping men's involvement in childcare remains underresearched and largely based on small-scale qualitative studies or cross-sectional survey data (Norman, 2010; also see O'Brien, 2005).

In the United Kingdom, as in most countries, it is more common for the mother than the father to reduce employment hours due to childcare responsibilities. It is difficult for mothers to remain employed full-time due to limited and expensive childcare services and the long full-time hours expected in many jobs. Working-time decisions are also shaped by social norms and "moral rationalities" concerning the socially acceptable behavior of parents, and in the United Kingdom part-time employment is more socially acceptable than full-time employment for women with young children (Duncan, 2006). In contrast, the essence of "good fathering" is employment and being the main earner in a couple with fathers who deviate from this position encountering "social scrutiny" and a "pressure to be earning" (Doucet and Merla, 2007).

Women are more likely to pursue full-time and continuous employment after childbirth if they have high levels of human capital, measured by education and their work experience and good career and earnings prospects (Fagan and Norman, 2012; Chanfreau et al., 2011; Harrop and Moss, 1995; Jacobs, 1999). Well-paid jobs also provide more resources to pay childcare costs, which are typically offset against the mothers' rather than the fathers' earnings when couples estimate the financial returns from a dual-employed household arrangement.

Class differences in paternal involvement have been found in qualitative studies in the United States (e.g., Shows and Gerstels, 2009; Gerstel and Clawson, 2014) and in the United Kingdom (e.g., Gillies, 2009; Brannen and Nilsen, 2006; Sullivan, 2006). These studies find that "middle-class fatherhood" tends to be more publicly visible through involvement in education and leisure activities with children outside of the home, while working-class fathers usually take on more of the (private) daily caregiving responsibilities at home.

In the United Kingdom, as in much of Europe, women's economic activity has increased and social attitudes have shifted in favor of more egalitarian gender roles in the family (e.g., see Lyonette and Crompton, 2015; Park et al., 2013). Hence mothers' employment might now be exerting a greater impact on paternal involvement in childcare than fathers' own employment activity. However, most studies to date focus on the immediate effect of current employment hours on paternal involvement. There has been little exploration of whether the hours worked by mothers and fathers in the early stages of a child's life have a bearing on how involved fathers are in childcare in later years.ⁱ

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM'S WORK-FAMILY RECONCILIATION POLICIES TO SUPPORT PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT

It is only recently in the United Kingdom that state policy has been introduced targeted at increasing father's involvement in childcare. In 2003 employed fathers gain a statutory right

to paternity leave, consisting of two consecutive weeks of leave after the child's birth, paid at the same low flat rate payment as statutory maternity leave (£139.58 in 2015 or 90 percent of average weekly earnings if that is lower). Unpaid parental leave was introduced in 1999 following the adoption of the European Parental Leave. In 2011 Additional Paternity Leave (APL) was introduced, giving fathers the opportunity to take a further 26 weeks of leave (including 19 weeks paid at the statutory rate) provided the mother shortened her maternity leave. This was replaced in April 2015 with a more generous system of Shared Parental Leave (SPL), which allows eligible parents to share 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of statutory pay more flexibly in blocks of 1 week or more interspersed with periods of work. Take up by fathers has been low. According to the 2009–2010 Maternity and Paternity Rights and Women Returners Survey, 91 percent of fathers took time off around the time of their baby's birth but only 49 percent of those taking time off took statutory paternity leave.ⁱⁱ Only 1 in 172 fathers (0.6 percent) took APL in 2011–2012 and only 2–8 percent of fathers are predicted to use the new SPL scheme once it is in place (TUC, June 13, 2013).

In 2003 employed fathers benefited from the introduction of the statutory "Right to Request" reduced or flexible hours (i.e., a change in schedule or place of work) for employed parents of children under 6 years old (or under 18 years old if the child was disabled). The right was extended to the carers of some adults in 2007, to parents of children aged under 17 years in 2009, and to all employees in 2014. Women make more use of this statutory right than men, particularly mothers, typically in the form of part-time work. Flexible work is often less available in male-dominated workplaces, fewer men make requests to work flexibly (e.g., see Tipping et al., 2012), and evidence indicates men are more likely to have their requests for flexible work rejected by their employer (Fagan et al., 2006; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2012; 2014).

Parents' decisions about whether to use the somewhat limited statutory parental leave entitlements or to request reduced or flexible hours occur in a context where there are shortfalls in the supply, quality, and affordability of childcare despite improvements following the government launch of a National Childcare Strategy in 1998. Free part-time childcare during school term time was introduced for all four-year-olds in 1998, extended to three-year-olds in 2004, and in 2010, the entitlement was increased to 15 hours of free part-time preschool nursery per week during school term time.ⁱⁱⁱ By September 2014, this entitlement was extended to 40 percent of the most disadvantaged two-year-olds in low-income families, up from the 20 percent coverage of two-year-olds, which had been introduced in 2013. In 2015 the new Conservative government announced that the free part-time preschool provision for three- and four-year-olds will be increased to 30 hours per week from September 2017.

In April 2015, "tax-free childcare" was introduced to cover 20 percent of families' annual childcare costs on fees of up to £10,000 per child. However, childcare costs continue to rise for parents in the United Kingdom and are among the highest in the world, equivalent to 26.6 percent of family income (or up to 40.9 percent of the average wage) (OECD, 2011). Furthermore, there are shortages of out-of-school and childminder places in some neighborhoods (Rutter, 2015), while the preschool provision is insufficient for many parents given it is only compatible with part-time employment.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

Which fathers are involved in caring for preschool children in the United Kingdom? In this analysis we focus on households that contain a heterosexual couple with one or more young children and examine the characteristics associated with the couple sharing childcare roughly equally (e.g., see Lupton and Barclay, 1997; O'Brien, 2005). We are particularly concerned to explore the association between fathers' and mothers' employment hours and paternal

involvement, and whether fathers' gender role attitudes and caregiving arrangements when the child is a baby shapes paternal involvement when the child is three years old.

The analysis uses longitudinal data from the first two sweeps of the Millennium Cohort Study, which is a nationally representative survey following a cohort of children born around the year 2000 in the United Kingdom. This cohort (or longitudinal) survey is particularly useful for our analysis because it allows us to chart employment, attitudinal and demographic changes, and the effect this has on paternal involvement, for the same cohort of children over a period of time. The first sweep, in 2001/2002, sampled 18,819 babies aged nine months (being raised in 18,552 families). The second sweep, in 2003/2004, followed the same cohort of children, plus 692 newly recruited families. The sample was filtered to focus the analysis on heterosexual couples in which the fathers were employed when their baby was nine months old (sweep one) and the couple were still together when the child was three years old (sweep two). This subset of households represented 48 percent of the original sample ($n = 9,189$ households)^{iv} (see Norman [2010] for further details on sample derivation).

We focus on paternal involvement when the child is aged three to explore the longitudinal impact of employment activity and the couple's division of caregiving in the immediate postbirth period (i.e., in sweep one when the child is aged nine months). It is measured by the variable: "who is mostly around and generally looks after the cohort child," which is asked when the child is aged three. The response categories are "mother does most," "father does most," "another does most," or "shared equally." A categorical variable was derived to distinguish fathers who shared childcare with a partner hereafter referred to as "shared caregivers," fathers who were secondary caregivers because the mother or someone else did most of the childcare, and fathers who were primary caregivers.

We use mothers' reports of childcare contributions because the MCS survey design for sweep two only collected data on this variable from the mother. Although parental reports

of actual time spent on childcare can vary with spouses sometimes overestimating their own contributions (e.g., see Mikelson, 2008), the indicator available to us is unlikely to be an overestimate since it is a broad summary of whether fathers roughly share childcare or not.

We explore whether shared caregiving when the child is aged three is associated with (i) the prior employment hours of the father and mother nine months after childbirth, (ii) the fathers' caregiving role nine months after childbirth, (iii) the fathers' gender role attitudes nine months after childbirth, and (iv) the employment hours worked by the father and mother when the child is aged three.

We do this in order to explore the relative significance of the association between the mothers' and fathers' employment hours and paternal involvement in childcare and to establish whether there is a longitudinal effect of the prior employment and caregiving arrangements when the child was a baby. We also examine whether fathers' gender role attitudes in the postbirth period are associated with caregiving behavior as the child grows older, controlling for the employment and caregiving arrangements in place when the child was nine months old.

We run two logistic regression models to predict whether fathers have a shared caregiving role when the child is aged three. The first model uses the previous employment hours when the child was nine months old (sweep one) and the second model uses employment hours when the child is aged three (sweep two) to establish whether the current hours of employment or those established shortly after their child's birth have the stronger association with paternal involvement.

Both models control for the sociodemographic variables of father's occupational class, his age, the sex of the cohort child, other children in the household, and whether the father has other children living elsewhere. Education is not included because it is correlated

with occupational class but similar results were obtained when the model was rerun using education instead of occupational class (also see Norman et al., 2014). All but two of the sociodemographic variables are from sweep one—when the cohort child is aged nine months—in order to model the longitudinal relationship with paternal involvement when the cohort child is aged three (sweep two). The presence of other residential and nonresidential children in the household when the cohort child is aged three is included since this is expected to have a direct impact on paternal involvement due to the additional caregiving demands.

RESULTS: WHICH FATHERS ARE MOST INVOLVED?

Just over a quarter of the fathers in our sample were shared caregivers when the child was three years old. Only 1 percent of the fathers were primary caregivers and they were found to be categorically distinct from fathers who were shared caregivers and hence cannot be aggregated (see Norman, 2010) so were removed for this analysis. The remainder were secondary caregivers.

Just over half of the fathers who shared care when the baby was nine months old had become a secondary caregiver by the time the child was three years old and 15 percent of the fathers who have been a secondary caregiver had become a shared caregiver. Only a very small proportion of fathers had been the primary caregivers when the child was nine months old ($n = 43$), and if they changed status by the time the child was three years old they were slightly more likely to have become a shared caregiver than a secondary caregiver. Table 5.1 presents the odds ratios from the two logistic regression models.

Table 5.1 The conditions associated with fathers taking on a shared caregiver role when children are aged three

Variable	Model one	Model two
	[N = 9,088]	[N = 9,036]
	B (std. error)	B (std. error)
Father shared caregiver when child is aged 9 months?	3.9 (.23)***	3.7 (.22)***
- Yes		
<i>Fathers' work hours^a</i>	n/a ^b	3.4 (.63)***
- Not in work	1.5 (.24)*	3.9 (.70)***
- PT (<30 hours/week)	1.4 (.11)***	1.7 (.16)***
- FT (30–40 hours/week)	1.3 (.10)**	1.3 (.11)**
- FT (41–48 hours/week)		
Reference category: long-FT (>48 hours/week)		
<i>Mother's work hours^a</i>	1.02 (.96)	1.8 (.15)***
- PT (<20 hours/week)	1.5 (.15)***	3.2 (.32)***
- Long PT (20–30 hours/week)	2.4 (.23)***	6.2 (.70)***
- FT (31–40 hours/week)	2.7 (.41)***	7.0 (1.3)***
- Long FT (41+ hours/week)		
Reference Category: not in work		
<i>Father's occupational class^c</i>	1.1 (.16)	1.1 (.16)
- Intermediate	1.1 (.11)	1.2 (.12)
- Small employer and s-emp	1.5 (.12)***	1.5 (.13)***
- Lo Sup and tech/semi-routine and routine		
Reference category: managerial and professional		
<i>Fathers' attitudes toward whether children suffer if mother works full time^c</i>	.7 (.06)***	.92 (.08)
- Strongly agree/agree	.9 (.07)	.96 (.08)
- Neither agree nor disagree		
Reference category: strongly disagree/disagree		
Sex of baby	.85 (.05)**	.84 (.05)**

- Female		
Reference category: boy		
Siblings in householdat 9 mths	...at age three
- Yes	1.3 (.08)***	.97 (.07)
Reference category: no		
Other nonresident children	...at 9 mths	...at age three
- Yes	.88 (.08)	1.2 (.08)
Reference category: no		
<i>Father's age</i> ^c	1.0 (.01)	1.0 (.01)*
16–69		

Source: MCS sweep 1 (2000/2001) and MCS sweep two (2003–2004), sample weighted by survey weights for sweep two (bvowt2).

^a PT = part time, FT = full time. Model one uses sweep one employment hours (recorded when the child is aged nine months old) and model two uses sweep two employment hours (recorded when the child is aged three).

^b The sample was filtered to include only fathers who were in work when the child was aged nine months and hence no data here.

^c Recorded when the child is aged nine months.

Note: 1.1% of the sample was missing in model one (n = 101 missing cases) and 1.7% of the sample was missing in model two (n = 153 missing cases). This was due to a minority of missing cases for the “other siblings” variable where the presence of other siblings was recorded as “unknown,” as well as missing occupational and employment hours data.

*p <0.05; **p <0.01; ***p <0.001.

The results show that the probability that fathers share childcare when the child is three years old increases significantly if they shared childcare nine months after the child’s birth. This association is statistically significant even when we control for parents’ employment hours nine months after the child’s birth (model one) or current employment hours when the child is aged three (model two). In model one, this variable has the strongest association with fathers sharing childcare at age three, which suggests that being involved in

the early months of a child's life is a key factor for shaping how involved fathers are in their child's care two years later.

The number of employment hours worked by the mother is also important, and in most cases has an even stronger association than the fathers' own employment hours. If the mother is employed full-time, at nine months and at three years after childbirth, the father is more likely to share childcare when the child is aged three. This association is statistically significant controlling for the fathers' shared caregiver status nine months after the child's birth, his occupational class, gender role attitudes, the sex of the cohort child, the presence of the cohort child's siblings, and other nonresident children and the fathers' age.

Model one shows that as the hours a mother works nine months after childbirth increase, there is an increased probability that the father shares the care of the three-year-old child. If she worked long full-time hours of 41+ per week nine months after childbirth then the father is 2.7 times more likely to share childcare when the child is aged three compared to couples where the mother is not employed at this point in time.

The father's employment hours when the child is nine months old is also associated with shared caregiving when the child is aged three but the effect is weaker than that of the mothers' employment hours nine months after birth. Fathers who worked full-time hours of between 30 and 48 per week when the child was nine months old were 1.3–1.4 times more likely to share childcare when the child is aged three than those fathers who worked longer employment hours. This suggests that if a father works long hours nine months after their child's birth, it sets a pattern of long working hours and limited caregiving that persists two years later.

Model two demonstrates that current employment hours are more important for predicting shared caregiving when the child is three years old than the hours previously

worked when the child was nine months old. In model two, the mothers' employment hours have the strongest association out of all the variables included, with fathers seven times more likely to share childcare when the child is aged three if the mother works long full-time hours (of 41+ per week) at that time. Fathers' current employment hours have a weaker influence than those of the mother, but fathers are still almost four times more likely to share childcare if they are employed part-time when the child is aged three, and just over three times more likely to do so if not employed. This suggests reduced work hours for fathers are conducive to sharing childcare.

We explored whether a measure of the interaction of fathers' and mothers' employment hours improved the model but this was not significant at both time points. This confirmed that mothers' employment hours have the strongest influence on paternal involvement in childcare when the child is aged three, independent of what hours the father works.

Attitudes and values influence behavior. Previous multivariate analysis demonstrated that fathers with traditional gender role attitudes were less likely to share childcare nine months after birth (Norman, 2010). Model one shows that fathers with traditional gender role attitudes—measured by their agreement that children suffer if the mother works full-time—are less likely to share childcare when the child is aged three, controlling for the couple's caregiving and employment arrangements when the child was nine months old. However, there is no statistically significant effect when the analysis is run with the mother's and father's current employment hours (model two). This demonstrates that there is little additional influence of gender role attitudes on the probability that the father is a shared caregiver once their current employment hours and that of their partner are taken into account when the child is aged three.

Turning to the sociodemographic variables, fathers were more likely to share childcare when their child was aged three if they were in the lower supervisory and technical/semiroutine and routine occupational groups. Other research has found that some working-class fathers are more involved in childcare compared to their middle-class counterparts (e.g., Gerstel and Clawson, 2014; Shows and Gerstels, 2009; Brannen and Nilsen, 2006). Similar results were obtained when the model was rerun using education instead of occupational class (also see Norman et al., 2014). Fathers are more likely to be shared caregivers at this stage in the child's life if the child is a boy. Once the mothers' and fathers' current employment hours are taken into account (in model two), the presence of other children in the household has no significant association with the probability of fathers sharing childcare. Children who reside in other households have no significant effect either. Older fathers are slightly more likely to share childcare (model two).

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Our results show that fathers in the United Kingdom who share childcare when the child is nine months old are significantly more likely to share childcare when the child is three years old. The mothers' and fathers' employment hours nine months and three years after the birth have additional significant effects on the couples' caregiving arrangements when the child is three years old, and of the two, it is the hours worked by the mother that has the stronger effect. The strong influence of maternal employment on fathers' involvement in caregiving is found for other countries as well: for example, in Italy (Tanturri and Ruspini, forthcoming 2015) as well as in Australia, Denmark, and France (Craig and Mullen, 2011). What our analysis shows is that for the United Kingdom the more the hours the mother works in employment, the more likely the father is to share childcare, regardless of how many hours he works in employment. Fathers who work long full-time hours in employment are less likely

to share childcare than other fathers. The importance of the employment hours worked by the mother and father persists even when we control for the father's occupational position.

Fathers in the United Kingdom are less likely to share childcare when the child is aged three if they have traditional gender role attitudes toward parental roles nine months after the child's birth. However, fathers' attitudes do not have an additional significant effect once the fathers' and mothers' current employment arrangements are taken into account

These results expose the influence of mothers' employment on fathers' caregiver roles in the United Kingdom; a result that has also been found in other EU countries. In two-parent households, couples have historically given precedence to the fathers' labor market role as the main earner (e.g., see Warin et al., 1999). Structural arrangements perpetuate this norm, not least because the gender pay gap in the labor market increases the probability that the man is better paid. If the woman interrupts her employment or switches to part-time hours this reinforces her position as a "secondary" earner. This longitudinal analysis has shown that this gender inequality in the UK labor market reduces the probability that the couple shares childcare at home.

We have previously shown that mothers in the United Kingdom are more likely to be employed full time both nine months and three years after childbirth if they had a higher occupational position prior to the birth, the likelihood of which is greater for the highly qualified (Fagan and Norman, 2012). Hence measures to enable all women to make a smooth resumption of employment after childbirth are conducive to a more gender-equal parenting arrangement. These include interventions to provide stronger protection from discrimination for women who take maternity leave, improvements in parental leave and childcare services, and wage setting policies that improve women's pay rates, such as implementation of the "equal pay for work of equal value" principle.

The longitudinal analysis also shows that fathers who share childcare nine months after the child's birth are more likely to share childcare when the child is aged three. The number of hours taken up by the fathers' employment also impact on the probability of a shared childcare arrangement. Hence if the policy goal is to enable fathers to become more involved in raising their children, it is important to create the conditions in which they can become involved caregivers from an early stage in the child's life through enhanced parental leave entitlements reserved for fathers, effective implementation of the "right to request" flexible working, and measures to reduce the long full-time working hours that characterize many of the jobs and workplaces men are employed in.

Finally, in line with previous research that has found working-class fathers are more involved in daily childcare activities, our analysis shows that fathers employed at lower occupational levels are more likely to share childcare when the child is three years old than are fathers in managerial and professional occupations. This effect is found once the employment hours of both the father and the mother are taken into account. Economic factors provide part of the explanation: low-income households are less able to pay for childcare to supplement the free part-time hours provided by the state and working-class mothers are more likely to seek work schedules where they work during the evening, at night, or during the weekend when the father is available to provide childcare (e.g., see Fagan et al., 2012).

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i. Bailey (1994) and Wood and Repetti (2004) are examples of two (older) North America studies who used longitudinal data to chart changes in paternal involvement over three and four years, respectively.

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- ii. According to the 2009–2010 Maternity and Paternity Rights and Women Returners Survey: 25 percent took statutory leave plus other paid leave, 18 percent took other paid leave only, 5 percent took unpaid leave and 2 percent took other combinations of leave (Chanfreau et al., 2011).
 - iii. In 1998, an entitlement to 12.5 hours/week (in five sessions of 2.5 hours) for 33 weeks per year was introduced for four-year-olds. This was rolled out to three-year-olds in 2004 and increased to 38 weeks per year (term time) in 2006.
 - iv. This also included the removal of 96 (1 percent) primary caregiver fathers in sweep two, discussed further later.