

Impact case study (REF)

<p>Institution: Lancaster University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 4 – Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience</p>
<p>Title of case study: <i>Promoting Fathering and Paternal Influences on Child Development</i></p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>In a continuing policy focus on the family, both the current coalition government and its Labour predecessor have emphasised the value of re-integrating fathers into the family unit. For over 20 years our research has helped the UK government understand the role and importance of fathers to children’s development. We have made concrete recommendations about the focus (i.e., the what and how) of initiatives designed to promote fathering. Our impact includes a tenfold increase in funding for work with fathers in Children’s Centres and the pivotal influence of one study in parental responsibility granted to over two million unmarried fathers.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Over the last 25 years, Lancaster University’s Centre for Research in Human Development and Learning, led by Professor Charlie Lewis, has explored the roles that fathers play in the development of their children. Our research integrates interview, experimental and observational studies of father-child interaction, and has made three main contributions.</p> <p>First, we have charted public perceptions and attitudes towards fatherhood as a means for understanding the social context that facilitates or inhibits fathering. This research, at the interface between developmental psychology, sociology and social policy, has charted the contemporary barriers to, and facilitators of, fatherhood across more than two decades (1). Since this work started, paternal care of children has increased amidst a variety of equally dramatic social changes, notably in work-home relationships, shifts in the labour force, marital division and the emergence of new family forms, in particular cohabitation. This longstanding research programme has led to a series of evaluations of the role of the contemporary father within the family, and more particularly the influence of men on their children’s development (e.g. 2-3). In addition to the thousands of citations for the several editions of (2), the work is cited as <u>the</u> definitive analysis of the international research and the place for policy makers to go to in order to effect substantive change in family practices in the UK. Other international audiences, like policy makers in Brazil (3) and Australia (see supportive letter), have been targeted with similar effect.</p> <p>Second, our empirical studies have examined the involvement of fathers in child care, their experiences and father-child interaction within the context of such social changes. This research has explored the impact of paternal and maternal employment patterns on child development (4), paternal employment on family relationships (4), the involvement of men with their children following cohabitation breakdown (see Section 4, below) and changing patterns of family relationships in households with a teenager (5). Current work critically examines the maternal gatekeeping hypothesis (that mothers facilitate or, more typically, prohibit the active involvement of fathers) and the part played by men in complex family units, when they are fathers to children in different households.</p> <p>Third, we have undertaken studies evaluating initiatives designed to promote the role of the father. For example, we took on two roles in the national evaluation of <i>Sure Start</i>, a government program that provided education, childcare, health and family services for pre-school children and their families. Not only did we oversee the evaluations in the north-west of England, we conducted an intensive national study of the means by which <i>Sure Start</i> programmes involved fathers (6). This was ground breaking as it revealed the need to concentrate on practices to effect a greater involvement of fathers. As with more basic research (4), this had specific influences on the rise in provision for fathers in the last five years of the Labour Government, detailed in Section 4, below.</p>

3. References to the research

1. Lewis, C. & Lamb, M. E (2003). Fathers' influences on children's development. The evidence from two-parent families. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 18, 211-228. (Google scholar: 170 citations)
2. Lamb, M. E. & Lewis, C (2010). The development and significance of father-child relationships in two-parent families. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (5th ed., pp. 94-153). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley. (also in editions 3 (1997) and 4 (2004): for the fourth edition of this volume there are over 2200 citations in Google Scholar, and 184 for two editions of this chapter alone).
3. Lewis, C. and Dessen, A. M. (1999) O pai no contexto familiar (Fathers in family life). *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa*, 15. pp. 9-16. ISSN 0102-3772. (Google Scholar: 126 citations)
4. Warin, J., Solomon, Y., Lewis, C. & Langford, W. (1999). *Fathers, Work and Family Life*. London: Family Policy Studies Centre. (Google Scholar: 106 citations)
5. Solomon, Y., Warin, J., Lewis, C. & Langford, W. Intimate talk between parents and their teenage children. *Sociology*, 36, 665-684. (Google Scholar: 51 citations)
6. Lloyd, N., O'Brien, M. & Lewis, C. (2003). *Fathers in Sure Start*. London: National Evaluation of Sure Start & Department for Education. (Google Scholar: 66 citations)

4. Details of the impact

Perceptions of the role that fathers should play in their children's upbringing have changed markedly over the past 20 years (2). This is evidenced internationally through changes in government policy (7), for example in President Obama's fatherhood initiative (<http://www.fatherhood.gov>), press reporting on fatherhood both nationally and internationally (e.g., 8, 9); and the growth in organizations set up especially to promote fathering (e.g., Fathers Direct/ Fatherhood Institute: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/>). Our main aim has been to inform policy makers of the research on the contribution of fathers at several levels. Concerning government policy, Lewis acted as an invited consultant on the Department of Children, Schools, and Families' Green Paper on "*Support for All Families and Relationships*" (7), advising specifically on the nature of fathers' contributions to child development and how these might best be supported. This Green paper influenced the Department of Education's annual spend (~£55m). Perhaps most importantly it also recommended a review of employment law relating to paternity leave; a review that is currently underway. More recently, Lewis was invited to present at a consultation to members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Stormont, where he launched the 'Man Matters' campaign (10). This multi-million pound initiative is focused specifically at providing support to fathers seeking to take a greater role in their children's upbringing.

At the same time we have provided advice and education to charities and agencies working with families. In 2009, Lewis served as a member on the Advisory Group on Fathers for the Children's Society and he has worked with judges and family lawyers (e.g., at the Sieff and Dartington Conferences), the Fatherhood Institute, Parenting NI and other similar organizations. Within the period 2008-2013, Lewis has given over a dozen invited talks to institutions and public organizations concerned with family welfare, including an invited paper at the Annual CAFCASS conference (11) and talks coordinated by Parenting NI (10). We have also been active in promoting the findings of our own and others' research on fatherhood in the national and international press, radio and television: for example, BBC's *The Biology of Dads* (first broadcast 2010, viewing figures 800,000) (8), as well as national (e.g., 9) and international press.

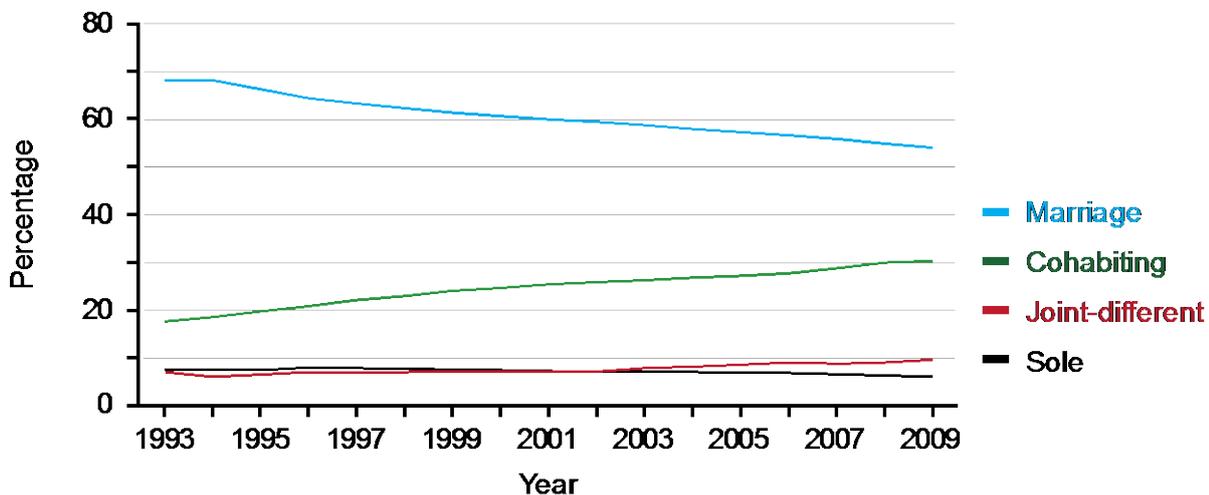
While such attempts to effect shifts in public attitudes and behaviour are inevitably the result of action by a large number of people, the specific influence of our contributions is visible in two areas, leading the Director of the Fatherhood Institute to conclude: "Due to the work of Professor Lewis and his colleagues, fatherhood practice in the UK can be grounded in UK-evidence, as well

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as harvesting the most important findings from other countries” (12).

First, our Cohabitation Breakdown (13) study was commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to assess why cohabitations led to so many separations and subsequent reductions of paternal involvement. At that time the vast majority of unmarried fathers had no legal status and we reported how such men were often prevented from contact with their children following a separation. We highlighted the need to confer parental responsibility to cohabiting fathers. The report was the main piece of current research to feed into negotiations between Government Ministers with the pressure group Fathers Direct who used Lewis’ research extensively (12, 14). The 2002 Children and Adoption Act amended the Children Act (1989), awarding parental responsibility to fathers named on their children’s birth certificate after 1.12.2003. Thus parental responsibility has been extended to an increasing number of fathers over the past decade – see Figure 1 (15, p.6). This includes approximately 217,000 men per year through the REF period (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Live births by marital status / registration type, 1993-2009



Secondly, our DFE sponsored research into fathers’ involvement in Sure Start (6: see above) exposed the institutional problems preventing men’s participation in programmes and specified the conditions in which an increase in such involvement would take place. As a result of the report, individual analyses (e.g., 16) (see Figure 2[a]) and work conducted at several Children’s Centres (e.g., 12) stemmed from our research and recommendations. For example, the Fatherhood Institute rolled out a programme specifically for fathers in Children’s Centres and they attribute their tenfold increase in their turnover in the period 2005-2010 (see Figure 2 [b]) to the DfEE research which we conducted:

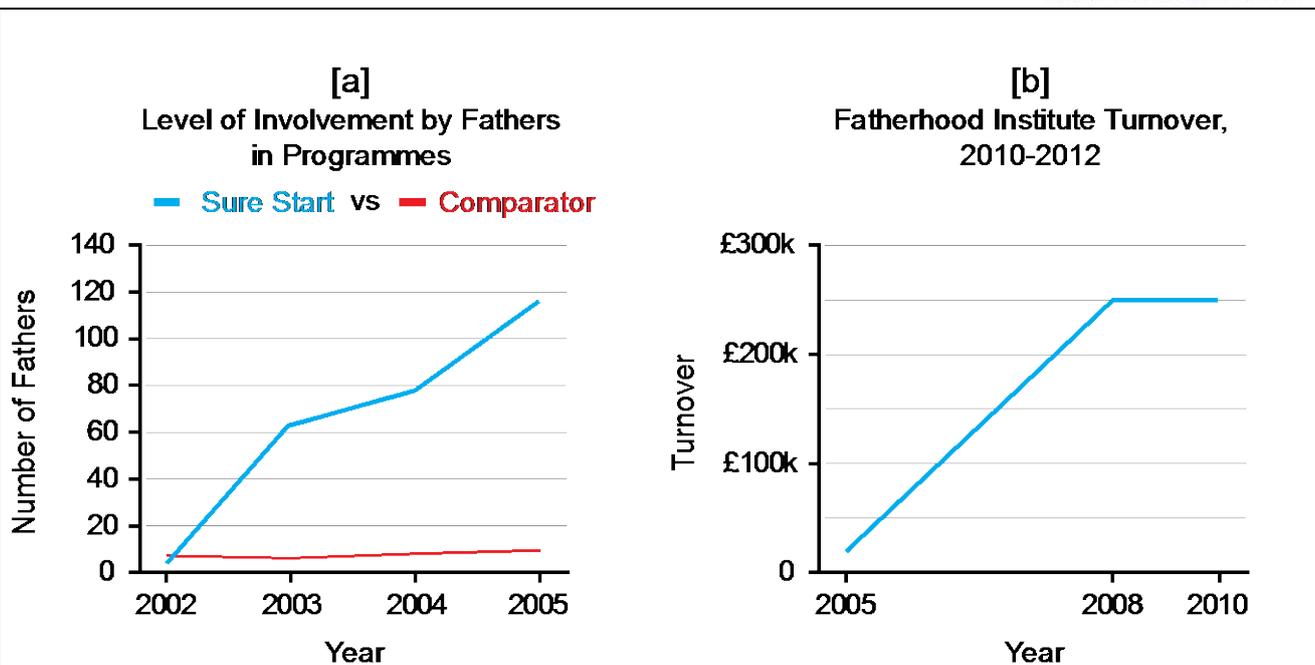


Figure 2 : Fathers' involvement in the years after Lewis' DFE report on [a] one Sure Start programme (16) (Hinton: Number of fathers involved) [b] £1000s of income to The Fatherhood Institute's for their work in Children's Centres (Corroborated by the Letter from the Institute: 12).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

7. UK Government report: *Support for all: The Families and Relationships Green Paper*. (Ref: CM7787).
8. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/tv/features/fatherhood-season/> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00rvv6t> (2010)
9. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2011/aug/27/dad-childcare-stay-at-home>
10. <http://www.wea-ni.com/current-news-stories/celebrating-the-father-role-event-16th-june-stormont>
11. [http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/PDF/ResearchConferenceProgramme\(final\).pdf](http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/PDF/ResearchConferenceProgramme(final).pdf) Now available on <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2009/cafcass-research-conference-2010/>
12. Letter from the joint CEO of the Fatherhood Institute (formerly Fathers Direct).
13. Lewis, C., Papacosta, A. & Warin, J. (2002) *Cohabitation, Separation and Fatherhood*. York: Joseph Rowntree.
14. <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/uploads/publications/407.pdf>
15. Messer, J. (2011). An analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of sole registered births and infant deaths. *Health Statistics Quarterly*, 50, 1-29.
16. Potter, C., & Carpenter, J. (2008). 'Something in it for dads': getting fathers involved with Sure Start. *Early Child Development and Care*, 178, 761-772.