



Different sorts of Dads

The research on fathers' impact on their children ...

Fathers come in different forms, with different faiths, different cultures, different abilities. Some do not live in the same house as their children. This is a summary of the evidence as to how differences inform fatherhood in different settings.

Separated dads

At least one child in three will experience their parents' separation before the age of 16.

In England, about 11% of children in separated families share their time equally between both parents, between one quarter and one third rarely, if ever, see their non-resident parent.

High father-involvement before separation is rarely reflected in post-separation agreements. In the UK, 91% of resident parents are female.

Outcomes are less secure for children whose parents separate ...

The negative effects on children of parental conflict and hostility include depression, withdrawal, aggression and bad behaviour.

70% of children whose parents have separated have similar outcomes to children whose parents are together, 30% have long term psychological problems (double the incidence of the general population).

There is a strong correlation between children in separated families perceiving themselves as distant from their biological fathers and childhood depression.

But poor outcomes are far from inevitable

Younger children adjust better to their mother's re-partnering. Shared care children tend to have particularly positive outcomes. Adolescent closeness to separated fathers is linked with good school marks and ambitions; distance with suspension, expulsion, delinquency and school problems.

Fathers and Step fathers have a big role to play

Income from child support, particularly where it is willingly paid, has a more beneficial impact on children than equivalent income from other sources.

Stepfathers tend to find it difficult to separate conflict with the child from conflict with their partner.

Young dads

Young fathers are generally defined as being under the age of 25.

Early fatherhood is more common in some minority ethnic communities (Bangladeshi, African Caribbean and Pakistani) where it may be culturally normative.

Young fathers can be powerfully involved with their children

In the UK, 78% of the babies born to teenage mothers are registered in both their parents' names, and the vast majority of young fathers are keen to be, and stay, involved. The single most powerful predictor of adolescent fatherhood is being involved in a long-term relationship with the baby's mother. Young mothers tend to place a high value on the involvement of their babies' fathers. Support by the father not only tends to bolster the mother's child-rearing skills but fosters healthy emotional, cognitive and social development in the child.

And can be a spur to positive life changes

Young fathers tend to have low socioeconomic status, poor academic skills, and a parent who was younger at first birth. Among young offenders aged 22 and under, nearly half are (or are about to become) fathers.

Early fatherhood can trigger maturity, personal growth and social responsibility, as well as protecting against involvement in a range of negative activities.

Challenges for young fathers include family rejection and service which can be indifferent or even hostile

Young fathers frequently face family rejection, barriers to contact with child and mother, a lack of ways to contribute financially and an inability to imagine future achievements.

Services that help teenage mothers not only tend to ignore young fathers but are overwhelmingly averse to them. Most residential settings are for mothers and babies only.

Like young mothers, young fathers have very high rates of anxiety and depression, but fathers' distress tends to go untreated.

Disabled dads

In Britain 12% (1.7 million) of all parents are disabled.

Disability in this analysis being defined as physical and/or sensory impairments, learning difficulties, mental health problems, HIV/AIDS and drug and/or alcohol problems.

Fathering is often seen in breadwinning terms; many disabled fathers are dependent and so can encounter difficulties in being recognised and taken seriously as fathers.

Many disabled fathers cannot take part in rough and tumble play, another way in which fatherhood can be defined.

Dads with disabled children

In the days after the birth of a disabled child, fathers' grief is often unrecognised and unexpressed, with neither health nor education professionals nor employers recognising their need for inclusion.

Negative aspects of the experience may be exacerbated by the men's belief that they should be strong for their partners.

Families with a disabled child are often able to have only one earner, usually the father, and this can cause considerable pressure to maintain employment and income.

Most fathers share some responsibility for care tasks with their partners, with a wide range of levels of involvement.

Families with disabled children have higher rates of separation and divorce.

Fathers experience more depression and more parenting and child-related stress, and often feel their parental situation is less under control than those without disabled children.

Fathers of children with disabilities are often afraid to engage in rough and tumble play.

The benefits of paternal involvement are greater as family members need high levels of emotional support, understanding and practical assistance.

The involvement of fathers is often unrecognised by practitioners, employers and support services and many practitioners view fathers negatively.

Imprisoned dads

An estimated 160,000 children in the UK have a parent in prison, more than twice the number of children in care and over six times the number of children on the child protection register.

Children who have a parent in prison are more likely than others to experience poverty, mental ill health and poor housing, but are much less likely to receive any help or assistance.

The children of prisoners are about three times more likely to commit anti-social or delinquent behaviour and 65% of boys with a convicted parent go on to offend.

An estimated 45% of prisoners lose touch with their families. Re-offending rates rise when contact is lost.

African Caribbean dads

Fathers in Black Caribbean, Black African and Mixed-Heritage families are more involved in their children's education than fathers in other groups including white families.

Black Caribbean fathers are very concerned with meeting their children's health and mental health needs, and spend more time than average on physical care giving.

Black Caribbean fathers identify the need to help their children with stereotypical expectations and media representations of Black fathers, racism barriers, and disappointing behaviour by other fathers and men in their own communities.

Black and Mixed Heritage families are more likely to be separated than white families. Separations follow the same patterns (low socio-economic status, unemployment, low education), all of which are compounded by racism.

Early fatherhood is relatively common and the combination of ethnicity and age may result in fathers being more likely to be sidelined by services.

Muslim dads

Muslim parents tend to have more traditional gender roles in contrast to their White British or Black Caribbean counterparts, particularly if parents are born outside the UK.

The traditional role of a Muslim father is as head of the household, moral guide, custodian of tradition and breadwinner. Nurturing of children is seen as less important.

Muslim fathers' faith is seen as a force for good both in their own personal development and that of their children's self-esteem and confidence.

Early fatherhood (and motherhood) are common and tend to be positively regarded.

Cultural changes can be pronounced...

Many fathers are increasingly distancing themselves from the typical Asian father role (perceived as remote and authoritarian), and instead spending more time with their children.

Adapting to a new culture is a stressful process during which Muslim fathers commonly experience a sense of loss and isolation.

For Muslim fathers, loss of respect and authority is a recurring theme, combined with difficulty in communicating with children who increasingly hold differing cultural norms.

Fathers who integrate positive fathering characteristics from both Asian and Western cultures express the greatest sense of fulfilment as men and fathers.

Muslim fathers perceive themselves as more involved in their children's education than white fathers, but 39% say lack of English means they offer little homework help and 22% are constrained by work and other commitments.

Sources

FI Research Summary: [Separated Families](#)

FI Research Summary: [Young Fathers](#)

FI Research Summary: [Fathers and Disabled Children](#)

FI Research Summary: [African Caribbean Fathers](#)

FI Research Summary: [Muslim Fathers](#)

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