

Fatherhood in the 21st Century: who are the fathers who combine long work hours and caring for children?

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Abstract:How fathers resolve tensions around being a “breadwinner” and an “involved father” when they work long hours has not yet been adequately researched. Using 13 waves of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey, we identify 3166 partnered heterosexual fathers (n=14,745 person observations) who work full time. We compare fathers who combine long hours in paid work with long hours caring for children, with three other groups of fathers: 1) those who work regular full time hours and spend relatively long hours with children; 2) those who work long hours and spend fewer hours with children; and 3) those who work regular full time hours *and* who spend fewer hours with children. We compare these fathers across demographic, social, and work factors that may be associated with time in work and care. We find younger fathers who have younger children, and those who see childcare as a pleasurable activity, are more likely to combine longer work hours with more time with children. We find working from home and working in the private sector are associated with long hours in paid work, whereas occupation prestige and wife’s or partner’s level of education are associated with time spent with children.

Introduction

Maintaining a position of “breadwinner” within the family remains core to the definition of fatherhood (Kaufman and Uhlenberg, 2000; Lamb, 1987), despite recent academic and popular discourses expanding to include the “involved father” ideal (Kaufman and Uhlenberg, 2000; Pleck, 2010). In Australia, 90 per cent of heterosexual couple families with at least one child under 15 years of age include a father who is employed, and of these fathers, 92 per cent work full time (ABS, 2012; see also Baxter, Gray, Alexander, Strazdins, and Bittman 2007). In 2004, fathers in Australia worked an average of 47 hours each week (Baxter, Gray, Alexander, Strazdins, and Bittman, 2007), and between 1992 and 2006 fathers’ time in paid employment increased by ten hours per week (Craig and Mullan, 2012). At the same time, fathers increased the hours they spent caring for children from 10 to 12.7 hours a week (Craig and Mullan, 2012). Although care

has not increased by as many hours as paid work, research from the US (Bianchi, 2006), the UK (Sullivan, Billari, and Altintas, 2014), and Scandinavian countries (Brandth and Kvande, 2001; Haas, Duvander, and Chronholm, 2012) show similar trends of fathers increasing their time in both work and care. However, little research has studied fathers who combine long hours of paid work with caring for children to understand how they resolve competing breadwinner and involved father ideologies. This paper addresses this research gap.

Background theory and literature

Holter (2007) analysed survey and interview data from men across European and theorised that fathers who spend fewer hours in paid work and more time caring for children (relative to other fathers) was because of one of two reasons. Firstly, to adhere to an involved father ideology, or secondly, in response to specific personal circumstances – such as their or their partner’s employment – which require them to work fewer hours and spend more time with children, relative to other fathers (Holter, 2007). We apply this theory to the Australian context and develop a two-part framework that helps explain variations in fathers’ work and care practices by looking at: 1) the extent that parental identity is associated with fathers’ involvement in work and care, and 2) the impact of family and work-related circumstances on fathers’ time in work and care.

The first part of this framework incorporates identity theory. Research suggests that fathers devote time to work or care according to whether they identify with the “breadwinner” or “involved father” roles (Gaunt and Scott, 2014; Marsiglio, 1993) and whether they feel positively towards, or fulfilled by, parenting (Adamsons, 2013). Some studies suggest that a higher socioeconomic background is associated with intensive parenting norms and an involved father identity, and thereby comparatively more time with children (Ba, 2014; Gracia, 2014).

The second part of this framework incorporates a time availability perspective as a whole-of-household approach, and suggests personal and family circumstances are associated with fathers’ time in paid work and caring for children. Fathers of infants typically spend more time with children because of the increased demands of physical and routine care (Baxter et al., 2007; Gracia, 2014) or may take on more active child care duties in response to mothers’ employment (Baxter, 2012; Raley, Bianchi, and Wang, 2012). In contrast, fathers may spend less time with children in response to long hours of paid work (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson, 2000; Craig and Mullan, 2011).

Circumstances within the workplace itself may also be associated with the time fathers spend with children. For example, although some fathers may have access to flexible work arrangements, research suggests few fathers use these arrangements to care for children due to wage reduction, career penalties, and stigmatisation in the workplace (Coltrane, Miller, DeHaan, and Stewart, 2013; Rudman and Mescher, 2013). However, some international studies suggest fathers are more likely to use flexibility to care for children when they work in the public sector and in female-dominated occupations wherein negative consequences are less prevalent (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Lappegård, 2012).

Other studies suggest fathers in higher status occupations are less involved with children than fathers in lower status jobs that have clearer start and finish times and enable fathers to arrive home and spend time with younger children (O’Brien, 2005; Pleck, 1997). In contrast, Ba (2014) notes although higher status occupations are more likely to be associated with long work hours, they are also more likely to have autonomous work patterns and flexible work arrangements, which may help facilitate time with children.

Research Question

The overarching question asks: What personal, family, and workplace characteristics are associated with fathers who work long hours and engage in long hours caring for children each week?

Data

To answer the above question, we used 13 waves of the Household, Income, and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, 2001 to 2014. We selected full time employed, heterosexual partnered fathers of children under 15. After dealing with missing data across all explanatory variables, our final analytic sample comprised 3,166 individual fathers (n=14,745 person observations).

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is a typology constructed from two questions in HILDA that asked fathers how much time they spend each week 1) in paid employment, and 2) actively caring for children. Caring for children is defined in the HILDA survey as “playing with your children, helping them with personal care, teaching, coaching or actively supervising them, or getting them to child care, school and other activities”. This definition encompasses activities that fathers typically engage in with children from birth to 15 years. The typology comprises four groups of fathers and are defined as fathers who spent: 1) 45+ hours in work and 20+ hours with children; 2) 35-44 hours in work and 20+ hours with children; 3) 45+ hours of work and 0-19 hours with children, and; 4) 35-44 hours in work and 0-19 hours with children.

Table 1 “Descriptive statistics: work hours and hours with children typology”

Typology	N	Per cent
Group 1 = 20+ hours with children, 45+ hours work	1,578	11
Group 2 = 20+ hours with children, 35-44 hours work	1,624	11
Group 3 = 0-19 hours with children, 45+ hours work	6,780	46
Group 4 = 0-19 hours with children, 35-44 hours work	4,763	32
Total	14,745	100

Independent variables

The independent variables include demographic, family, work characteristics and a measure of fathers’ own subjective experience of fatherhood (see Table 1). The first set of independent variables include fathers’ age, marital status, and age and number of children in the household. Fathers’ age was centred around the mean and treated as a continuous variable. Marital status is a dummy variable (0 = married, 1 = cohabiting). We constructed four count variables for age of children, which are number of children aged 0-1, 2-4, 5-11, and 12-16.

The second set of independent variables relates to fathers’ work circumstances: employment status, occupational gender composition, occupational sector and size, whether fathers work from home, and their satisfaction with work hours and workplace flexibility. Employment status is constructed as a dummy variable (0 = employee, 1 = employer/self-employed). Occupation gender composition is constructed as a categorical variable: 1 = works in a male-dominated occupation (>70 per cent male employees), 2 = works in a female-dominated occupation (>70 per cent female employees), and 3 = works in neither male- nor female-dominated occupation (see ABS, 2015). We included five occupation sector and size categories: 1 = Public; 2 = Small private (<20 employees) and self-employed; 3 = Medium private (20-199 employees); 4 = Large private (200+ employees); 5 = Not-for-profit (NFP). Fathers’ work from home status is measured as a dummy variable (0 = does not work from home, 1 = does some work from home), and

satisfaction with both workplace flexibility and hours worked are measured as a Likert scale (0 = totally dissatisfied, 10 = totally satisfied).

The third set of variables looks at fathers' socioeconomic position: fathers' education, income, and Australian Socioeconomic Index 2006 (AUSEI06)¹ score. Education is measured as: 1 = Bachelor degree or higher; 2 = Certificate/Diploma or equivalent; 3 = High school or below. Fathers' income is measured as a continuous variable (raw income scores adjusted by dividing by 10,000). Finally, AUSEI06 measures occupation prestige and is measured as a continuous variable from 1 to 100 (higher scores denote higher occupation prestige).

The fourth set of independent variables includes mothers' work-related characteristics: hours spent in paid employment, level of education, and income. Hours in employment are measured as a continuous variable from 0 (0 hours = not in the labour force). Level of education and income are measured as per fathers'.

Lastly, we include a variable asking whether fathers agree taking care of their child(ren) is more work than pleasure, and is a Likert scale whereby 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Table 2 “Descriptive statistics”

Variables	Mean/per cent	SD	Range
<i>Age (centered)</i>	40	7.64	16-67
<i>Marital status</i>			
0 Cohabiting/De Facto	12		
1 Married	88		
<i>Country of birth</i>			
1 Australia	79		
2 English-speaking country	10		
3 Non-English-speaking country	11		
<i>Number of children in household</i>			
Aged 0-1	0.25	0.45	0-3
Aged 2-4	0.37	0.58	0-4
Aged 5-11	0.75	0.86	0-5
Aged 12-16	0.52	0.74	0-4
<i>Employment status</i>			
0 Employee	88		
1 Employer, Self-employed	12		
<i>Occupation gender composition</i>			
1 Male-dominated occupation	49		
2 Female-dominated occupation	11		
3 Neither male- nor female-dominated occupation	40		
<i>Sector and size</i>			
1 Public sector	21		
2 Small private (<20 employees) and self-employed	39		
3 Medium private (20-199 employees)	23		
4 Large private (200+ employees)	13		
5 Not-for-profit	4		

Variables	Mean/per cent	SD	Range
<i>Satisfaction with the flexibility available to balance work and non-work commitments</i> (0=dissatisfied, 10=satisfied)	7	2.3	0-10
<i>Satisfaction with hours worked</i> (0=dissatisfied, 10=satisfied)	7	2.0	0-10
Father's education			
1 Bachelor degree or higher	30		
2 Certificate/Trade/Diploma or equivalent	43		
3 High school or below	27		
<i>Income (\$10,000)</i>	6.85	5.58	0-86.5
<i>AUSEI06</i>	52.1	23.77	0-100
<i>Work from home</i>			
0 Does not work from home	67		
1 Does some work from home	33		
<i>Wife/partner – paid work hours</i>	19	16.97	0-118
<i>Wife/partner – level of education</i>			
1 Bachelor degree or higher	33		
2 Certificate/Trade/Diploma or equivalent	25		
3 High school or below	42		
<i>Wife/partner income (\$10,000)</i>	2.43	3.19	0-86.55
<i>Taking care of children – more work than pleasure</i> (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)	3	1.5	1-7
Total (N)	14,745		

Methods

Given the dependent variable has four categories we run a multinomial logistic model. Because the data is longitudinal we account for clustering at the individual level, and estimate a generalised structural equation model with random effects. We run a full model incorporating all variables. With this approach we examine which characteristics are associated with fathers in each group. Fathers who engage in at least 45 hours engage with work 20 or more hours with children are the reference group.

Results

Descriptive results (table 2) show of the fathers who spend 20 or more hours with children each week, 11 per cent work at least 45 hours and 11 per cent work 35-44 hours each week. Of the fathers who spend 0-19 hours each week with children, 46 per cent work at least 45 hours each week, and 32 per cent work 35-44 hours each week.

Table 3 Results (Base group: 20+ hours with children, 45+ hours work)

Independent variables	20 + hours with children, 35-44 hours work	0-19 hours with children, 45+ hours work	0-19 hours with children, 35-44 hours work
	(Coef/Robust standard error)	(Coef/Robust standard error)	(Coef/Robust standard error)
<i>Age (centered)</i>	0.030**	0.046***	0.057***
	0.010	0.008	0.009
<i>Marital status</i>			

Independent variables	20 + hours with children, 35-44 hours work	0-19 hours with children, 45+ hours work	0-19 hours with children, 35-44 hours work
Cohabiting (ref)	-	-	-
Married	-0.373*	0.165	-0.209
	0.171	0.147	0.167
<i>Number of children in household</i>			
Aged 0-1	-0.165	-0.737***	-0.642***
	0.121	0.104	0.113
Aged 2-4	-0.136	-0.630***	-0.618***
	0.085	0.075	0.081
Aged 5-11	-0.051	-0.094	-0.128*
	0.072	0.062	0.065
Aged 12-16	-0.221	0.514***	0.366***
	0.139	0.102	0.108
<i>Employment status</i>			
Employee (ref)	-	-	-
Employer/Business owner	-0.605**	0.157	-0.456*
	0.221	0.157	0.186
<i>Occupation gender composition</i>			
Male-dominated occupations (ref)	-	-	-
Female-dominated occupations	0.031	-0.261	-0.078
	0.196	0.165	0.179
Neither male- nor female-	-0.097	-0.069	-0.209
	0.125	0.093	0.107
<i>Sector and size</i>			
Public sector (ref)	-	-	-
Small private (<20) + self-emp	-0.910***	0.099	-0.819***
	0.177	0.155	0.170
Medium private (20-199)	-0.756***	0.163	-0.626***
	0.182	0.163	0.174
Large private (200+)	-0.675**	-0.175	-0.545**
	0.218	0.185	0.202
Not-for-profit (NFP)	-0.852**	-0.227	-0.828**
	0.312	0.257	0.281
<i>Work from home</i>			
Does not work from home (ref)	-	-	-
Does some work from home	-1.003***	0.076	-0.808***
	0.123	0.093	0.105
<i>Satisfied with level of flexibility at work (0=not satisfied 7=very satisfied)</i>	0.022	-0.030	-0.005
	0.026	0.021	0.022
<i>Satisfied with no. of hours work each week (0=not satisfied 7=very satisfied)</i>	0.308***	0.006	0.327***
	0.031	0.022	0.026

Independent variables	20 + hours with children, 35-44 hours work	0-19 hours with children, 45+ hours work	0-19 hours with children, 35-44 hours work
<i>Fathers' education</i>			
Bachelor or higher (ref)	-	-	-
Trade/certificate/diploma	-0.168	-0.207	-0.108
	0.178	0.140	0.161
Year 12 or below	-0.017	-0.212	-0.117
	0.208	0.163	0.188
<i>Income (\$10,000)</i>	-0.099***	0.002	-0.095***
	0.016	0.009	0.013
<i>AUSEI06 (occupation prestige)</i>	-0.001	-0.005*	-0.004
	0.003	0.003	0.003
<i>Partners' work hours</i>			
	-0.004	-0.004	-0.007
	0.004	0.003	0.003
<i>Partners' level of education</i>			
Bachelor or higher (ref)	-	-	-
Trade/certificate/diploma	0.183	0.294*	0.177
	0.176	0.145	0.163
Year 12 or below	0.041	0.252	0.159
	0.169	0.136	0.156
<i>Partners' income (\$10,000)</i>	0.057**	0.006	0.051**
	0.021	0.016	0.019
<i>Spending time with children is more work than pleasure (0=disagree 7=agree)</i>	0.079*	0.110***	0.186***
	0.036	0.029	0.030
Constant	0.602	2.745***	1.658***
	0.450	0.351	0.398
Across-individual variation constant			2.685***
			0.235
N			14745

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3 presents the results from the analysis. Holding all other variables constant, as age increases above the mean, the likelihood fathers work at least 45 hours and spend at least 20 hours with children each week decreases compared with all other groups of fathers. Amongst fathers who spend at least 20 hours with children each week, married fathers are less likely to work 35-44 hours compared with fathers who work at least 45 hours each week. Finally, irrespective of work hours, fathers with more children aged 0-1 or 2-4 living in the household are more likely to spend at least 20 hours with children each week. In contrast, more children in the household aged 12-16 increases the likelihood fathers will spend 0-19 hours with children compared with fathers who spend at least 20 hours with children and work at least 45 hours each week.

In relation to fathers' work circumstances, being an employer or self-employed decreases the likelihood of working 35-44 hours compared with fathers who work at least 45 hours each week, irrespective of time spent with children. In addition, compared with fathers who work in male-dominated occupations, fathers who work in occupations with a more equal gender distribution are less likely to work 35-44 hours and spend 0-19 hours with children than fathers who work

at least 45 hours and spend at least 20 hours with children each week. Further, compared with fathers who work at least 45 hours and spend at least 20 hours with children each week, fathers in small, medium and large private businesses, and fathers in NFP organisations, are less likely than fathers in the public sector to work 35-44 hours. A similar pattern is found for fathers who do some work from home, whereby they are less likely to work 35-44 hours each week (irrespective of hours with children) when compared with fathers who work at least 45 hours and spend at least 20 hours with children. Satisfaction with flexibility, however, is not significant. Rather, fathers who work 35-44 hours each week are more likely to feel satisfied with their work hours when compared with fathers who work at least 45 hours and spend at least 20 hours with children.

In relation to fathers' socioeconomic position, as incomes increase, fathers are significantly less likely to work 35-44 hours each week compared with fathers who work at least 45 hours, irrespective of time spent with children. However, an increase in occupational prestige (AUSEI06) is associated with a decreased likelihood of working at least 45 hours and spending less than 20 hours each week with children, compared with fathers who do at least 45 hours of work and spend at least 20 hours with children each week.

Unexpectedly, however, mothers' work hours are not associated with fathers' time spent in paid work or childcare. Results suggest, however, as mothers' income increases, fathers are more likely to work 35-44 hours per week (irrespective of hours with children) when compared with fathers who work at least 45 hours and spend at least 20 hours with children. In relation to mothers' education, however, having a Trade, Certificate, or Diploma (compared to Bachelor degree or higher) is associated with an increased likelihood of fathers working at least 45 hours and spending 0-19 hours with children each week, compared with fathers who also work at least 45 hours yet spend at least 20 hours with children.

Finally, fathers who work at least 45 hours and spend at least 20 hours with children each week are significantly less likely to view childcare as more work than pleasure than all other groups of fathers.

Discussion

This paper investigated personal, demographic, family, and work characteristics that differentiate four groups of fathers who have children aged under 15, as outlined above. Firstly, according to the results of the analysis, very few characteristics explain differences between fathers who work at least 45 hours and spend at least 20 hours with children each week when compared to other fathers.

This research does suggest, however, that younger fathers are more likely to work at least 45 hours and spend at least 20 hours with children each week. Overall, younger men may be at a stage in their career where they typically work longer hours (Dermott, 2006), suggesting they may identify with a breadwinner or intensive worker ideal (Gaunt and Scott, 2014). However, the results show that fathers who engage in long hours of paid work *and* childcare are also more likely to see childcare as more of a pleasure than a chore. This suggests that fathers' own subjective experience of parenting is also associated with time in paid work and caring for children. Perhaps one way in which young fathers may reconcile the apparent competing demands of a culture of long work hours and being the breadwinner, with an increasing cultural expectation of being an involved father, may be to maintain longer hours in work *and* care. This also suggests that existing theories are inadequate for explaining how fathers combine long work hours and caring for children, an issue that is highlighted by other authors (see Craig and Mullan, 2011; and Barnett and Hyde, 2001).

According to our research, family characteristics are primarily associated with childcare hours, irrespective of work hours. In addition to being younger, fathers who work long hours and engage

in longer hours with children each week are more likely to have younger children (aged 0-4 years) when compared to fathers who also work long hours but who do less childcare. While some research in Australia (Baxter et al., 2007) and the US (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, and Hofferth, 2001) show fathers decrease their time in paid work immediately after the birth of a baby, our results suggest this is not sustained after the immediate post-partum period when fathers return to their regular hours of paid work. Fathers of infants may be at a stage in their career where long work hours are required for career progression, and infants also require intensive amounts of parenting, despite number of hours spent in paid work (Biggart and O'Brien 2010). This is reflected in our results, whereby fathers of infants are more likely to spend more time with very young children (aged 0-4 years) than fathers of older children (aged 12-16 years). Although previous research has shown that the types of child-related care fathers provide differ according to their child's age (Yeung et al., 2001), our results suggest that the age of their child(ren) is also significantly associated with the total time fathers spend in work and care.

This study also suggests that fathers' work characteristics are primarily associated with work hours, irrespective of hours spent caring for children. Unsurprisingly, higher-earning fathers are less likely to work fewer hours. However, mothers' time in paid work was not associated with fathers' time in work and care, although mothers' income was positively associated with fathers working fewer hours. This suggests mothers may work to supplement the family income when fathers work fewer hours and earn a lower income, but that these fathers do not necessarily spend more time with children in response to mothers' time in paid work (Craig and Mullan, 2011).

Working longer hours each week is associated with working in environments that are traditionally associated with longer work hours (Bygren and Duvander, 2006): being self-employed or an employer, and working in the private sector (irrespective of employer size). Our findings further suggest that fathers do not typically use flexible work to facilitate extensive amounts of time with children, but rather to facilitate long hours of paid work. This aligns with previous US research showing that flexible work arrangements are typically taken by mothers to combine work and care, whereas there is a cultural expectation that men will work very long hours, irrespective of whether or not they are a father (Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, and Siddiqi, 2013).

Finally, our results differentiate between two groups of fathers who work long full time hours: those who spend less than 20 hours actively caring for children and those who spend 20 hours or more caring for children. Fathers who combine long hours of work *and* care have higher levels of occupational prestige and have wives who have a bachelor degree or higher, compared to fathers who also work long hours but who spend *fewer* hours with children. Previous research suggests this may be because families with high levels of parental education and associated prestige are more likely to demonstrate intensive parenting norms through longer hours in childcare irrespective of work hours (Shirani, Henwood, and Coltart, 2011).

Conclusion

While we don't find a lot to differentiate fathers, this study highlights the importance of incorporating fathers' own subjective experiences of parenting in research that seeks to understand more about how families combine work and caring for children. Furthermore, the results suggest that fathers today are not only either 'breadwinners' or 'carers'; rather, fathers seek to accommodate both roles, to varying degrees, and at various times over the life course. This study therefore demonstrates the need for developing theories and frameworks that more adequately help us understand father involvement in both work and care.

Further, this study suggests that fathers' flexible work arrangements are not necessarily associated with longer hours caring for children (see also Baxter, 2011). Despite this, previous research has shown that restrictive work practices can make it extremely difficult for fathers who

do, or who want to, spend more time with children (Berdhal and Moon, 2013). For this reason, further research also needs to better understand how workplace and government policy, together with subjective personal experiences, are associated with the time that fathers spend in work and care. Doing so may assist governments and workplaces develop policies that help pave the way for fathers to continue to increase their time with children, which ultimately hold numerous benefits for families.

Notes

1 The AUSEI06 is a measure of socioeconomic position and takes into account occupation, typical income, and education level of individuals in that occupation in order to provide a scaled number or index. The scale is measured from 1 to 100, whereby higher scores denote occupations that have a higher socioeconomic position or prestige.

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