Understanding fathering

Masculinity, diversity and change

Hanan Hauari and
Katie Hollingworth

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To what extent is there a 'common model' of fatherhood in a modern multicultural Britain that is changing fast?

This research set out to investigate the parenting beliefs and practices of fathers from 29 'ordinary' two-parent families living in non-affluent neighbourhoods from four ethnic groups: White British, Black African, Black Caribbean and Pakistani.

The study explores:

- how fathers, mothers and children living in ordinary British families view what it means to be a father;

- how individual interpretations of fatherhood are influenced by personal history, culture, ethnicity, faith, and social circumstance;

- whether it is possible to identify common ideals about fathering and the behaviours of fathers across ethnic groups;

- to what degree members of the same family share beliefs, attitudes and practices;

- how beliefs and practices vary within and across ethnic groups;

- how fathers might be better supported in their roles as parents.

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Contents

1 Overall introduction

Background to commissioning

This report documents the main findings and conclusions from a study of fathers and fatherhood in modern Britain. The research, which was mainly qualitative, was completed by the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU), Institute of Education, University of London on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and was commissioned as part of a major programme of research into parenting in Britain.

The study explored aspects of diversity in parenting, in particular focusing on fathering in ordinary, two-parent families in four ethnic groups in England: Pakistani, Black Caribbean, Black African and White British. The aim was to gain a better understanding of what 'being a father' means to parents and children in these communities: what does fathering involve, what values and aspirations are attached to fathering and to what extent can there be said to be, in a modern multicultural Britain that is changing fast, a 'common model' of fatherhood that holds within and across families from diverse ethnic groups?

Policy, practice and scholarly interest of the study

In the post-war period, dramatic changes in family structures and in social attitudes to the family have occurred in Britain. While myriad social and political factors have been instrumental in bringing about these changes, two factors in particular can be identified as having impacted fundamentally on attitudes and expectations of fathers. The first is women's increasing involvement in the paid workforce outside the home, such that, in many respects, the model of families with two working parents is now the norm (ONS, 2005). The increasing presence of women in the labour market has brought with it a reassessment of parenting roles and responsibilities, and an expectation that working-couple families will – at least to some extent – share parenting in ways that give each partner an equal role (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003; Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda, 2004). As we will show later in this report, 'gender stereotypes' that place mothers in the pre-eminent caregiving role and assign to fathers the main responsibility for breadwinning are still alive and well within the family, yet for the most part fathers across all groups feel themselves to be – and many are – deeply involved in most of the daily routines of childcare and nurturance in ways that their own parents (and certainly their grandparents) might have found surprising.

The second factor may perhaps be less visible, yet it is no less powerful. The rise of the 'child-centred' family incorporates the notion that children require certain inputs from parents in order to grow and develop in optimal ways; they are not just incidental adjuncts to adults but a central focus of family life in their own right, with rights enshrined by international convention (United Nations, 1989). Yet, in modern Britain today, parents show signs of being in the midst of a 'parenting transformation' with far-reaching implications. For men, in particular, whose fathering role has undergone previous transformations from a traditional one-dimensional role, such as a breadwinner, to a more multidimensional role during the 20th century, there is now an expectation that a father should be involved in all aspects of childcare and child-rearing activities, not to mention his role as a companion (Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda, 2004).

The challenge of how to do the best for their children preoccupied the thoughts of many of the parents who took part in this study. It calls for a complex balance to be maintained, reconciling economic, moral, social and personal dimensions, achieved with considerable skill and effort against a backdrop of social structures and public expectations that do not always facilitate the task.

With this in mind, it is no coincidence that parenting has been a key issue in policy focus over much of the last decade, especially, though not only, in the UK. At times, an observer might be forgiven for imagining that 'good parenting' is the common cure for all social ills, given the enormous attention and resources that the State has provided in recent years (Barrett, 2003; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Moran *et al.*, 2004). Fathering – what it is and how it can be supported – has been part of this, though to a lesser extent than the concern with parenting generally. Policy documents that have emphasised the importance of the father–child relationship, such as *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1998) and, more recently, *Every Child Matters* (HMT/DfES, 2003) and *Every Parent Matters* (HMT/DfES, 2007), have provided the impetus for practice initiatives aimed at increasing fathers' opportunities and inclination to participate in their children's care. For example, the *National Childcare Strategy* (DCSF, 2004), the *National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services* (DoH, 2004) and *Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance* (Sure Start Unit, 2005) all emphasise the importance of involving fathers in childcare and family support services. Yet initiatives aimed at enhancing their involvement have not always been successful (Ghate *et al.*, 2000; Page *et al.*, 2008).

Policy-makers may be driven to some degree by the economic benefits of father involvement – for example, by ensuring that fathers feel committed to contributing to family costs even if they re-partner or are non-resident with their children (Child Support Act 1991). However, policy and practice interest in fathers' role in childcare has also been substantially galvanised by a growing body of research evidence on the social and developmental benefits to children of high levels of quality paternal involvement. It is now recognised that, in many respects, sensitive caregiving from both parents contributes to a wide variety of positive child outcomes (Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda, 2004). These include the following.

- Better educational outcomes: Flouri and Buchanan (2004) and Goldman (2005) found fathers' expectations and levels of involvement in their children's learning and schools to be predictive of greater school progress and higher qualifications.

- Better psychosocial adjustment: studies have identified a range of positive outcomes around the psychological development of adolescents, specifically in the domains of children's social maturity, behaviour and self-esteem. Many of these are thought to relate from the father–teenager relationship (Zimmermann *et al.*, 2000; Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004; Flouri, 2005).

- Reducing adolescent involvement in risk-taking behaviour, such as antisocial behaviour and youth crime (Flouri and Buchanan, 2002a, 2002b; Videon, 2005 and Menning, 2006 – both cited in Burgess, 2008).

The present study was commissioned with all of these factors in mind: the evidence that the involvement of fathers is good for children; the strong and growing policy interest in promoting father involvement; and the fact that practice still struggles to ensure that services provided to support parents are as accessible and effective for fathers as they are for mothers. In addition, we set out to explore and shed light on fathering in the context of an increasingly multicultural, diverse society.

Conceptualising father involvement
References to 'father involvement' throughout this report imply both direct interaction and involvement in caregiving, as well as the economic contribution that fathers make (O'Brien, 2004). As others have noted, paternal involvement in childcare is influenced by a number of distinct but interrelated factors – biological, economic and motivational (Lewis and Lamb, 2007). Much of the recent research on father involvement has been informed by Lamb and colleagues' (1987) three-part model, which considers paternal involvement in terms of fathers' *engagement*, *accessibility* and *responsibility* – three dimensions of fathering that we consider throughout this report.

- *Engagement* refers to the direct interaction between the father and the child, usually through caregiving, shared activities or other

interactions involving direct person-to-person contact (for example, play or instruction).

- *Accessibility* or *availability* concerns the father's potential availability for interaction through being present in the child's vicinity, even if not in direct physical proximity.

- *Responsibility* for care includes making sure the child's physical and emotional needs are met and arranging for resources to be available for this where necessary.

The current evidence suggests that greater father involvement in any or all of these three categories is beneficial for the entire family (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004). Theories of parenting, and this would include fathering, emphasise that parenting is multiply determined, being influenced by a variety of individual and sociocultural factors. These include the:

- characteristics of the father (that is, his personality, as well as his beliefs and attitudes towards child rearing);

- characteristics of the child (age, gender and temperament);

- context in which fathering takes place (for example, the father's social support network, employment status and relationship with the child's mother) (Belsky, 1984).

Within these three categories, the father's relationship with the mother may be particularly important. Furthermore, maternal attitudes regarding the role of fathers may have more influence over fathering practices than fathers' own beliefs. For example, McBride and colleagues (2005) found that mothers' beliefs regarding the role of the father moderated both fathers' perceptions regarding the importance of their role and the degree to which they were engaged in their children's care. To this we might add (as revealed by respondents in this study) that fathers' own experiences of being parented are also influential, along with a whole complex of practical and logistical factors that frame family life: work,

money, availability of help with childcare, type of neighbourhood in which one lives, health and well-being, among others.

Several researchers have reported that the economic aspects of fathering are an important element and that conceptions of 'good' fathering remain linked to some extent to fathers' traditional role as the family breadwinner, despite the fact that women increasingly provide additional income to households (Lewis, 2000: Lamb and Tamis-Lamonda, 2004). Pleck (2004) suggests that contemporary conceptualisations of 'good' fathers characterise them as individuals who provide both economic and emotional stability for their families. In this respect, it is claimed, both men and women associate fathers' breadwinning capacity with their masculinity and power within the family structure (Warin *et al.*, 1999). Related to this, others have focused on the contradictory pressures under which modern parents operate: that time involved in childcare may have to be at the expense of time in paid employment – and vice versa (Lewis, 2000). Though much of the media focus is on how mothers 'juggle' work and home, for fathers, whose breadwinning role is often a dominant feature of their family membership, *managing* this 'role conflict' may also be a significant pressure.

Aims and objectives of the study

While a study of this scale cannot attempt to address all of the potentially important influences that research suggests impact on fatherhood, its objectives can provide a framework for exploring some of the broadly interconnected questions in order to gain a better understanding of what influences fathering practices.

Research questions that the study set out to address were as follows.

- How do fathers, mothers and children living in ordinary British families view the 'role' of a modern-day father. What does it mean to be a father? What do fathers 'do' and does this differ in any systematic way from what mothers do?

- In what ways are individual interpretations of fatherhood influenced, in particular, by personal

history, culture, ethnicity, faith and social circumstance?

- Is it possible to identify commonalities in ideals about fathering and the behaviours of fathers, despite differences of ethnic background and culture?

- To what degree do members of the same family share similar beliefs, attitudes and practices (that is, behaviours)?

- How do beliefs and practices vary within and across ethnic groups?

Structure of the report

Chapter 2 of this report describes the methodology used in the study, including the sample characteristics. Chapter 3 then goes on to explore 'What is a father?', looking at both the values and attitudes held by parents and children about fathering, and what the data tells us about the actual parenting behaviours and activities of fathers in our sample. Chapter 4 focuses on 'What shapes fathering?', looking at different influencing factors including parents' own experiences of being parented, current life and family circumstances, gender relations and constructs, and tradition, culture and religion. In the concluding chapter we examine the importance of fathers: 'Do fathers matter?', assessing the contribution that fathers make to the family and focusing on how fathers might be better supported in their roles as parents.

2 Methodology for the study

This was an exploratory, mixed-method study, primarily using qualitative data-collection methods, with a quantitative component in the form of a written activity diary. The research set out to investigate the parenting beliefs and practices of fathers from 'ordinary' two-parent families living in non-affluent neighbourhoods from four ethnic groups: White British, Black African, Black Caribbean and Pakistani. The original research design proposed recruiting a purposive sample of ten families and thus 30 individuals in total in each of the four ethnic groups. The data was 'triangulated' within families by including fathers, their partners and one child in each family unit, with data collected separately from each member. The age range for children was chosen to enable exploration of fathering of younger, school-age as well as older, adolescent children. Data-collection tools included an activity diary and a semi-structured, in-depth interview lasting from 45 minutes (for children) to 1.5 to two hours (adults). The fieldwork took place between October 2007 and March 2008.

Sample

In order to ensure that, as far as possible, a good cross-section of ordinary families was achieved, families were recruited to a specification designed by the research team by three professional companies with expertise in recruiting respondents for qualitative research studies from within local communities. Specific local authority areas in England were selected as recruitment sites for the purposive sample on the basis that they had a significant population of one of the four ethnic groups on which the research focused. Within these authorities, the research team selected particular wards with high rankings in the 2007 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, which combine a number of indicators covering economic, social and housing issues into a single deprivation score

for each area of England,[1] and families were recruited from these wards.

The eventual research sample comprised 29 families in total, and included a father, mother and child in each family (87 individuals in total). Ten families of Pakistani origin were recruited from a metropolitan borough in the North. Ten families of White British origin were recruited from the Inner London area and from large cities in the Midlands and the North West. Seven families of Caribbean origin and two Black African families were recruited from the London area. Only families with a child aged in the selected age range were included.

Despite substantial efforts, the use of locally networked recruiters and extending the planned time-frames for recruiting, the final sample was somewhat lower in number than intended, with unequal numbers of families in the different ethnic groups (see Table 1). The shortfall was most serious in relation to the Black African families (only two families were recruited) and to a lesser extent the Black Caribbean families (seven families were recruited). There were also some differences between groups in relation to socio-economic status, as described later in this chapter. As a result of these sampling difficulties, although the sample can be described as a purposive sample of 'ordinary families', the families participating were not necessarily typical families. The implications of this will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Table 1: Geographic location of families

Area	Ethnic group	Families recruited (n)
North	Pakistani	10
Midlands	White British	4
North West	White British	5
London	White British	1
London	Black Caribbean	7
London	Black African	2

Recruitment of families and individuals within families

As described above, families were indentified and recruited within selected areas by professional companies of recruiters. Once the recruiters had secured initial agreement from fathers to be contacted for further discussion, the research team made contact by telephone to explain the research study in more detail, seek informed consent and arrange for a researcher to make an initial visit to the family's home.

At the initial visit, each family member was given a research pack containing information about the research, leaflets detailing relevant support agencies and sources of information for parents and young people on a range of issues, written activity diaries and, for children and young people, instructions outlining the camera diary task. The researcher also explained how to fill out the daily activity diaries and agreed with the family the days on which they would complete them. Informed consent from fathers was reconfirmed, and sought from each mother and child in their own right. Provisional arrangements were made at this stage for the in-depth interviews, which followed the completion of the final activity diary.

Data collection

Activity diaries

To record actual parenting behaviours, each participant was asked to keep a diary of their daily activities and interactions over a period totalling eight days (two weekdays and two weekend days during term time and two weekdays and two weekend days during a school holiday period).[2] The diaries recorded activities and time spent directly engaged with family members and other significant individuals, as well as availability and accessibility to one another (see Chapter 1). The diaries were pretested and refined with a small number of families prior to more extensive use, to ensure that they were both clear to families and easy to use. Diaries were completed by families prior to the interviews to minimise the possibility of bias in the reporting of activities post-interview. To support the completion process and enhance data quality, daily telephone support and guidance was given to participating families by the researchers. A simplified version of the written activity diaries was given to children and young people. An example of the adult and child activity diaries can be found in Appendix 1 (separate appendices).

In-depth interviews

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted in participants' homes after the second diary period had been completed. Interviewers used a topic guide to ensure key topics were covered. Areas covered included:

- attitudes and beliefs about fathering, mothering and gender roles;

- the components of fathering versus mothering (for example what do fathers do, what do mothers do at home?);

- respondents' own experiences of being parented, and the possible influence of childhood experiences, culture, ethnicity, religion and practical circumstances on present-day fathering;

- the importance of fathers to children and in the family more widely;

- clarification and reflection on the information recorded in the activity diaries.

Copies of the interview topic guides for adults and for children can be found in Appendix 2 (separate appendices).

Camera diary (children only)

Children and young people were given a Polaroid (instant) camera and were invited to use it to take photographs of their family during the data-collection period, and in particular of any activities they did together with their fathers or with their mother and father together. They were told they could take photographs of any kinds of activities, both home-based and outside the home, from routine daily activities to special treats and activities that were more out of the ordinary. The majority of the photographs taken by children and young people of their fathers were in the

context of home-based activities, particularly watching TV, reading or doing homework together, eating, playing games and spending time on the computer. A few children took photographs of their fathers carrying out domestic activities such as washing up and cooking. There was also a significant number of photographs of family trips out – for example, at the cinema, at restaurants, swimming, shopping and visiting extended family – and some of the boys took photographs at sporting activities, such as football training or fishing, which they attended solely with their fathers.

This camera diary was incorporated into the research design to serve a number of purposes, in addition to helping to engage children and young people in a 'fun' aspect of the study. The photographs taken by children and young people were used as a stimulus for discussion in the interviews with children, and served as visual prompts, making discussions of abstract issues relating to fathering more concrete. Not all children returned photos to the team, but many reported having enjoyed this aspect of the study.

Participation rates in the different stages of data collection

Families were extremely generous with their time. Despite the relatively onerous commitment (an initial visit, keeping three sets of activity diaries and three in-depth interviews, plus a camera diary for children), once families had agreed to participate in the research, most completed all stages of data

collection. Table 2 shows the participation rates for different stages.[3]

At the end of the study, all respondents were given shopping vouchers to the value of £40 (adults) and £15 (children) as a thank you from the research team.

Analysis

The data gathered from the activity diaries was coded and entered into SPSS. This data was then analysed descriptively to quantify the different activities reported by participants and to identify 'who did what with whom'.

The qualitative in-depth interviews were digitally recorded (with permission), fully transcribed and indexed (coded) and analysed thematically using the 'framework' technique (Ritchie and Spencer, 1993) by entering data into thematically structured charts for collective review by the team.

Ethics

The detailed research methodology and implementation plan was formally approved by the Institute of Education's Faculty Research Ethical Committee, prior to the start of fieldwork.

Limitations of the methodology
All research designs entail trade-offs and most studies encounter at least one or two problems at the implementation stage. This study was no exception, and we would highlight the following limitations in design and implementation of the

Table 2: Number of completed interviews and diaries

Ethnic group	Families recruited (n)	Participating fathers: diaries (n)	Participating fathers: interviews (n)	Participating mothers: diaries (n)	Participating mothers: interviews (n)	Participating children: diaries (n)	Participating children: interviews (n)
Pakistani	10	10	9	10	10	10	10
White British	10	9	10	10	9	10	9
Black Caribbean	7	6	7	6	7	6	7
Black African	2	2*	1	2	2	2	1
Total	29	27	27	28	28	28	27

n = 87.
* Diaries partially completed by mothers on behalf of fathers.

research, with the associated implications for the conclusions.

As the methodology was primarily qualitative, the study set out to be exploratory, aimed at gaining a better understanding of complex meanings and concepts by means of purposive sampling, rather than attempting generalisations about all families in the respective groups. The decision to include mothers and children in the data collection, as well as fathers, naturally imposed limits on the total number of families that could be included within a given time-frame and budget. The original research design proposed a balanced design of ten families and thus 30 individuals in total in each of the four ethnic groups. In the event, despite substantial efforts, the final sample was limited to 29 families and 87 individuals, and was unbalanced in relation to ethnic groups. The imbalance makes it difficult to draw inferences about differences between the groups on grounds of ethnicity, even given the qualitative nature of the data. The two groups of Black African and Black Caribbean families could have been combined and treated as one group of 'black families' for the purpose of analysis, but to do so risked obscuring important differences of culture and background. However, on issues where the views of fathers in these two groups concur, they have been described as 'black fathers'.

Perhaps more insidiously, there were also differences between ethnic groups in relation to employment status and occupational ratings. These too were a reflection of sampling difficulties (and possibly area differences), which resulted in a social bias within the sample, with the Black Caribbean fathers more likely to be in occupations of higher socio-economic status and the White British fathers more likely to be unemployed. These differences have acted to limit some of the analyses that could sensibly be conducted – for example, investigations from the diary data of the average amount of time spent on paid work and other activities by fathers in different ethnic groups, and the conclusions that can be drawn, and must be borne in mind, when interpreting the findings.

While it is important to acknowledge these difficulties, it should be stressed that the care and attention paid to the research design, and the considerable effort and time invested by the

many families who took part, has produced a rich dataset that we believe provides new insights into fathering in multicultural England. With a total sample of 29 families and 87 individuals, the dataset is large by qualitative standards. The triangulation of data across family members gives a unique picture of how different individuals within families experience shared daily routines, while the inclusion of perspectives from children, some as young as 7 years of age, has been a particular achievement of this study.[4]

Sample characteristics

Age of participants
All of the 29 fathers in our sample were between 30 and 59 years of age. Seventeen fathers were 30–39 years old and nine were aged 40–49 years. The proportions of mothers in the same age groups were almost identical to that of fathers. There was almost an equal spread of children and young people across three age ranges. Around a third of children and young people were between 7 and 9 years old; approximately two-fifths were 10–13 years old and a quarter were aged 14–19 years (see Tables 3 and 4).

Fathers' employment status
Within the local communities selected for recruitment, recruiters were asked to identify families where fathers were working predominantly in non-professional occupations, reflecting the funder's interest in extending the knowledge base on 'ordinary' (as opposed to affluent) families. Fathers' occupational grades were classified according to the socio-economic classification used by the market research recruiting organisation, equating to occupations in groups E, D, C1 and C2.[5] These are broadly equivalent to the National Statistics Socio-economic Classes (NS-SEC) of 8, 7, 6 and 5. Jobs held by fathers in the sample were nonetheless diverse in terms of employment status and type, including catering, painting and decorating, bakery worker, warehouse operative, taxi driver and youth worker. The majority of fathers in all ethnic groups were employed full-time, with the exception of White British fathers, of whom only half were in current employment. Caribbean fathers were employed in higher occupational grades, CI and C2, than fathers in the other groups. This was

Table 3: Age of parents

Ethnic group	20–29 years		30–39 years		40–49 years		50–59 years	
	Fathers	*Mothers*	*Fathers*	*Mothers*	*Fathers*	*Mothers*	*Fathers*	*Mothers*
Pakistani	0	2	8	5	1	2	1	0
White British	0	1	6	7	4	2	0	0
Black Caribbean	0	0	2	2	4	5	1	0
Black African	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0

n = 57 adults.
Missing data = 1.

Table 4: Age and gender of children and young people

Ethnic group	7–9 years		10–13 years		14–16 years		17+ years	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Pakistani	1	2	1	3	1	1	0	0
White British	2	1	3	1	1	2	0	0
Black Caribbean	2	0	2	1	0	1	1	0
Black African	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

n = 28 children and young people.
Missing data = 1.

because of difficulties experienced in recruiting Caribbean fathers from the lower occupational grades. All of the other working fathers were employed in occupational grade D jobs (see Table 5). Many mothers also worked, often part-time, in occupations such as care assistant, supermarket checkout worker, catering and teaching assistant.

At the time of the research, one Asian father worked part-time for health reasons and one Caribbean father was on long-term sick leave from his job.

Almost half of the mothers in our sample were not in active employment, while, of those who were working, almost equal numbers were employed in full-time and part-time jobs (see Table 6). Table 7 shows the employment status of both mothers and fathers within each family. Most notably, White British families were the only group to have both parents unemployed (five families).

Across the different ethnic groups, fathers' working patterns differed considerably. Half of all Pakistani fathers worked more than 40 hours a week and in some cases more than 50 hours a

Table 5: Fathers' occupational grades

Ethnic group	Grade C	Grade D	Unemployed (E)
Pakistani	0	10	0
White British	0	5	5
Black Caribbean	7	0	0
Black African	0	2	0

n = 29.

Table 6: Mothers' employment status

Ethnic group	Full-time	Part-time	Unemployed
Pakistani	1	3	5
White British	2	1	7
Black Caribbean	4	2	1
Black African	2	0	0

n = 28.
Missing data = 1.

Methodology for the study

Table 7: Employment status of both parents

Ethnic group	Father and mother employed	Father employed and mother unemployed	Father and mother unemployed
Pakistani	4	5	0
White British	3	2	5
Black Caribbean	6	1	0
Black African	1	1	0

n = 28.
Missing data = 1.

week. Eight out of the ten Pakistani fathers worked regularly at weekends in addition to weekdays and evenings, with three working night shifts. In contrast, most of the White British and Black Caribbean working fathers were employed for no more than 40 hours a week, Monday to Friday, and at regular times (see Tables 8 and 9).

Accommodation
The type of housing occupied by families in the sample ranged from relatively spacious owner-occupied homes to rented social housing. All ten of the Pakistani families owned their own homes, which had an average of six rooms per dwelling excluding kitchen and bathroom. In contrast, all except one White British family lived in rented local authority/housing association accommodation, with an average of four rooms per dwelling (see Table 10).

We did not probe families' individual financial circumstances, but it is possible that the differences in tenure reflect the nature of the housing market in the UK, with property prices in some areas well beyond the reach of families on relatively modest incomes, while in other areas cheap availability of property makes owner-occupation possible, even where income is not substantial.

Table 8: Fathers' working hours

Ethnic group	0 hours worked	Part-time less than 35 hours worked	Full-time 35–40 hours worked	41–50 hours worked	Above 50 hours worked
Pakistani	0	1	3	3	2
White British	5	0	3	1	0
Black Caribbean	0	1	5	1	0
Black African	0	0	1	1	0

n = 27.
Missing data = 2.

Table 9: Fathers' working patterns

Ethnic group	Weekdays only	Weekdays and weekends	Regular evening work pm	Regular night work pm–am
Pakistani	1	8	6	3
White British	3	1	1	0
Black Caribbean	4	0	1	0
Black African	1	1	0	1

Fathers could fall into more than one category.
n = 24.
Missing data = 1.

Table 10: Accommodation type

Ethnic group	Rented, local authority/ housing association	Rented, private landlord	Owned/buying on a mortgage
Pakistani	0	0	10
White British	9	0	1
Black Caribbean	2	0	5
Black African	1	1	0

n = 29.

3 What is a father?

Introduction

Lamb (2004), making the point that ideas about fathering are inevitably context-dependent, states that:

> *There is no single father's role to which a father should aspire. Rather, a successful father, in terms of his children's development, is one whose role performance matches the demands and prescriptions of his socio cultural and familial context.*
>
> (Lamb, 2004, p. 11)

In a multicultural society as diverse as modern Britain, this becomes a complex proposition, since for different families different *demands* and *prescriptions* may apply. Even setting aside the diversity in family background, the question remains as to whether a wider sociocultural context applies and, if so, do families experience this in similar ways? The answer is probably no, but one issue that our study set out to explore was the degree to which people in ostensibly different ethnic and cultural groups share similar ideas about what 'being a father' involves, or whether there are clear differences. Put another way, is it possible to identify any common standard of 'fatherhood' across these different groups?

Values and attitudes

In this section, we discuss the study's findings related to some key aspects that define fathering, considered in the context of beliefs held about what fathers should do – that is to say, values and attitudes about fathering, as well as the reality of what fathers actually do and the roles they play within the family. Where appropriate, we have considered whether there appear to be similarities or divergences across the different ethnic groups, as well as within them, between mothers and fathers, and between parents and children. An important point to note at the outset, however, is that for the most part, in terms of values and attitudes to fathering, there were far more commonalities than there were divergences across the sample of families. Furthermore, across all the ethnic groups, children and young people's views of their parents' roles tended to regard them as gender-neutral in principle:

> *I think that it can be equally shared with both of them. Because I mean mums are just as capable as dads of getting food and money and stuff, to comfort you and stuff really. So I mean it's just as easy isn't it for a man as for a woman to do the same things.*
>
> (White British young person, male)

Despite this, many children felt that, in practice, real-life circumstances and individual competencies dictated that responsibilities are more often divided. One parent may be naturally more adept at a certain job and so would take the lead, with the other parent taking more of an assisting and supporting role – for example, mums were viewed as tending to do a better job of cooking and housework and dads at DIY and fixing things. Above all, the interviews with children and young people indicated that most of them were under no illusions about how hard it must be for parents in general to fulfil all the different roles and responsibilities associated with parenthood.

Financial provider
The notion of father as 'breadwinner', which was noted earlier, was endorsed by parents and children across our sample. Warin and colleagues' (1999) research on fathers, work and family life found that parents and children, but fathers in particular, viewed providing an income for the family as the central aspect of fathering. Our study – almost ten years on – suggests this view continues to be widely held.

Despite the numbers of working mothers in our sample (14 out of 29 were in work, eight of whom were full-time), many respondents considered the father to be the main financial provider. Indeed, for some fathers, across all four ethnic groups, financial provision was seen as their defining role. It was considered to be both a key part of identity and a major contributor to feelings of self-worth:

> If I won the Lottery, yes I'd still go to work … I'd probably change my job … but there is no life if you sit down at home all the time.
> (Pakistani father)

Fathers who could not make a financial contribution to the family through paid work (for example, because of health problems) spoke painfully of the feeling of failure associated with this situation:

> You've got to provide – and I mean it's [being a father] all about providing, this is what I believe … I say to [wife] it's my fault that we've got no money coming in, my fault this … at the end of the day, I can't stop beating myself up.
> (White British father)

Pakistani fathers and mothers in particular seemed to place great emphasis on the providing role of the father, which supports the findings of a recent research study on UK Asian fathers (Salway et al., 2009). One Pakistani father in our study stressed that financial security for his children was his main concern, a view that was echoed by some of the black parents.

Two caveats should, however, be noted. First, despite the widespread consensus on fathers as key financial providers in the family, White British, Black Caribbean and younger parents tended to consider that, in today's society, economic necessity increasingly dictates that both parents have a role to play in earning for the family. Also, in cases where either both parents worked or neither parent worked, fathers and mothers' values and attitudes tended to be more egalitarian. Second, among the sample of White British families, financial provision assumed less importance as part of the father's overall parental role. However, this might have been a reflection of the higher levels of unemployment in this group resulting in work being less valued as a central aspect of fatherhood.

Children and young people from all four ethnic groups viewed financial provision as an important role that fathers should fulfil: 'Every dad in the entire world should work' (White British child, male, 7 years old). Several also identified fathers as the ones who give children money. The young people's comments on financial provision also illustrated the practical nature of their views about parents' roles. While many considered that, in principle, both parents could work, there was less agreement as to whether they should do so. By the same token, some children expressed the view that, although there was no reason why mothers and fathers should not both provide financially for the family, in practice this would mean there would be no parent at home for the children – for example, when they got in from school or to transport them to activities – and the benefits of spending time with at least one parent were clearly valued:

> Then you wouldn't have like a parent to be there … we'd always know like there is someone there, you see when he was like not feeling well at school and then your dad, he might be busy as well. So somebody needs to be there as well at home and … You always need someone.
> (Pakistani child, female)

A few Pakistani children (particularly the younger ages) had strongly gendered views, believing that dads should work and mums should be at home. White British children, on the other hand, tended to have the weakest gender-based constructs, resulting in the most egalitarian views on financial provision.

Physical care and nurture of children

Across all ethnic groups and both parents, the view was commonly held that mothers are 'naturally' better equipped than fathers to fulfil the responsibilities of providing physical care and nurturing children. Strong beliefs were expressed regarding biologically determined reasons why mothers were better suited to this role. They were frequently viewed as more emotionally available, loving, physically affectionate and patient than fathers, often having a closer bond with their

children and more 'instinctively' aware of their children's needs:

> *Well they're* [mothers] *better organised and they're more loving … I think she's got more patience.*
>
> (Pakistani father)

Pakistani families in particular tended to view physical caregiving as more often the responsibility of the mother, partly for reasons of 'biology' as above and partly for pragmatic reasons (specifically that, if the father was the main financial provider, then mothers would spend more time at home with the children).This concurs with the research findings of Salway *et al.* (2009) who found that, while UK Asian fathers did contribute towards physical caregiving, they very rarely held any overall responsibility for this role. In general, fathers and mothers from White British and Black Caribbean families felt that nurturing and physical caregiving should be a shared role, although mothers still tended to take overall responsibility, with the father providing support and 'back-up' if mothers could not meet all the requirements for whatever reason.

A number of fathers from all ethnic backgrounds said they had found it especially difficult to engage with and provide physical care for babies. Many first-time fathers in particular had felt inadequate at this stage, recalling their fear of handling a new baby:

> *When we had Erina I was scared to even hold her … probably she get, break something and everything. I was scared.*
>
> (Pakistani father)

A strong and recurring theme that emerged from interviews with parents seemed to be the importance of fathers 'being there' for their children. This was also evident in a recent research study by Williams (2009) on African Caribbean and white working-class fathers in the UK. Parents from all ethnic groups felt that an important aspect of a father's role was being accessible and available to their children as much as possible, but also ensuring they spent 'quality time' with them:

> *It's just being there really. Being about, being there when your son or your daughter they're hurt, they need someone, they need a cuddle … or they're older, they're in trouble, you're there to have a go at them, but be there to support them … Even if you're not doing much, just being there makes a difference.*
>
> (Black Caribbean father)

There also appeared to be a consensus across ethnic groups that fathers should have a role in encouraging, talking to and listening to their children. Many parents felt that this was one of the most effective ways through which fathers establish a close relationship and friendship with their children:

> *Someone they can go to if they need you or if they need help or someone to talk to, or if they needed advice you know, maybe you can give them it or you can give them your point, your view like … Just being there really.*
>
> (White British father)

Despite this, many parents stated that mothers were still generally the ones who took responsibility for emotionally supporting the children and the ones in whom children confided. In addition to the biological determinants that suited them for this role, it was suggested that mothers often spent more time with their children and so tended to have closer emotional bonds with them.

Again, some parents considered that children and young people need physical affection and a 'woman's touch' and 'tenderness', neither of which comes as naturally to men. They thought that children were more likely to turn to their mothers for both emotional support and physical care. In contrast, fathers were seen by many across all ethnic groups as the physically stronger partner, active in practical ways, and therefore more suited to taking on physically demanding roles than to providing emotional care and support:

> *I don't think men are there for kids emotionally, really. They're more practical if you know what I mean.*
>
> (White British mother)

However, it would be wrong to infer from this that parents did not believe fathers *could* form close emotional bonds with children. The picture was more nuanced, in that parents across the whole sample acknowledged that it is essential for *both* parents to show their love and affection for their children and, to this extent, some mothers and fathers believed the provision of physical care and emotional support was a major component of fathering, as well as mothering:

> *Because* [they're] *my children, I have to help them … depending on the mum, you know, that's no good. Fathers should look after them as well you know. I know fathers bring in money, financially support from the outside. But fathers should be close with the children as well.*
>
> (Pakistani father)

A common theme that emerged across the sample as a whole, and that this father essentially was expressing, was the notion of complementary parenting – that parenting is a partnership within which there is a degree of role differentiation, with each partner taking the lead in different areas. However, to be successful, the partnership involves providing 'back-up' for one another and being prepared to cross role boundaries when necessary, with the needs of the children always paramount:

> *I mean if she's home, right, and if she's available, right, then she should … do these things, right? But, if she's not there and you need to change the nappy, then you're not supposed to wait for her – you should do it.*
>
> (Pakistani father)

Values and attitudes on nurturing and physical caregiving were very mixed among the children and young people, with some viewing this role as something that mothers should take the lead on because they are 'better at it' and others seeing it as something that can and should be shared equally between both parents. Views on this aspect of parenting were largely consistent with whether fathers fulfilled this role in practice, rather than showing any specific pattern linked to ethnic identity.

Endorsing the views of many of their parents, children and young people from all ethnic groups referred to inherent biological differences between mothers and fathers. Mothers are deemed to be more emotional, loving and physically affectionate, whereas fathers are more often seen as the physically strong ones, the protectors (see below). Many children felt that, because they tended to have stronger emotional bonds with mothers than with fathers, they more readily turned to them if they had problems or needed emotional support:

> *I think it's because mums are more emotional and personal. You can be closer to your mum I think … And I don't think men like to show their emotions, especially to each other.*
>
> (Black Caribbean young person, female)

Nevertheless, young people of all ethnic groups thought it important for children to feel able to talk to and depend on fathers for support and help; fathers, they thought, should show they care and should be loving and warm towards their children:

> *They should be loving, caring, help you with anything, see you can like talk to him about anything.*
>
> (White British young person, female)

Family protector

In one of the few areas in which ideals about fatherhood and traditional constructs of masculinity intersect, the role of 'family protector' is one that fathers and mothers across all four ethnic groups generally attributed to fathers. Some highlighted the greater physical strength of men as fitting them for this role, while the physical presence of a father was commonly associated with feeling safer and more secure at home:

> *When James used to work at nights I didn't feel as safe in the house on my own with the children as I do when he's here … I suppose, because they're seen as the stronger sex, you know, if anybody got in the house when James was here, I'd stand more of a chance of getting out of it I suppose, whereas, if they got in and I was on my own with the children, I wouldn't stand that chance.*
>
> (White British mother)

Children and young people too, from all ethnic groups, spoke of how important it was to have a strong male presence in the house to feel physically safe and protected:

> She [mum] *can't be that strong can she cos if a thief comes in your house what do you do? Your mum would be there screaming with you, she wouldn't be able to do anything. When things like that happen the dad would stand up.*
>
> (Pakistani young person, female, 15 years old)

Some Pakistani and black children talked about this protective role in the context of fathers as the head of the house, the strong authority figure. Physical strength was seen by many children to characterise fathers, justifying their suitability for the role of family protection, as well as for more practical pursuits such as DIY and physical leisure activities:

> *He's the man and he's the strongest of us in the house.*
>
> (Black Caribbean child, male, 8 years old)

Teaching and educating

Values and attitudes around fathers' responsibilities for teaching and educating their children tended to be mixed. While this role was generally shared between mothers and fathers, Pakistani and black parents more often saw it as an integral part of fathers' overall responsibilities, involving them in actively monitoring, supporting and promoting their children's education:

> *A child has to be educated, you know. It's a way forward in life, you know, education is a priority nowadays especially … if you want to succeed in life you need to have some sort of education behind you … So education is a priority.*
>
> (Pakistani father)

White British parents, on the other hand, attached less significance to this, although a number of White British parents spoke about their role in teaching and educating children in the context of life skills as distinct from schooling:

> *You've gotta be like a bit of a teacher I suppose to show the kids how to, how to get up, how to dress themselves, how to clean themselves, how to be around other people.*
>
> (White British father)

On the subject of providing teaching and guidance on puberty, sex and relationships, parents from all ethnic groups made clear gender-based distinctions, with fathers assuming responsibility for teaching sons while mothers took on this role for daughters:

> *I'm sure she would be embarrassed to discuss* [a] *boyfriend–girlfriend problem with her dad, but when she wouldn't be with me.*
>
> (Pakistani mother)

> *As daughters are growing up there are certain things that Sarah, she would come to me. And with Ben as well with his dad, he'll probably be able to talk to his dad about certain things that he wouldn't wanna talk to me about. Maybe as like with Sarah, she's not gonna go and talk about her personal … you know, bodily or whatever, with her dad.*
>
> (White British mother)

Many parents felt that fathers had a key role to play in relation to children's religious education. However, this was not salient for any of the White British families in the sample.

Discipline and instilling values

There seemed to be consensus across all ethnic groups with regard to the importance of discipline and instilling values in children, but less agreement about which parent was best suited to do this and how it should be done. While many parents felt that both mothers and fathers should be involved in disciplining their children generally, Pakistani and black parents tended to see it as primarily the role of the father to discipline sons:

> *I do think that to bring up a boy child you do need a man to put him in place … my friend has got two boys and they're two lovely boys, but when they got to that age, 15, 16, they start rebelling. And the woman can't put them*

in place because they're turning young men now and they are bigger than their mum, they're stronger than their mums and they wanna do what they wanna do and this little woman can't put them in their place.

(Black Caribbean father)

Parents from all ethnic groups saw fathers as holding more authority than mothers and being, therefore, more effective in disciplining children, particularly when they reached adolescence. However, many talked about how the fact that fathers are less often there in the home makes it harder for them to take on the task of day-to-day disciplining. As a result, children can sometimes be surprised when fathers intervene unexpectedly on more serious disciplinary matters. On the other hand, mothers in particular took the view that, because children spend more time with them, they become more relaxed in interpreting their disciplinary boundaries. With fathers' greater physical size and strength, parents generally considered that children take discipline from their fathers more seriously than from their mothers.

When dads do it, it'll be stricter. When dads start shouting they'll know about it. When mum does it they seem to like laugh. When dad shouts they do get the laugh, but they don't laugh the second time.

(White British father)

The view that fathers have a greater level of authority and therefore are the bottom line when it comes to exercising discipline was particularly strong among black parents:

Women are not authoritative. It's not in their nature. And some time in the build-up of a child you need somebody who is authoritative to handle them. But mothers are not born to be authoritative.

(Black African father)

Some parents, particularly those of Pakistani origin, believed one parent should be strict and the other less so for children to feel able to approach and confide in at least one of them. They did not view this approach as inconsistent in any way, given that each parent would back the

other up, but rather saw it as a complementary style of parenting. In contrast, a number of Black Caribbean and White British parents believed that both parents should be equal and consistent in their approach to discipline, to avoid the possibility of a situation developing whereby a child might 'play one parent off against the other'.

The importance attached to fathers as 'role models' for developing boys was mentioned by parents from all ethnic groups, although this was an especially strong theme among the Black Caribbean families. Both White British and Black Caribbean parents also viewed fathers as having key importance in teaching boys how to be (good) men and instilling morals and prosocial values such as respect for elders:

I say this, sons, because it seems to be the male most of the time, will look at their fathers and try and be like their dads. Even subconsciously. And, if the father is there all the time, they're there, then they can only do what they've seen. Whereas, if the father's not there, they, it can be anything.

(Black Caribbean father)

It must be difficult for families that the fathers aren't there in bringing up boys, teaching them how to be boys but not in an arrogant and violent way, but just in a way to be loving and to bring up their children in the same way. So it must be difficult, I don't think I could do it, I think that, no the father needs to do that.

(Black Caribbean mother)

Children and young people generally saw discipline as a very important part of a parent's role, but very few were of the opinion that this should be primarily the role of the father, viewing it more often as something in which both parents should engage equally. The exception was some children of Pakistani or Black Caribbean origin who had strong views that fathers should take the lead.

Children and young people generally also talked about the importance of fathers as role models providing guidance and advice to children as they grew up, though they differentiated between fathers taking responsibility for sons and mothers commensurately for daughters:

You look up to your dad as the way you wanna grow up really, if you're a boy. If you're a girl, it's the same with your mum. So I mean, without having a dad, I think it'd be … You just grow whatever you want to. You just follow what your mates are or something.

(White British young person, male)

Leisure and play

'Play' was commonly regarded by parents across the sample as an integral part of a father's role in terms of him engaging in leisure and physical activities with children. While mothers were not excluded from fulfilling this particular role, being active, playing and involvement in physical activities with children appeared to be a far more prominent feature of fathers' responsibilities. Some mothers believed that their children might have missed out on certain physical or outdoor activities had their partner not been present to take them on:

You go to the park and that and you see kids with the fathers, they're playing and doing things that they don't really do with the mother.

(White British father)

Fathers generally seemed to find it easier and more satisfying to interact and engage with their children once they were past early childhood and were at an age where they could spend time together on physical activities such as playing sports:

David is getting to that next stage of age, I can do a lot more for David, because you can put his football boots on and play the football match.

(White British father)

Once again, a gender difference was apparent when distinguishing the nature of the time parents spend with their children, with mothers tending to refer more often to time spent on physical and emotional care, particularly talking, whereas fathers referred to spending time that was more activity based:

I think it's slightly different cos Andy likes to do things and get out and get on with it …

Mine is, I think, more of an emotional role than Andy's. Andy's is, 'I'm the dad, I've got to do this'.

(White British mother)

Children and young people similarly identified a father as someone with whom they could play, have fun, 'have a laugh' and share in leisure activities. They tended to place great value on having a parent who was the 'active' one and this was typically the father:

We do all the same things like cricket, my mum wouldn't play cricket like he would.

(Pakistani young person, male)

If my dad wasn't around then I wouldn't really have much fun.

(Pakistani child, female)

This linked in very strongly with children's belief that fathers should make time for their children, 'be there' and spend quality time with them. Like their parents, young people indicated that mothers too could fulfil this role, but the elements of activity and play were more often associated with the roles and responsibilities of fathers.

Domestic chores – housework and cooking

Parents across the sample acknowledged that fathers are, and should be, increasing their involvement in housework and cooking, particularly in cases where both parents are working. Above all, mothers stressed the importance of fathers increasing their involvement in these roles and that, ideally, household tasks should be shared equally:

In an ideal world everything would be split, work would be split, housework would be split, responsibilities would be split.

(White British mother)

If a woman can do a man's job, I'm sure a man can do a woman's job. There's no such thing as cooking and cleaning is just for women, no. Men should do it as well.

(Pakistani mother)

The views of the fathers in the study were more divergent and appeared to fall into three distinct groups. There were fathers across the sample, including many Pakistani fathers, who believed that these roles should remain the sole responsibility of the mother – particularly where the father was the only financial provider. Other fathers from across ethnic groups felt that, in principle, it was fair to expect both parents to take equal responsibility for these roles, but that, in practice, women were naturally more competent at them and so should perhaps take the lead. The third group of fathers maintained that there was no justifiable reason why these roles should not be shared equally. These fathers tended to be from White British and Black Caribbean families where either both parents worked or neither parent worked.

The jobs of housework and cooking were viewed by many children and young people across the sample as something for which mothers usually take overall responsibility because they tend to be naturally better at these roles. Despite this, there was a strong feeling that fathers potentially can fill these functions and that ideally the responsibility for them should be shared:

> I think me dad should, like, hoover up more really because me mum sometimes has to hoover, sometimes me sister, but me dad should do.

> (White British child, male)

In practice, across all ethnic groups, it appeared that mothers were associated more often with taking the lead and retaining the responsibility for housework and cooking, along with physical caregiving. Both activities therefore still appear to be relatively gender-biased, as Chapter 4 will go on to explore.

Behaviours – what do fathers do?

We now explore the actual parenting behaviours of fathers as recorded in the activity diaries (see methodology described in Chapter 2). In particular, we focus on the activities and interactions of fathers relevant to measuring each component of paternal involvement: paternal engagement (direct interaction with child); accessibility (availability) to the child; and responsibility (taking care of and

arranging resources for the child). Using Lamb *et al.*'s (1985) construct of paternal involvement as a guide, we grouped the activities recorded in the diaries under each component of paternal involvement to allow us to measure the time fathers spent directly engaged with the index child in activities and time spent indirectly involved by being accessible/available to the index child and/or responsible for a particular caregiving activity such as employment. Although families were instructed to record a primary and secondary activity, very few recorded secondary activities. Analysis is therefore limited to primary activities only.

When looking at the data it is worth noting that the age of the child/young person has a significant bearing on the amount of time spent engaged in certain activities. For example, parents with older children recorded spending less time on the physical care of their children than parents with younger children. Likewise, time spent directly engaging with children appeared to be affected by parental availability. Thus fathers who worked reported significantly less time for direct engagement with their children. A full list of activities can be found in Appendix 4 (separate appendices).

The data presented here represents the mean time spent per day (based on aggregated 15-minute-interval time periods) across the eight-day diary period, based on fathers' behaviours, as recorded in their diaries. Comparisons of the full set of diary data generated by all of the family members who completed them will be the subject of future publications, following further detailed analysis.

Responsibility

According to Lamb and colleagues (1985), responsibility as a dimension of father involvement refers to activities where the father is engaged in a caregiving role, but is not necessarily involved in direct interaction with the child. Within our sample diaries we included in this category activities such as paid employment, transporting and accompanying children, physical caregiving and domestic responsibility. Because physical caregiving as an activity may involve both indirect and direct engagement with the child, we have included it as a measure of both responsibility and engagement.

On average, employed fathers spent 5.42 hours in paid work a day. Because of differences in employment status within the sample, it would not be sensible to comment on differences between the ethnic groups in time spent in paid work. However, analyses of Pakistani and Black Caribbean fathers' diaries (all of whom were in employment) revealed that Pakistani fathers reported spending the most time in paid employment, on average six hours per day.

Fathers spent considerably less time than mothers on other indirect activities of responsibility. Across all groups they reported spending an average of 15 minutes a day physically caring for their children, which included activities such as feeding, bathing and childcaring/minding. However, Black Caribbean fathers reported spending double the average amount of time, 30 minutes, on physical childcare. As might be expected, fathers who worked long and irregular hours were less involved in domestic activities such as housework and cooking, spending no more than 15 minutes a day on average on such activities, whereas fathers who were employed in higher-grade jobs or who were unemployed reported greater levels of involvement in domestic responsibilities. White British fathers reported spending nearly two hours a day on domestic responsibilities, compared with an average of one hour a day spent by Black Caribbean fathers.

Endorsing the interview reports of relatively high levels of father involvement in transporting and accompanying children to school, the diary data showed that on average they spent between 15 and 30 minutes a day transporting their children to and from school, extra-curricular activities and faith-related activities.

Engagement

Across all parents in our sample, analysis shows that the average time of 5.5 hours per day spent by fathers engaged in activities with the index child was slightly less than the 7.25 hours average spent by mothers.

Table 11 compares the mean hours per day that fathers and mothers from each ethnic group spent directly engaged in activities with their index child. It shows that the amount of time mothers and fathers spent engaged in activities with the index child also varied by ethnic group. For example, Pakistani mothers spent on average almost five hours more time engaged in activities with the index child than Pakistani fathers. Similarly, Black African mothers spent just over two hours more engaged in activities with the index child than Black African fathers. However, White British mothers and fathers spent almost the same amount of time engaged in activities with the index child. Of all the ethnic groups, White British fathers spent the most time per day engaged with their index children, but this might be explained largely by the fact that many of the white fathers in our sample were unemployed and had more time to spend with their children compared to Pakistani and black fathers, all of whom were in employment.

We also identified the most significant types of activities in which fathers engaged with their index children. Across all ethnic groups the fathers in our sample spent a significant amount of time – around 45 minutes on average per day – engaging with the index children in housework and/or cooking. However, this overall figure conceals the considerable variation across ethnic groups, with the White British fathers spending on average 1.25 hours per day, compared with the Black Caribbean fathers 0.75 hours and Pakistani fathers only 0.25 hours. Comparable figures for mothers confirmed the interview findings that, overall, they took a lead in this role, spending on average nearly three hours per day engaging with their children in these activities.

Table 11: Mean hours spent engaged in activities with index child

White British		Pakistani		Black Caribbean		Black African*	
Fathers	*Mothers*	*Fathers*	*Mothers*	*Fathers*	*Mothers*	*Fathers*	*Mothers*
7 hrs 45 mins	7 hrs 45 mins	3 hrs 30 mins	8 hrs 15 mins	4 hrs 30 mins	5 hrs	2 hrs 15 mins	4 hrs 30 mins

* n = data from one father and two mothers.

The difference between mothers and fathers in terms of the amount of time spent engaging with their index children in leisure activities outside the home (for example, shopping, going to the park, trips out) was considerably less extreme. Fathers spent on average just under one hour per day, compared with just over one hour for mothers. Of all the ethnic groups, the Black Caribbean fathers in our sample spent the most time on these activities (1.25 hours), followed by White British fathers at just over one hour per day. Pakistani fathers were engaged with their index children in these activities for approximately 0.5 hours per day. This level of engagement in leisure activities outside the home supports the interview data, both from fathers of all ethnic groups, who reported having a primary role in pursuing outdoor leisure activities with their children, and from their children, many of whom talked of fathers who spent significant amounts of time taking them out.

Of all the types of activities in which fathers were engaged with their index children, leisure/play at home (for example, computers, TV, reading, music, games) was by far the foremost in terms of the amount of time spent: an average of three hours per day across all fathers in our sample. Leisure/play at home also took up a considerable amount of mothers' time: on average around two hours per day spent with their index child on these types of pursuits. However, when looked at by ethnic group, a wide variation becomes clear. White British fathers spent five hours a day on average with their index children on leisure and play (three hours for White British mothers) and Pakistani and Black Caribbean fathers two hours a day (Pakistani mothers two hours, Black Caribbean mothers 45 minutes).

Overall, the average time spent on talking/listening with the index child was negligible (less than five minutes per day), but analysis by ethnic group again shows some variation, with White British and Pakistani fathers in our sample spending around 0.5 hours and just under one hour respectively engaged in this activity. Furthermore, time spent by Pakistani fathers differed little from that spent by Pakistani mothers. These relatively low figures should not be taken to represent the actual amount of time spent communicating with the child, since fathers and mothers will also communicate with their children when involved in other activities such as sport, physical care or cooking, but rather the amount of time during the day in which this was the primary activity.

Accessibility/availability

Accessibility or availability refers to the fathers' potential availability for interaction with the child by virtue of being present in the same environment. Using the diary data, this was measured by analysing the amount of time fathers spent undertaking an activity for which the index child was present but not actively participating with the father. As we would expect, those fathers who reported working the longest and most unsociable hours were available considerably less. Pakistani fathers recorded the lowest levels of accessibility, an average of under four hours a day. However, White British fathers (half of whom were unemployed) and Caribbean fathers (who worked regular hours in higher socio-economic grades of work) reported much higher levels of accessibility – almost double that of Pakistani fathers with an average of more than eight hours a day. It is also interesting to note the comparison with mothers' accessibility as detailed in Table 12, which shows that, with the exception of the Black African mothers, all of the mothers in our sample spent at least eight hours per day potentially available for interaction with their index child.

Table 12: Mean hours of fathers' and mothers' potential availability for interaction with index child

White British		Pakistani		Black Caribbean		Black African*	
Fathers	*Mothers*	*Fathers*	*Mothers*	*Fathers*	*Mothers*	*Fathers*	*Mothers*
8 hrs 25 mins	8 hrs 75 mins	4 hrs	8 hrs	8 hrs 15 mins	8 hrs 15 mins	4 hrs	6 hrs

* n = data from one father and two mothers.

Stated values versus actual behaviours: case studies

It is beyond the scope of this report to cross-reference values and attitudes about fathering with actual behaviours as recorded in the diaries for all of the fathers in our sample. Nevertheless, it is important to make some comparison between the reported and actual behaviours of fathers, and also to cross-reference their reports with those of their partners and index children. In order to do this, we have purposively selected four fathers as case study examples to represent a range of ethnicities and family circumstances.

Case study 1: Pakistani father employed full-time working nights, wife unemployed, index child is 12 years old, male

This father had relatively non-traditional gender views, stating that men are able to perform jobs that are traditionally done by women and that roles should not be determined by gender. In his interview, this father stated that it was important for fathers to be nurturers, to be involved with their children at home and to spend time taking their children out on trips and doing leisure activities. Analysis of his diaries showed that this father spent a total of just under 1.5 hours across the eight-day diary period engaged with his index child in general play and leisure activities at home – this equates to an average of only 15 minutes per day. The diaries also show that this case study father spent only approximately 45 minutes in total over eight days engaged in taking his index child on trips out. However, analysis of his diaries revealed that this father spent by far the most time of all the case study fathers engaged in talking/listening with his index child, approximately ten minutes per day. This concurs with comments made by the index child that his father listens to him, that they spend time talking together and that his father has a good understanding of his problems and worries.

This case study father reported that he and his wife shared caring responsibilities for their special needs daughter; and, in her interview, his wife reported similarly. The diary analysis, however, revealed that the father had spent a total of only 30 minutes across eight days (less than five minutes per day) in physical caregiving responsibilities. He also stated in his interview that

he preferred housework and cooking to be done by his wife, although she would like him to help out more and actively encouraged him to do so. His diaries showed that he spent the least time on housework/cooking of all the four case study fathers: in total less than five minutes across all eight days. The index child made comments in the interview to the effect that he thought his father was lazy and that he should do more to help out at home. In addition, the index child spoke about the long and unsocial hours that his father had to work and how this impacted on the time he was able to spend with his children.

It seems that, despite this father having non-traditional views on gender roles and strong values pertaining to fathers spending plenty of time engaged with their children, practical life circumstances (employment) and personal preference meant that these values did not always translate into actual behaviours.

Case study 2: White British father employed full-time, partner employed full-time, index child is 11 years old, male

In his interview this father said that the ideal father should be there for his children whenever they needed him and that 'being there' was the most important responsibility of a father. He reported spending a lot of time engaged in outdoor activities with his children (particularly his son who was the index child), in general play at home with his children and in taking them out on trips. His partner and index child also stated that the father's main role was leisure activities and playing with the children; his son reported spending more quality time with his father than his mother. Analysis of this father's diaries showed that he spent a total of 3.25 hours engaged in general play/leisure at home with his children, equating to around 30 minutes per day. Only 20 minutes in total over the eight-day diary period, however, was spent engaged in taking the children out on trips.

This case study father reported that the housework and cooking tended to be done by his partner, something which she verified and which is borne out by the results of his diary analysis, which shows that he spent a total of 30 minutes across all eight days on this type of activity.

This case study father had strong values and attitudes on the importance of fathers spending

quality time engaged in activities with their children and, although he worked full-time, these were translated into his actual behaviour at home.

Case study 3: White British father, unemployed, partner unemployed, index child is 16 years old male

In his interview this father expressed strong opinions that all roles and responsibilities should be shared. He felt it was important for fathers to take an active interest in what their children were doing and to spend time engaged with them, and he stated that a father can never spend too much time with his children. His partner and index child said in their interviews that the father spent more time in leisure activities with his son than the mother did. The index child stated that he did separate and specific leisure activities with his father that he did not do with his mother. Analysis of the father's diaries supported this, showing that he spent a total of 4.38 hours (over 30 minutes per day) engaged in general play/leisure activities at home with the index child – the most time spent by any of the case study fathers. The diaries also showed that he spent 2.72 hours (around 20 minutes on average per day) engaged with the index child in leisure activities outside the home. In total, this father spent an average of 50 minutes per day engaged in some form of leisure activity or play with the index child.

This father reported sharing responsibilities for cooking, housework, childcare and leisure with his partner. The mother and index child reported similarly, saying that everything except for washing and ironing was shared equally between both parents. The diary analysis revealed a somewhat different picture, with this father spending a total of just under 45 minutes across all eight days actively involved in housework or cooking – less than five minutes per day.

Some of this father's reported values and attitudes were borne out by the diary analysis of actual behaviours, particularly in relation to quality time spent with his children. The notion shared by all three family members that there was a very egalitarian division of other roles and responsibilities at home was not reflected in the father's diary data.

Case study 4: Black Caribbean father employed full-time (shift work), partner employed full-time, index child is 11 years old, female (note that this father filled out diaries for only four days)

The fourth case study father said in his interview that it was important for fathers to listen to and communicate with their children, and that they should build a close relationship with their children through spending time doing activities with them. This father stated that having a good relationship with his daughter was important to him and that he and his partner shared childcare responsibilities for her. His partner verified that they shared everything to do with their daughter but that he took responsibility for physical and leisure activities with her and spent more time playing and having fun with their daughter. The diary analysis corroborated this, showing that the father spent a total of 1.31 hours engaged in general play at home with his daughter (approximately 20 minutes per day) and 1.69 hours (just under 30 minutes per day) on trips out with the index child. In total, this father spent approximately 50 minutes per day directly engaged in leisure activities and play with his daughter. In addition, the diary analysis showed that the father spent a total of 1.63 hours or just under 30 minutes per day engaged in faith-related activities with his daughter.

In his interview, this father had strong views that housework and cooking were roles that were better done by mothers, whereas his partner thought that all roles and responsibilities should be shared equally between both parents. In practice, this father spent very little time on housework or cooking, less than five minutes per day.

Despite working unsociable hours, which resulted in either having to leave for work before his daughter got up or before she got home from school, this father had strong views on building a good relationship with his children by spending time with them. This was borne out by his diaries, which revealed a significant amount of time directly engaged with the index child.

Conclusions

Our data suggests that values and attitudes are changing concerning the role of fathers. There was a consistent finding across the sample that fathers are expected to engage in a greater multiplicity of roles than ever before. However, there seemed to be less agreement on the precise roles that fathers fulfil in practice or whether, indeed, they should be doing so.

There were indications that behaviour and attitudes were linked, and the diary data generally supported this, although there was evidence of a tendency for some fathers' views of their relative contribution to activities such as housework and cooking to be somewhat optimistic. Both views and behaviour appear to be influenced by a range of interrelated factors and intersections between practical life circumstances, gender constructs (at both the individual and societal level), gender relations within the family and individual competencies. There were also indications that values and attitudes held by parents were not static, but could be quite fluid over time in response to these related factors.

For children and young people, values and attitudes towards fathers' roles and responsibilities seem to be largely consistent with the roles that their fathers actually fulfilled, the exception being among older teenagers or where there had been significant conflict between child and father.

Society's expectations of fathers have changed considerably in recent decades. They have shifted from a rather narrow provider/protector role to one where the father is expected to be actively engaged in all aspects of parenting and its associated responsibilities. This in turn appears to have influenced parents' aspirations and ideals about what a father should be. A consequence seems to be that parents and children in our sample held strong views that fathers should be involved in a far more comprehensive range of parenting roles than was historically the case. Yet paid work is still predominately what fathers do and it continues to have a negative impact on their levels of involvement in all other areas of child rearing, particularly for those working long hours or in low-status jobs. The fathers in our sample not in paid work spent more time per day engaged in activities with their index child largely because of their greater availability. When fathers did get involved, across all ethnic groups, they spent by far the greatest amount of their time engaging with their children in leisure activities, both at home and outside the home. Housework/cooking were key activities in which White British and black fathers engaged with their children, while talking/listening featured more significantly for White British and Pakistani fathers.

At the same time, across all ethnic groups and ages, our data confirmed a general acknowledgement that modern society and practical life circumstances are forcing changes in both parents' roles and their responsibilities. It is becoming more common for fathers and mothers to feel that parenting should be shared more equally, particularly in cases where mothers are also in employment. Fathers and mothers recognise that, in this context, there is both an expectation and a need for fathers to take on a larger share of the responsibility in relation to parenting roles.

Yet there are inherent difficulties with this and in the ability of fathers to be all things to their children – for example, to be a provider while also spending increasing time with their family, to provide structure and discipline while also fulfilling the role of mentor and friend. That the expectations placed on fathers have broadened and increased in complexity might reflect a more widespread uncertainty, in terms of what fathers today should be or do, in order to encourage resilience and foster positive outcomes in children. It is not always easy to reconcile the roles that fathers are expected to embrace within the family alongside the wider role they occupy in society. We will go on to look at what has shaped the responses to these potentially conflicting demands and how our sample manages the tensions they might generate.

4   What shapes fathering?

Introduction

The literature on father involvement indicates that paternal behaviour is shaped by many interlinking factors. In the introduction to his edited collection on the role of the father in child development, Lamb (2004) suggests that:

> *… there is a consensus that father involvement is affected by multiple interacting systems operating at different levels over the life course, including psychological factors, the children's individual characteristics, social support, community and cultural influences and institutional practices and public policies.*
>
> <div align="right">(Lamb, 2004, p. 11)</div>

The following are generally regarded by researchers to be some of the key determinants of father involvement (Lamb, 2004).

- *Motivation:* fathers have to want to participate in family roles if their involvement as a parent is to increase. Motivational levels can be influenced by a father's positive or negative experience of being fathered, a wife or partner's participation in paid work, or a life stage re-evaluation.

- *Self-confidence:* men often feel ill-equipped for family life and some report a skill deficit, especially with children. Men who feel better equipped and able to contribute specific skills to family life experience a more self-reinforcing and satisfying role in the family, which in itself generates increased confidence.

- *Social support:* positive reinforcements from important figures in a father's life and from society in general help to increase and sustain higher levels of father involvement.

- *Institutional practices:* fathers' involvement is directly affected by institutional practices, with the workplace exercising the greatest constraint.

- *Cultural ecology:* fathers' roles tend to differ according to the subcultural context in which they find themselves and the specific views held of what constitutes a good father.

In this chapter, we explore some of the influences on fathers revealed by the findings of our own study, based on the data collected from the individual family members and their views on what they considered helped shape fathers' involvement as parents.

Fathers' own experiences of being parented

Reference has been made above to the influence of early experiences of being parented on fathers' motivation to become involved parents themselves. Our data revealed certain continuities and discontinuities in parenting behaviours through the generations, which were clearly linked to subsequent fathering practices. It should be noted at the outset that an element of attribution effect can be identified in so far as fathers who considered their own childhoods to have been happy mostly exhibited a parenting style approximating to that of their fathers, while those who had unhappy parenting experiences in childhood were trying to be different in the way that they were parenting. While this is not altogether surprising, it is relevant to understanding what 'shapes' the way men parent.

Continuities between generations in fathering practices

Many fathers in our sample reported that their experiences of being parented in childhood had

some influence on the way they were currently parenting. While in some instances this meant emulating their own fathers' parenting behaviour, the continuities were on the whole outnumbered by the discontinuities of parenting behaviours across the generations.

Historically, the roles and responsibilities of the previous generation were very much divided along traditional gender lines. Paternal behaviour described was predominately one-dimensional (largely financial provision), though with some notable exceptions across ethnic groups. Pakistani and black fathers reported having fathers who had adopted a more multidimensional approach to the fathering role by being involved and taking a lead in child-rearing activities related to discipline, moral guidance and education:

> *He wanted us to go to church … I think he knew that the morals and the values that it'd give us.*
>
> (Black Caribbean father)

> *Like we have homework, come home, it's mostly him we approach when we want him to help during that little age of us when we're the primary and in the early secondary, he would help you* [with homework].
>
> (Black African father)

Fathers in these groups, who had themselves experienced higher levels of paternal involvement in terms of responsibility, availability and engagement, appeared to replicate this parenting behaviour through monitoring and supervision of their children's behaviour, involvement in educational activities and religious adherence. They also continued the practice of acting as the moral lead and promoting religious and cultural values in their children:

> *Like they* [children] *have to, learn about religion as well as study. I just want to see them really just successful with their life … they should know about their religion.*
>
> (Pakistani father)

> *Keep* [them] *away from immoral things. And I think that's the most important thing.*
>
> (Pakistani father)

The role of breadwinner predominated for fathers in the previous generation. Fathers then were reported to have worked long hours, sometimes requiring them to be away from home for extensive periods of time. This continuing pattern was particularly common among Pakistani fathers. Pakistani fathers on the whole continued to hold very strong values attached to their breadwinning role, and acknowledged the significance of this for their masculinity and role as a father, just as it had been for their fathers:

> *Main thing, I go to work, earn money. Spend you know my family and provide every necessity.*
>
> (Pakistani father)

White British fathers in the sample, as mentioned above, were less likely to identify with this role, possibly reflecting the higher rate of unemployment in our White British sample.

Discontinuities in fathering practices
Overall, the fathers in our sample referred to more discontinuities than continuities relative to the previous generation's style of fathering. While, on the whole, fathers were reluctant to describe themselves as *better* fathers than their fathers, they nevertheless described themselves as adopting different fathering behaviours, which they saw as an improvement on their own childhood experiences of being fathered. They aspired to give their children a different, more positive childhood experience than the one they had experienced by trying to ensure that fathering behaviours they had perceived as negative were not replicated:

> *I let them see that I can do the housework, I cook, I clean whatever. I listen to them, you know, I give them every opportunity to, I play with them, do things with them that I would want done with me.*
>
> (Black Caribbean father)

Despite fathers' unequivocal views on their limited involvement in household chores (see Chapter

3), they nevertheless reported having greater involvement in domestic and child-rearing activities than their own fathers, who had themselves generally assumed few domestic and childcare responsibilities. Fathers in our sample reported adopting a more shared, though not equal, role in these areas, which some attributed to their earlier childhood experiences. These reports were based on data from the qualitative interviews and backed up by the data from the diaries:

> *It's because it made me miserable when I was a kid … watching me mum cleaning and cooking every day, I didn't think that was right, so we* [partner and respondent] *both do it you know.*
>
> (White British father)

> *Me mum … done everything.* [Father] *could have done more to help her, that's* [why I'm] *the way I am now* [more involved]*.*
>
> (White British father)

On the whole, fathers described a fairly traditional masculine style of parenting adopted by their own fathers. Characterised by its authoritarian style, this involved a high degree of discipline, control and aloofness. In particular, Pakistani and black fathers were reported to have been stricter in terms of setting rules and boundaries and actively supervising the behaviour of their children, especially boys, while White British fathers were described as exercising a more relaxed authoritarian style of fathering:

> *We were brought up from the very beginning the rules were laid.*
>
> (Black Caribbean father)

Fathering behaviours that were commonly not replicated were those associated with harsh parenting practices, such as physical punishment or the threat of violence, or with a lack of emotional nurturance and warmth, which resulted in a distant relationship between father and child. Fathers described closer and more nurturing relationships with their own children:

> *I just want to give them more time and be friendly with them, you know. Let them discuss away … if they want to discuss anything with me.*
>
> (Pakistani father)

On the whole, the fathers in our sample tended not to repeat the authoritarian style of parenting they had themselves experienced, but instead adopted less harsh disciplinary practices based on similar principles or, in the case of those who had experienced very distant relationships with their own fathers, they abrogated the role of disciplinarian altogether:

> *Like letting him go and do the things that he wants to do. And taking him to places where he wants to go. Where* [I] *didn't get none of that.*
>
> (White British father)

> *I think I know me kids more than what me dad did.*
>
> (White British father)

Few fathers described their childhood relationship with their own father as a close one, perhaps reflecting the demanding nature of fathers' paid work at that time. Fathers in earlier generations were often described as being emotionally unavailable to their children, most notably by White British fathers, resulting in their children's inability to confide in and build meaningful relationships with them.

In consequence, many of our fathers aspired to becoming closer to their children and wanted to encourage their children to confide in them as a parent. They saw one way of achieving this was to stop the more authoritarian style of parenting they had experienced and instead adopt a more caring and nurturing style:

> *My dad was strict. He keep* [telling us] *don't do this or that. But, when we start going high school,* [we] *do everything, you don't know what* [children] *… That's what I try to do have different relationship with my children.*
>
> (Pakistani father)

The levels of availability and accessibility to fathers in the previous generation were reported to have been low, some more so than others. White British fathers often described their fathers as being particularly 'time poor' relative to fathers in the other ethnic groups who, despite having worked equally long hours, were recalled as being more available and accessible to their children:

> [By] *the time he came home* [from work]*, we was more or less going to bed.*
> (White British father)

> *He'd always find the time to spend with us, even probably just before he went to work or things like that, so he would always have time for us.*
> (Black Caribbean father)

> *Not too much time. But whatever time we'd spend with our dad that was like a good time. Like, you know, he ask you what you up to? How's your studies and things like that? And do you need anything?*
> (Pakistani father)

All fathers recognised the importance of being more accessible to their children, relative to the experience they had had with their own fathers. However, as we will see in the next section, levels of accessibility were very much determined by families' practical life circumstances, with some fathers being able to achieve this better than others:

> *I know I've had more time to be able to spend with me kids than what he* [respondent's father] *did … it's a different life all together, you know.*
> (White British father)

Current life and family circumstances

Many factors arising from current life and family circumstances influenced fathering in our sample, and shaped the behaviours that ultimately determined their level of paternal involvement.

Our focus now turns to the key constraining and enabling factors that had a bearing on fathers' involvement and parental responsibilities. We also explore how parents were managing to organise their respective roles in the face of these factors.

Fathers were asked to describe aspects of their current life circumstances that they viewed as having a negative impact on the levels of involvement they had with their children and their ability to fulfil the role of father. They were also asked to describe what would help them to achieve increased levels of involvement in order to reach their fathering potential. The dimensions of life and family circumstances that emerged as key constraining and enabling factors fell mainly into the areas of work, health status and family structure/extended family, with work representing very much the dominant theme.

Key constraints

Work and working hours

Given the centrality of the concept of financial provision/breadwinning to the role of fathers, it is perhaps no surprise that most of the fathers in our sample cited work and working hours as key constraints. Fathers who had working patterns of long and unsociable hours described these as being incompatible with their children's schedules and family life. In particular, these fathers spoke of a mismatch between their limited availability, dictated by work, and that of their children. They reported that it was impossible in their current jobs to satisfy the expectation of being a provider as well as having greater involvement in the home. When attempts had been made to redress the balance, these efforts often fell short of expectations, causing those people concerned to feel let down:

> *It's especially* [difficult] *come the* [children's] *activities, it's me getting home from work, sorting myself out and then to their activities in time. I've tried it and I've been late and people aren't very happy.*
> (White British father)

Because from job when I came back they're all asleep.

(Pakistani father)

Cos normally when I'm working on the weekends and but she's [child] like off from her school so we don't see each other.

(Pakistani father)

Unemployment

Fathers who were unemployed cited their inability to provide for the family as a major constraint to fulfilling the role of provider. The lack of money limited what activities they could do with their children, which in turn limited the amount of time they spent with them:

It's not easy. Getting the kids things they want. They don't realise that we're not working at the minute. You can't afford everything they want. We try and give them more or less everything.

(White British father)

Without money you can't do nothing … Money makes the world go round doesn't it.

(White British father)

Health status

Poor health or caring for a sick partner was another limiting factor cited by a few fathers. Because they were unable to work, this affected their ability to provide financially for their families. For the sick fathers, their level of involvement with their children and in the home was severely hindered because they were simply not well enough to engage in certain activities with their children or help out around the house. However, fathers whose inability to work was the result of caring for a sick partner also reported limited availability for their children because the time was taken up with running the household:

Well I'm here. I'm not working … A lot of my time's taken up with other things … I've got to clean up rather than go out with Alex or do anything with Alex.

(White British father)

Age of child

The age of the child was often reported to be a determining factor in fathers' involvement. In particular, fathers expressed concern about the difficulties of spending time with their children during adolescence because, all too often, the children were out by themselves or with friends. Many fathers across the sample commented on the decreased availability of their teenage children, such that they spent less time together compared to earlier childhood years and had to compete with other adolescent interests:

They're grown up … They're their own set of people now … They don't want to do anything with us any more. You know what I mean.

(White British father)

We all get along, but now that I'm older I spend less time down here and more time in my room.

(Black Caribbean young person, male)

In addition, some parents spoke of increasing areas of conflict experienced with their adolescent children as the young people sought to exercise greater autonomy over their lives:

I think you get to a certain age, 16, 17, 18, there's that conflict there.

(Black Caribbean father)

Organisation of parenting roles within the family

Some fathers' contributions were further constrained by the extent to which mothers and fathers actively managed their time and affairs to enable fathers to spend time with the children. Where both parents had jobs, they had often made a conscious decision to organise the family in particular ways. More commonly, in families where at least one parent was not in employment and therefore technically available to care for the children throughout the day, there was less conscious organisation of roles and responsibilities. In these circumstances one parent, usually the mother, was available at home and was often left to organise home life, assuming many of the domestic and childcare responsibilities.

The working families in our sample adopted various management strategies to facilitate fathers spending some time with the children while being actively involved in childcare. They made deliberate decisions about how the household should be run and which parent was responsible for particular aspects of childcare.

In some cases a strategy of shift parenting was employed, which ensured that at least one parent was at home and available for the children at any time. This usually meant that one parent was employed in a job with child-friendly hours – that is, during school hours and/or on a part-time basis. Such strategies enabled at least one parent to be available to the children before and after school. Other strategies included parents working opposite shifts – for example, one working throughout the night and the other throughout the day. In these situations parents had clearly planned and co-ordinated roles and responsibilities.

The availability of extended family members to lend a hand with childcare arrangements was cited as an important source of support for mothers in particular, who often took the lead role in this domain.

Key enabling factors

Just as there was a general consensus among our sample of fathers about the types of factors believed to be constraining their fathering input, so too there was agreement about the types of factors that could enable increased father involvement; not surprisingly, these were mainly to do with work and money.

Flexible working hours
Self-employment or the ability to arrange more flexible working hours was cited by fathers as a way of increasing their involvement with their children and family life. Having family-friendly employment policies was viewed by many fathers as the first step to achieving this:

I think in Europe and that they're, they're a lot better parenting-wise … Because I think they just get a bit more time for the kids and so on and a lot of places are Europe, you know, work and that … your employer, you know, will bend

over or see it from your side a little bit more.
(White British father)

[Would like to] *work less, yeah. But then, if you don't do so many hours, the kids don't get what they want. And then you don't win do you?*
(White British father)

Being unemployed
Unemployed fathers tended to report higher levels of involvement in the day-to-day running of the house and childcare activities than those fathers who were in employment, but ironically, despite being more accessible and available to their children, this did not result in any significant increases in direct engagement with them. Indeed, many fathers felt diminished in status because they were failing in the breadwinning role, which made some feel worse about their fathering contribution, despite having more time for it:

But I like being at home. I like being at home, I do … For some mums it's hard, so it's like you're helping and it's like a bit of a … You know, it's a bit of weight off their shoulders isn't it?
(White British father)

[Being a father] *It's hard sometimes. I wouldn't say it's hard, but it is hard sometimes like financially, like buying stuff like. That's the main* [thing] *cos if you're not working and that's just like … it doesn't help does it, if you know what I mean?*
(White British father)

Financial provision
Nearly all fathers cited increased wealth as a factor that would allow them to participate more in family life. In particular, Pakistani and some black fathers, who were mostly employed and working long and irregular hours, reported that increased wealth, which they expressed in terms of winning the Lottery, would mean that they would not have to struggle to provide financially for their families by working long, unsociable hours. In their view, this would free up more time for them to spend at home with the children.

What shapes fathering?

[Winning the] Lottery *[would make life easier]*
… can't do anything like but it helps. It helps a
lot … Can give a bit more time to your family.

(Pakistani father)

Win the Lottery … It would make it easier,
won't it? You could buy a big house, you
wouldn't have to work. It would be easier
wouldn't it?

(Black Caribbean father)

Family support

Although fathers did not explicitly mention the support and encouragement of their families as a contributing factor to their level of involvement, some mothers cited this as a way of encouraging fathers to take a more active role in family life. Specifically, support and encouragement from wives, and a facilitative attitude to their role as involved fathers from the extended family, were thought to encourage increased levels of paternal involvement:

Women wants to hear it more but fathers all
want to hear [praise]*.*

(Pakistani father)

Gender relations and constructs

The interviews with parents revealed a highly complex and often inconsistent picture in relation to gender constructs assigned to the behaviours, characteristics and values attributed to men and women. Across our sample, we noted striking contradictions in what parents said at different times concerning gender constructs related to roles and division of labour, as well as a disjuncture between what individuals said and what appeared to be occurring in practice.

In general discussions concerning parenting roles and division of labour, the attitudes expressed by most parents were gender-neutral. The majority stated that individuals of either gender could potentially fulfil any and every aspect of a parent's role and responsibilities, and that everything should be shared equally. Such egalitarian views seemed to be particularly strong among younger parents, White British and Black Caribbean parents. They might suggest that traditional attitudes to parenting

and gender roles are breaking down, at least at this level. However, the reality is far more complex.

Despite these apparently egalitarian views, many parents across the sample distinguished clear differences between the genders stemming from inherent biological factors, which in turn gave rise to significant differences in parenting styles and capabilities:

Emotionally I think is a, it's just totally different I
think, mum and dad.

(Pakistani father)

Sometimes I think it's built in with women, it's
like they almost automatically know what to do.

(White British father)

These views became even more apparent when parents were asked to think at a detailed level about individual parenting roles and responsibilities. In these instances, attitudes expressed in relation to certain roles such as childcare and housework were found to be far more gendered. This tendency was also evident when parents were asked to consider the potential impact on the family if either the mother or father were not present. Many parents, both mothers and fathers, believed that if the mother were not there family life and routines would most likely start to fall apart rapidly.

Furthermore, the egalitarian views expressed by parents were not always reflected particularly strongly in actual behaviours. Indeed, it appeared that traditional gender constructs were alive and well across all ethnic groups and, while men appeared to be increasing their accessibility and engagement in parenting through adopting less traditional roles, beneath the surface the more traditional gender constructs still remain:

I think throughout the world men and women
are different … you're never going to get away
from it.

(Black Caribbean father)

Mothers were still viewed by many parents of both genders as retaining the overall lead and responsibility for the typically female roles such as physical caregiving, housework and cooking.

Parents often referred to innate biology, gendered suitability and competence to undertake certain roles as justification for this gendered division of labour:

> Women we've got instinct to be maternal and men don't have it … you can see them holding babies and that and they don't know how to do it.
>
> (Black Caribbean mother)

> I enjoy doing the majority of it really, it's, it's second nature to me … but he finds it tiring and more stressful, whereas I think, cos I've always done it, it's second nature to me.
>
> (White British mother)

Three categories of gender constructs – 'traditional', 'non-traditional' and 'composite'(Parsons, 1955) – were used to classify the patterns identified across the parents in our sample. Each individual parent was assigned to one of these categories based both on the views they expressed on parenting roles and responsibilities, and on their actual parenting behaviours as described in the interviews and recorded in the diaries.

All three gender constructs were represented in our sample, but the most commonly occurring pattern was that of 'composite' (eleven out of 29 fathers and twelve out of 28 mothers). This category was assigned where parents exhibited a mix of traditional and non-traditional attitudes and behaviours. This pattern was found to be most common among Pakistani parents (four out of nine fathers; four out of ten mothers), Black Caribbean fathers (four out of seven) and Black African mothers (two out of two), whereas White British parents were more often classified as 'non-traditional' (with nine out of 29 fathers overall assigned to this category – and five out of ten White British fathers; four out of nine mothers). Once again, this may have been a reflection of the relatively high level of unemployment among the fathers in this group giving rise to their greater participation in other roles and responsibilities.

There appeared to be some divergence within couples in terms of the gender constructs, especially among black families, when the parent with the more traditional gender construct was virtually always the father – for example, four out of seven Black Caribbean fathers were classified under 'composite' whereas four out of seven Black Caribbean mothers had 'non-traditional' gender constructs compared with only one out of seven fathers. Gender constructs were more likely to correspond among White British and Pakistani couples but, where there was divergence, no clear pattern could be identified as to which parent conformed to the more traditional construct.

Overall, Pakistani and Black African parents tended to have more traditional views on gender roles and gendered division of labour than was the case for White British and Black Caribbean parents:

> I just believe men should be the men, the real capital provider … The man should bring, the finances should come from the man. He should be the one hustling. And the mother there to take care of the children.
>
> (Black African father)

Despite this, these parents were increasingly aware of the need to compromise and adapt because of the pressures of modern-day life in the UK:

> I mean, over here it depends innit how you want to live? If you want to keep your standard then obviously you have to work both together.
>
> (Pakistani father)

Within our sample of Pakistani parents we noted some within-couple differences in attitudes and ideals related to gender and division of labour between Pakistani fathers born in Pakistan and Pakistani mothers who were born in the UK. The former generally held more traditional attitudes and ideals on gender roles, referencing the social and cultural norms of Pakistan in influencing their attitudes to division of labour within couples, whereas the British-born mothers tended to have more egalitarian views:

> I mean all fathers, me too, I don't want to work for my house, my wife is there for cooking, for looking after my kids. That's all.
>
> (Pakistani father)

What shapes fathering?

He's from back home [Pakistan]*, he's been here what 13, 14 years, he doesn't believe men should do the cooking or cleaning or anything. I teach my boy to vacuum and clean up as well, which he* [husband] *doesn't like.*

(Pakistani mother)

There were similarities between White British and Black Caribbean parents in their attitudes to gender roles, which tended to be less differentiated than those held by Pakistani and Black African households, while the roles they filled in practice also appeared to exhibit a greater degree of egalitarianism:

We don't even look at things in that respect, because you're dad you're supposed to be doing this, you're mum you're supposed to be doing that, we just do what is needed to be done, you know, and that's it.

(Black Caribbean mother)

These days, you know, the mother goes out to work and so I think it's pretty much equal.

(White British father)

Nevertheless, the attitudes and practices in White British and Black Caribbean households revealed some gender distinction, particularly in relation to the roles of protector and disciplinarian – a role to which fathers were often seen to be more suited and more effective in fulfilling.

Factors influencing gender relations and constructs

Mothers mediating father involvement
One theme that emerged from interviews with both mothers and fathers was the part played by mothers as gatekeepers, mediating father involvement and influencing the roles and responsibilities that fathers can and do fulfil. This factor, in addition to parents' often quite gendered perceptions of individual competencies, may contribute to the perpetuation of traditional gender relations and gender stereotypes:

Marsha [partner] *just does what she does and anything else she don't do she tell me to do.*

(Black Caribbean father)

I think I'm that sort of person who I don't let him touch anything whereas, you know, I know what goes where.

(Pakistani mother)

Some mothers considered fathers to be less capable of taking on certain household roles, for example housework, cooking and also physical caregiving and childcare. They declared a preference for doing these jobs themselves because they believed they were better at them than fathers. In turn there were a number of fathers who similarly acknowledged this to be the case, as had been made clear to them by their partners:

I prefer doing it myself anyway … He just gets in the way and he wouldn't do it properly anyway.

(White British mother)

However, with roles such as housework, the issue was not simply one of competence. It also concerned fundamental differences in standards in so far as mothers often paid more attention to detail and demanded higher standards, which some fathers could not sustain or had no inclination to do so:

I like to have a, you know, a clean, tidy house … therefore that means not having clutter around like the ironing, you know, the ironing's piling up in there now, it's driving me mad … he just doesn't notice it like I would.

(White British mother)

Alongside this, parents tended to have different priorities, with mothers regarding housework and practical chores to be of a higher priority relative to the importance placed on them by fathers:

I think fathers worry less about the house and things and care more for spending their time with the children generally where they can. Whereas mums take the wrong end of it, thinking about it.

(White British mother)

The thing is with me, sometimes I'd say to Don [husband]*, like, 'If you get time if you can*

do the dishes for me?' But I suppose I'm like most women, when you ask someone to do something, it's like you want it to be done now. But then Don is not that sort of person, he would do it, but he would do it in his time, you know.

(Black Caribbean mother)

The interview data suggested that men might be consciously or unconsciously helping to perpetuate such gendered stereotypes, resulting in a gendered division of labour within the household. In the face of criticism from partners of their substandard performance, fathers often preferred to take the line of least resistance by not doing the job at all, or becoming less involved, rather than trying to improve. Such issues appeared to be the source of ongoing conflict and aggravation for some couples.

Couple households reinforcing gender roles

To some extent, being a couple in a two-parent household reinforced traditional gender patterns; each parent is able to assume a more traditional role simply because the other parent is there to play the complementary part. The roles may be equal in terms of status, but they are differentiated in such a way that they balance each other. White British and Black Caribbean couples seemed to have developed more egalitarian roles of this type than was the case among the Pakistani and Black African couples where the division of labour was more likely to be traditionally gendered.

Practical life circumstances

Growing flexibility in the way parenting roles are interpreted in the UK has given rise to many roles becoming interchangeable between mothers and fathers. While this pattern was evident across all ethnic groups, it was particularly apparent in White British and Black Caribbean households:

I don't see defined roles between a man and a woman … if you come here some Sundays you'll see [mother] *out in the garden doing gardening stuff and I'm cooking. Or I'll be behind there and she's out there doing DIY. If it needs to be done, it'll be done by whoever is not doing something else.*

(Black Caribbean father)

Traditional gender constructs and division of labour in relation to financial provision have been particularly affected by changes in practical life circumstances associated with living in our society. Many parents in our sample referred to a growing need for both parents to provide financially for the family in order to make ends meet. When both parents did so, traditional gender roles and constructs appeared to be less evident. The same can be said, however, in cases where neither parent was working. Financial provision may thus strongly influence how other roles and responsibilities in the family are shared or divided:

You become an equal footing then. On an equal level. Whereas, if Andy was working and if I was at home all day, he'd expect me to have this house like a gleaming pin.

(White British mother)

At the moment the bias is mostly on me to do the running round with the kids and everything because he's working, but if I start a new job it's going to be fifty fifty … he's gonna have to take over.

(White British mother)

On the subject of flexibility in roles and responsibilities, White British and Black Caribbean parents spoke of how modern-day life requires both parents to 'muck in' and do whatever is required of them at the time in order to make family life work:

The roles are not clearly defined, everyone just mucks in and does what needs to be done.

(Black Caribbean father)

Other factors mentioned by parents that might exercise an influence on gender constructs and relations were education (particularly the education of women), changing social norms and cultural shifts in the UK towards the ideal of a more egalitarian society:

With this new generation … maybe having the education, you know, going out, being more independent … what we're drilling into our brothers as well is that you know you've got

to be hands-on, you know your wife's not your slave or whatever, just get on with it, help out and share responsibilities. I think it's just with the growing up in society and the education really.

(Pakistani mother)

Tradition, culture and religion

Tradition, culture and religion featured prominently in the lives of the Pakistani and Black African parents in our sample, but, because the relationship between all three was complex, it was difficult to separate them into distinct components for individual analysis.

The majority of Pakistani and Black African parents were participating in religious activities, including attending the mosque or church, praying and reading holy books. Religious principles and moral codes seemed to be influential in shaping many of these respondents' values on parenting. Some of the families explicitly referred to their religious beliefs or texts to support their views that women were better suited to bringing up children while the father's role was to provide for his family. The fact that all of the Pakistani fathers and Black African parents who were interviewed were born outside of the UK might have been influential in these strong beliefs:

The difference of a father to a mother is the mother is, is, I would say the home sustainer. Cos mother, they control the home … A man can't bring up children well, it's only the mother. The reason is, the way God created it.

(Black African father)

Religion provided many Pakistani and black parents with core values that directly influenced fathering practices – for example, financial provision, discipline, moral guidance on relationships and encouraging their children's participation in religious activities:

The Bible said a father or a man who cannot provide for his house is worse than a non-believer. If a man cannot provide for the house, provide for your children for your, why are you a father? It's a useless man.

(Black African mother)

Pakistani fathers, along with Black African and older Black Caribbean fathers, were generally very committed to teaching their children about their culture, traditions and religion. Where a Pakistani mother was UK-born, the father frequently took on greater responsibility for the cultural and religious upbringing of the children – in particular, fathers took a lead role in teaching children their Pakistani language and in reading religious texts in cases where the mother was not as proficient in the Pakistani dialect.

The father in Pakistani families still tended to be viewed as the head of the household and commanded a high level of respect in this regard. This was influenced greatly by tradition, culture and religion. Actual parenting roles and responsibilities within Pakistani families were shaped by the same influences, which underpinned the strong views held by many Pakistani fathers on how the respective roles of fathers and mothers should be interpreted.

Most Pakistani fathers placed a high value on their tradition and culture with regard to certain aspects of parenting – for example, moral guidance and discipline. Since mothers were usually present in the home, they were able to ensure that their children were taught about religion. However, some Pakistani men were consciously deviating from the practices of their own fathers by getting more involved in non-traditional parenting roles such as childcare.

Several Pakistani parents spoke about the stigma associated with fathers carrying out certain domestic tasks, which their own parents' generation still found unacceptable – for example, fathers doing housework, cooking or providing physical care for children. Some Pakistani fathers felt uncomfortable about carrying out these roles if their own parents were present, a feeling that was shared equally by a number of mothers:

When my mother-in-law came down to visit the first time I was so embarrassed at the fact he was hoovering in front of his mother. I was just so shocked I said, 'you're not gonna do are you?' … I felt what would his mother think because back home I say men don't lift a finger.

(Pakistani mother)

It was generally seen to be easier for Pakistani fathers to be more 'hands-on' parents in this country, in terms of bringing up their children and engaging in more traditionally female roles, than might have been possible for them in Pakistan. This was because fathers' involvement in these areas of parenting is more socially acceptable in the UK:

> *It is more difficult in Pakistan because others will talk there that 'Oh he is like that … he isn't man enough' … If I do this, what will my mother and sisters think, that he has gone backward … Over here we teach them to do everything from the start, you even vacuum … you clean the bathroom and he will do it too.*
> (Pakistani mother)

Another significant difference between bringing up children in the UK and in Pakistan is that, in Pakistan, a large network of extended family is usually available to provide support and help to mothers. For the Pakistani families in our sample living in the UK, this type of family support was less often available. Many of the parents believed it was necessary, therefore, for fathers to get more involved in non-traditional roles in order to support mothers and to compensate for the absence of the extended family:

> *In Pakistan it's completely different. Men, they don't do anything. They just work, they do a job and they earn money and they bring money home, that's it. But, over here, now trend is changing. Men, they are more involved in day-to-day activities. They do like cooking and cleaning and more involved in children's care … Because mother is on her own here. Back home it's different. We live together like grandparents, cousins, aunties, families, so everybody together … So it was a lot easier.*
> (Pakistani mother)

While the combined influence of culture and religion for Pakistani and black parents was strong, its impact on actual parenting practices did not seem to be as great as might have been anticipated. In the case of Pakistani families, this might have been because the majority of mothers in our sample were UK-born and generally seemed to have more egalitarian attitudes and values, which in turn may have had an impact on their partners. Our sample included some Pakistani households in which the views held by fathers and mothers on gender roles were significantly different. The study findings revealed an ongoing effort on the part of Pakistani parents to retain their culture and tradition while adapting it to living in modern UK society.

The influence of tradition and culture on fathering was less apparent in Black Caribbean families. Some older parents did talk about their Christian religion providing them with guiding principles for parenting and some Black Caribbean parents were regularly attending a church with their children.

In contrast to the other ethnic groups, the White British parents in our sample did not mention tradition, culture and religion in discussions around parenting influences and practices. This could be explained by 'cultural concordance' among the White British sample, where there is a less overt awareness or forefronting of cultural issues within the indigenous culture, and by 'cultural discordance' among the other ethnic groups in the sample, where there is a desire in those from different cultures and traditions not to lose their cultural roots. In spite of this, the views expressed by White British parents on the subject of 'good fathering' were not so far removed from parents in the other ethnic groups.

A more general finding from this study, which endorses research carried out by Horwath and colleagues (2008), is that those parents with a strong religious faith generally seemed to find it easier to understand and identify with abstract parenting constructs and to articulate facets of parenting, in contrast to those parents for whom religion played little or no part. The role of the parent is dealt with in religious teaching and texts, and therefore parents with a strong faith benefit from a guiding framework and understanding, which makes these concepts more accessible to them and which is lacking for parents who have no religious association.

Children's views on culture and tradition
All Pakistani children and young people were engaged to some degree in their parents' culture and religion. Most were being taught about

religion and their father's first language. This was often the responsibility of the father, particularly in cases where the mother was UK-born. Many of the children and young people were attending a mosque in order to learn about the Qur'an.

In their everyday lives, Pakistani children and young people were subjected to the influence of their parents' tradition and culture – for example, not being allowed out with friends to certain places and close monitoring and regulation of friendships and relationships. At times this resulted in conflict between parents and older children who had to reconcile living under the religious and cultural rules of their parents within a far more liberal society.

> *You can't have boyfriend. You can't have a girlfriend. You're not allowed … You're not allowed going out that much … They think that if you go out then you end up doing something wrong to yourself, which is not allowed in religion … That's why you can't tell them if you've got a special friend or a special girlfriend or a special boyfriend. You can't. You just can't tell 'em because they just … You don't know how they're gonna react.*
>
> (Pakistani young person, female)

In contrast, none of the White British children in our sample spoke about tradition and culture, although some held fairly traditional views on gender roles. These views were expressed in the context of biological inheritance and competency rather than cultural traditions.

Tradition and culture played a part in the lives of a number of Black Caribbean and Black African children and young people, some of whom were regularly attending church with either one or both of their parents, but its influence on their daily lives was less evident than for Pakistani young people.

Conclusions

To summarise, many fathers described having experienced a fairly traditional style of parenting from their own fathers. Fathering behaviours of the previous generation were generally confined to the role of breadwinner and disciplinarian, with relatively low levels of involvement in other domains such as child rearing and domestic activities. On the whole, the fathers in our sample exhibited more discontinuities than continuities with the previous generation's style of fathering, some more so than others. In particular, those fathers who described experiencing very low levels of father engagement and nurturing in their own childhood were more motivated to increase the level of involvement with their children. However, the ability of fathers to achieve this was dependent on their current life circumstances.

On a broad level, many parents from across all ethnic groups expressed egalitarian views on gender roles and division of labour, but more traditional views emerged when parents talked at a more detailed level in relation to particular roles and responsibilities. Egalitarian views were not always translated into actual behaviours. A large proportion of parents across our sample believed that there were inherent differences between the genders and many thought that, in practice, one gender was often more naturally suited to some roles than others. At the same time, most parents thought that parents of either gender could competently fulfil most roles as required.

Overall, Pakistani and Black African parents seemed to hold more traditional views on gender constructs and division of labour than their White British or Black Caribbean counterparts.

A number of factors appeared to have an influence on gender relations and constructs. These included mothers mediating father involvement, the two-parent family structure reinforcing and facilitating traditional gender roles, practical life circumstances such as employment, and changes in social and cultural norms and attitudes.

Tradition and culture appear to still have a strong influence in shaping fathering behaviours and ideals within Pakistani families and in some Black Caribbean and Black African families, particularly when the father had been born outside the UK. Parenting practices and ideals across a number of domains seemed to be shaped by tradition and culture. These included discipline, financial provision, guiding and monitoring relationships, and encouraging children to learn about parents' culture and religion. At the same time, the findings suggest that the influence of tradition and culture was moderated somewhat

by practical, social and cultural factors associated with living in a modern UK society.

Having considered fathers' values and attitudes, their role in society today and the influences that shape fathering, we move on now in the concluding chapter to consider whether fathers actually matter and to assess the contribution they are making within the context of the family, before going on to look at how fathers might be better supported to fulfil the roles expected of them at all levels.

5   Conclusions: fathering today

Our research supports evidence from earlier research that fathers' roles and responsibilities have broadened over recent years, along with society's expectations of them (Lamb and Tamis-Lamonda, 2004). Despite the methodological limitations of the sample, it was clear from the qualitative interviews with fathers, mothers and children that there was a high level of congruence between the views expressed by individual family members and across ethnic groups regarding the perceived importance of fathers, with the majority maintaining that fathers have a unique and vital contribution to make.

Despite practical circumstances and changes in society, there are certain parenting roles that continue to be seen as predominantly the responsibility of the father; these are financial provider, protector and disciplinarian. Our findings confirm that economic provision continues to define the role of the father and that this role remains linked to conceptions of 'good fathering'. However, whereas traditionally this one-dimensional approach might have been sufficient to fulfil the paternal role, fathers today are expected to be more than just a financial provider, embracing a more multidimensional notion of fathering that has now become the norm:

> *I think more's expected of fathers now than 30 years ago, 30 years ago the man's responsibility was to go out to work and come home … but I think gradually it's become that way where from a father having maybe 10 per cent of the responsibility, his responsibility has gone up, he's going up like 50 per cent … having to learn to have equal responsibility as the mother for what goes on in children's lives and how much you contribute towards them, I think that's what's changed. So maybe it's harder in a way but maybe it's better as well, better for the children that the father is not just*

> *an image, he's a person that they can be close to.*
>
> (White British father)

While there were some significant differences between fathers' values and attitudes to parenting and their behaviours in terms of what they actually did, our findings have shown that this was often because of practical life circumstances that made it difficult for fathers to fulfil their aspirations. Fathers in general aspired to be different from their own fathers and in this sense it can be said that fathers' own experiences of being parented were very influential in shaping their fathering role. However, while this did not always translate into a significant increase in the level of paternal involvement, our data indicates that, in general, fathers' levels of engagement with and accessibility to their children have increased relative to that of their own fathers. As a result of these discontinuities with the previous generation and the changes to which fathers aspired, the childhood currently being experienced by the children in our study is in many ways very different from that experienced by their parents. These young people, however, tended to have a non-differentiated gender view of parenting roles to an extent that was greater than the present behaviour of their fathers. When they become the next generation of parents, there is every prospect that their gender roles will be even less differentiated, continuing the trend of greater paternal involvement in family life and producing even more profound changes in fathering roles.

Fathers' unique contribution to the family and parenting

Mothers and fathers across the whole sample generally agreed that fathers are equally as important as mothers, and in many ways make a

unique contribution to the upbringing of children. In the course of our study, a number of themes have emerged that highlight the special role played by fathers. First, the advantages of having two parents rather than one was stressed by parents and children in order to ensure that children have a rounded upbringing, but, perhaps more importantly, one that includes an adult male perspective. As one White British female young person described it, 'I feel that like if you haven't got a dad then … you've got a major part of your life missing'. Equally, fathers were thought to 'bring a balance to a relationship', so that children were exposed to two different viewpoints.

We have referred to the unique disciplinary role that fathers appeared to play, in particular for boys, and more specifically in black families where a more authoritarian discipline takes prominence in child rearing. Our data has shown that, in both Pakistani and black families, the father's ability to engender a greater level of respect in his children is seen as important in ensuring that children grow up to be disciplined and well behaved in society, and this parental behaviour is seen as 'normative' in these cultures. The benefits of a more authoritarian parenting style for black male youths have been demonstrated by Deater-Deckard *et al.* (1996), as those who received firm parenting tended to display lower levels of externalising behaviours and aggression, and achieved better outcomes in later life. Our own findings indicated a general consensus across all ethnic groups that fathers were more effective disciplinarians than mothers and were also important role models for their children, especially boys. They were more often the authority figures within families than mothers, exerting a greater influence on their children's behaviour because children appeared to react more positively to paternal discipline:

Boys don't tend to take what I say, they tend to take what he [father] *says more, like he's above me, that's how they view it.*
(Black Caribbean mother)

I do think that to bring up a boy child you do need a man to put him in place … the woman can't put them in place because they're turning

young men now and they are bigger than their mum, they're stronger than their mums and they wanna do what they wanna do.
(Black Caribbean father)

Conversely, many parents believed that a lack of father involvement in disciplining children, and indeed the total absence of a father figure in the lives of children, could lead to detrimental outcomes for children and young people, which may become more apparent during adolescence. Negative outcomes most frequently cited by parents included lack of respect, delinquency and criminal behaviour. Previous research supports these views in so far as paternal 'inputs' are correlated with child development outcomes such as higher levels of self-worth and prosocial behaviour, together with lower levels of depression and later police contact (Flouri and Buchanan, 2002a, 2002b; Grossman *et al.*, 2002). Certainly, the absence of a father figure was seen by some parents in our sample to have potentially adverse consequences as far as young people learning right from wrong. From the viewpoint of mothers and children, fathers were also considered important in their role as protectors of the family. We have seen that the presence of a father can make families feel secure and safe, not just in terms of physical safety, but also financially safe, given the father's role as breadwinner. To this extent, the findings suggest that traditional gendered attitudes to fathering were still very much alive in modern-day Britain.

Another important theme that emerged from our findings related to the special role that fathers play engaging directly in play and leisure activities with their children. The diary records revealed the extent of time they spent on these activities, which was substantiated by the qualitative data from the interviews with all family members. The value of these activities for children embodied more than simply engaging with them. It included the element of having fun with them. As one Pakistani young person pointed out, 'without my dad, I really wouldn't be having that much fun'. However, what was clear was the significance of the middle years of childhood as the period when fathers have the greatest direct involvement in play and leisure activities with their children, while either side of this time, during their infant and teenage years, fathers'

interactions with their children in such activities appear to be less frequent.

A final theme from our research that deserves mention relates to the various factors that impact on fathers' abilities to fulfil their role, quite apart from the views they expressed on the perceived desirability of greater involvement. The picture that emerged was one of stresses and tensions experienced in the current economic, moral and social climate. These result from a combination of practical life situations, gender constructs and relations within the family, and individual competencies. Where, traditionally, women's increasing participation in the labour market has brought pressure on them as a result of trying to juggle a dual role, so, too, our findings indicate that men were equally struggling to make sense of the new expectations that a changing society places on them. Above all, the importance of a father's role within the family is now stressed over and above the role he has traditionally filled in the workplace as the family breadwinner. As we have shown, fathers across the board described the pressures they were under in modern Britain, of owning their own homes and being able to provide materially for their families, while also spending more time engaged with their children. The complexity that our data revealed in the views that parents expressed about fathering, alongside what we found was happening in practice, may be a reflection of these tensions. For example, the Pakistani fathers in our study exhibited perhaps the most traditional interpretation of fathers' roles, but their long and irregular working hours made it harder for them to take on a more active role within the family. Our study revealed that many couples were endeavouring to make adjustments in the division of labour in order to accommodate their dual roles more effectively and to better reconcile the balance, though there was no clear differentiation across the ethnic groups as to how they were achieving this and many of the traditional patterns were persisting.

Policy and practice implications

In an attempt to shed light on fathering in the context of an increasingly multicultural, diverse Britain, this study set out to explore aspects of diversity in fathering across four ethnic groups.

However, while we uncovered some significant differences between the groups, our findings suggest that there are in fact far more similarities in the behaviours of fathers and their attitudes to fathering than there are differences. In the context of modern-day Britain, fathers are facing similar challenges in their role as parents and this holds true both within and across families from the four ethnic groups included in this study. Where differences emerged between the groups, more often than not these were to be found in the Pakistani families interviewed, in which all of the fathers had been born and raised in Pakistan. As a group, therefore, the Pakistani parents were generally more culturally intact and were thus holding on to traditional patterns of gender roles in the family, at least within the present generation of parents. Nevertheless, all the fathers in our sample held common views about what being a father involved, and attached similar values and aspirations to fathering.

The findings from this study generally support an already extensive list of policy recommendations stemming from other research studies in the field of fathering; these include better policies to promote a work–life balance for fathers, increased financial support for families on low incomes and increased parenting support to fathers. To these we would add the following.

The similarities found in values and attitudes to fathering across our sample, as well as in fathers' experiences of fatherhood, suggest that support for men in their role as fathers might be more successful if it was focused and based on these shared experiences and commonalities of fathering in Britain today when trying to recruit them into parenting activities, rather than taking an approach that concentrated on specific characteristics and cultural practices of different groups of fathers. Initiatives such as Sure Start, directed to families with children aged under 4, have inevitably been accessed more widely by mothers than by fathers. Given the reservations that many of our fathers expressed about their involvement with younger children, the need to reach out to them and support them in their parenting role could not be clearer, capitalising once again on their shared experience as fathers.

At the same time, the findings of our study that fathers engage most actively with their children in

play and leisure pursuits during their middle years suggests an optimal window for support services to engage fathers during this period. Universal services could therefore better attract fathers by providing increased leisure and play opportunities directed to fathers and children of primary school age. These might include activities like adventure weekends and gardening days, with facilities that were available at times that were convenient for fathers such as evenings and weekends. If such activities were designed specifically with fathers in mind, they would serve to promote the level of interaction and thereby facilitate increased levels of father involvement during this stage of childhood, before children reach their teens.

In conclusion, our study has revealed that, in our sample, families expressed very similar views about what it means to be a father and the particular contribution of fathers to family life today. However, while on the surface the beliefs and attitudes of fathers, mothers and children suggest that respective parenting roles are no longer seen to be as strictly differentiated as they were in the past, detailed examination revealed that some aspects of traditional gender stereotypes still persist in practice. Attitudes to fathering and actual fathering behaviours have been shown by our study to be influenced by a complex web of factors, including fathers' personal experiences of being parented, culture, faith and social circumstance. It is the latter that perhaps exerts the greatest influence as a result of the socio and economic climate of life in Britain today, giving rise to a common model of fathering, which cuts across ethnic diversity and within which fathers are facing similar challenges in achieving their ideal fathering role.

Notes

Chapter 2

1   www.communities.gov.uk/communities/
    neighbourhoodrenewal/deprivation/
    deprivation07/.

2   There were a few exceptions to this pattern,
    mainly to accommodate various circumstances
    that made eight days of diary-keeping too
    difficult for families to accomplish within the
    period of fieldwork.

3   Some missing data resulted from two sets of
    data apparently being lost by the Post Office
    in transit between fieldwork sites and the
    research office.

4   Children's perspectives on fathers will be the
    subject of a separate publication.

5   *Social grade C1:* junior management, owners
    of small establishments and all others in
    non-manual positions; equivalent to National
    Statistics Socio-economic Class (NS-SEC) 5
    lower supervisory and technical occupations.

    Social grade C2: all skilled manual workers and
    those manual workers with responsibility for
    other people; equivalent to NS-SEC 6 semi-
    routine occupations.

    Social grade D: all semi-skilled and unskilled
    manual workers, apprentices and trainees to
    skilled workers; equivalent to NS-SEC 7 semi-
    routine occupations.

Social grade E: all those entirely dependent
on the State long-term, through sickness,
unemployment, old age or other reasons;
those unemployed for a period exceeding six
months; casual workers and those without a
regular income; equivalent to NS-SEC 8 never
worked and long-term unemployed (www.nrs.
co.uk/about_nrs/data_available/definitions_of_
social_grade; www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/
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Acknowledgements

About the authors

Hanan Hauari is a Research Officer at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. Her research studies to date have focused mainly on parenting and family support and have included evaluations of services for children, young people and their families. She has conducted research in the fields of education, health, social care and youth justice. Her research interests include prevention and earlier intervention area-based initiatives and the influence of parenting on outcomes for children and young people.

Katie Hollingworth is a Research Officer at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. Her background in research with children, young people and families crosses the disciplines of parenting and parenting support, as well as child and family services, including education and health.