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FATHERS AND CHILDREN FROM INFANCY TO MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

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INTRODUCTION

The influence of fathers on child experiences and outcomes has been given much less attention in international and Irish research than the influence of mothers (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). The *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) study has collected very detailed information from fathers throughout the different waves of the study which can be used to address this gap. This report uses data on the younger GUI cohort, Cohort '08, who were born in 2008 and were nine years of age in 2017. It documents the nature of father-child interaction and the quality of father-child relationships from infancy (nine months) to middle childhood (nine years). Analyses relate to the 4,090 cases where fathers and mothers were both living with the child and where fathers completed the survey at all full waves.[1] However, additional analyses are included on the quality of the relationship between children and their non-resident fathers, as reported by the children at nine years. Case numbers did not permit an analysis of households with lone fathers or same-sex couples.

The report draws on four waves of Cohort '08 data collected from fathers, mothers and (at age nine) children, when the child was nine months, three years, five years and nine years, to address the following research questions:

1. What activities do fathers engage in with their children from nine months to nine years? How does this vary by fathers' characteristics (such as education, employment status, income, social class and take-up of parental leave) and child characteristics (gender, illness/disability)?
2. What is the quality of relationship between fathers and children, as reported by fathers and (at age nine) children?
3. What factors are associated with parental stress among fathers from infancy to middle childhood?
4. What is the relationship between the nature of the father-child relationship (activities, relationship quality and parental stress) and selected child outcomes: namely, cognitive development, physical activity and wellbeing?

FATHER-CHILD INVOLVEMENT

When the infant was nine months old, the father was asked about the extent to which a range of tasks encompassing both care and play were carried out by the

[1] Wave 4 of GUI involved a postal survey of primary caregivers (usually mothers) so is not analysed in this report.

mother, father or equally by both parents.[2] Over half of fathers reported that care and play activities were shared equally for about eight of the fourteen tasks specified, though mothers were reported to be more involved in the infant's personal care (such as feeding and bathing). Levels of paternal involvement tended to be higher for fathers with lower levels of educational attainment, a pattern that reflected parental engagement in paid employment, being higher where fathers were not employed and/or mothers worked full-time and lower where fathers worked longer (40 plus) hours.

At three years of age, measures of activities with the child related to 'someone in the household' and did not distinguish between mothers' and fathers' involvement. At ages five and nine, both parents were asked separately about the frequency of engaging in play-related activities and outings with the child. These measures differed from those used at nine months as they did not take account of care-related tasks (such as feeding the child or helping them get dressed). More highly educated fathers were more involved in such activities than those with lower levels of education, even taking account of their longer working hours. Involvement was also greater among migrant fathers and the fathers of twins or triplets. Fathers with more children were less involved in activities with the study child than those with fewer children. Fathers who held a more traditional view of their role, focusing on themselves as a financial provider, had lower levels of involvement than other fathers. Fathers working longer hours in infancy continued to have lower levels of engagement with their children later on. Patterns were found to be gendered, with fathers more frequently engaging in activities with sons than with daughters. Fathers who availed of family-friendly work arrangements (such as flexible working hours or working from home) tended to have higher levels of involvement with their children than those who had not availed of such practices.

FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Information was collected from both parents and, at the age of nine, the child themselves on the quality of the parent-child relationship. The measures used changed between infancy and early childhood, with paternal attachment to the baby captured at nine months and the closeness/positive and conflict subscales of the Pianta (1992) Child-Parent Relationship Scale used from three to nine years. Fathers reported a relationship with high levels of attachment in infancy and closeness in early and middle childhood, with low levels of father-child conflict. Both closeness and conflict tended to decline overall between three and nine years of age, reflecting the developmental stage of the child. Closeness was somewhat greater in relation to daughters among fathers with lower levels of education and

[2] This analysis is based on father self-report as mothers were not asked a similar question.

for those with greater attachment to the infant at nine months. Father illness or disability was related to somewhat lower levels of closeness.

Both father and mother illness/disability were associated with greater father-child conflict as was the child's own illness/disability. Reported conflict levels were higher in urban areas and among fathers from a migrant background as well as those with more traditional views of fatherhood.

Over three-quarters (78 per cent) of nine-year-olds reported that they got on 'very well' with their fathers (similar to the level of 80 per cent reported in relation to mothers), with more positive responses among girls and those whose fathers reported higher levels of involvement and a close and non-conflictual relationship. The children of fathers with a more traditional view of their role tended to report a slightly less positive relationship. Those who got on very well with their fathers were, not surprisingly, more likely to say they would go to them for help with a problem. While those who did not live with their fathers reported somewhat less positive relationships, the majority (65 per cent) of those who responded to the question said they got on very well with their (non-resident) father. The quality of the relationship with the non-resident father tended to be better where there was frequent contact (especially sleep-overs) and a more positive relationship between the mother and father.

PARENTING STRESS

Parental stress among both fathers and mothers was measured using the Berry and Jones (1995) stressors subscale of the Parenting Stress Scale, which captured the extent to which the demands of parenting resulted in feelings of stress and strain. As with mothers, fathers reported low to moderate levels of parenting-related stress, with the highest levels in infancy as they adjusted to their role, and a subsequent dip followed by a slight increase between five and nine years of age. Fathers with higher levels of education reported more feelings of stress as did migrant fathers and those living in urban areas. However, parental stress was not related to father's employment status or working hours. Fathers expressed more stress where the child was a first-born, one of twins or triplets, and where the family size was large. Other factors associated with increased stress were child illness/disability, maternal illness and having more traditional attitudes. In contrast to other aspects of the father-child relationship, parental stress among fathers was responsive to changes in experience of financial difficulties, with increased stress related to increasing financial strain. Feelings of attachment or closeness to the child in early childhood and greater involvement in activities with them emerged as protective factors in relation to parental stress in middle childhood.

FATHERS AND CHILD OUTCOMES

The analyses considered three sets of outcomes among nine-year-old children: cognitive development (measured in terms of Drumcondra vocabulary test scores); physical activity levels (based on child self-report); and child self-image (measured using the freedom from anxiety, happiness/life satisfaction and behavioural adjustment subscales of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept scale). In contrast to some previous international research (see, for example, Emmott and Mace, 2021), no systematic relationship was found between levels of paternal involvement in two-parent families and this set of child outcomes. However, relationship quality did make a difference. Children who got on very well with their fathers reported less anxiety, greater happiness and better behaviour on average. Surprisingly, reading test scores were lower among children who got on very well with their fathers; when different groups of fathers were looked at separately by educational level, this pattern applied only where fathers had lower levels of education and thus tended to reflect paternal resources rather than the quality of the relationship per se. Father-child conflict was associated with poorer self-image among boys but had no significant relationship with girls' self-image. Higher levels of parental stress were linked to poorer academic outcomes and less frequent engagement in physical activity among nine-year-olds, even controlling for the quality of the father-child relationship.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The study findings have implications for policy designed to facilitate the care responsibilities of fathers, especially those in paid employment, and family support policies more generally.

Ireland has been ranked low compared to other European countries in the provision of family-friendly policies, but recent developments have improved the provision of paid paternity leave (with a statutory entitlement of two weeks paid at a flat rate granted since 2016), extended paid leave (with Parent's Benefit being paid for five weeks from 2021) and extending unpaid leave for parents (increasing to 26 weeks from 2020). Estimates from different sources suggest that under half of eligible fathers avail of paid paternity leave (Köppe, 2019; CSO, 2020). This pattern is likely to be related, at least in part, to the fact that access to top-up payments vary across employers and rates of payment are lower than in many other European countries (European Commission, 2018). The current study findings relate to a cohort of children who were born at a time when paid paternity leave was not universally available. Only a small number of fathers (12 per cent) in the sample did take unpaid leave in the first nine months of their child's life, usually for just a short period. The recent extension of paid paternity and parent's leave may contribute to greater paternal involvement in infancy, which is found to set the tone for later father-child engagement and relationships. However, challenges remain regarding the short duration of paid paternity leave and its flat-rate nature,

with the recent Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (2021) recommending increases in payment levels to promote take-up.

A significant proportion (42 per cent) of fathers were working more than 40 hours per week when the child was nine months old. These long working hours, particularly at this stage of the child's development, were found to have a long-lasting negative association with fathers' level of involvement with children. Legislation on working hours is strong in Ireland (with the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997) so enforcement is likely to be crucial; enforcement will be especially challenging in the context of remote or blended working.

GUI collected information on the extent to which fathers availed of family-friendly work practices offered by their employer (such as flexible working hours or working from home), though only in Wave 3 of the study. Taking advantage of such flexibility was related to greater paternal involvement. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a good deal of discussion about the future nature of paid employment, with the *Remote Work Strategy* (Government of Ireland, 2021) promising legislation to give employees the right to request remote working. However, recent research during the pandemic alongside earlier research on working from home suggest that such flexibility may, in fact, reinforce a gendered division of care responsibilities and increase work-life conflict (Xue and McMunn, 2021; Zamberlan et al., 2021).

Family support policies in Ireland have increasingly moved towards a greater focus on early prevention of potential difficulties as well as integrated service provision (Tusla, 2013a; 2013b; DCYA, 2016). However, existing research highlights resourcing constraints as well as lack of public awareness of available supports (McGregor and Devaney, 2020; Rochford et al., 2014). Several commentators have suggested that family supports tend to focus on mothers rather than fathers (McKeown, 2001; Ferguson and Hogan, 2004), with international research highlighting the importance of early paternal involvement, flexibility of provision and more activity-based approaches as important elements of successful engagement (Maxwell et al., 2012). Existing policies may be more targeted towards 'vulnerable' fathers (Ferguson and Hogan, 2004; Rush, 2011), but the current study indicates a complex relationship between the nature and quality of father-child relationships and socio-economic disadvantage. The findings highlight the importance of providing information and support that is tailored to different groups of fathers at different stages of their children's lives. Existing online information and support use inclusive language, referring to 'parents' rather than 'mothers' or 'fathers'; however, the development of tailored support and advice for fathers could usefully be investigated.

In conclusion, the study presents new findings on the crucial role that fathers in Ireland play in the lives of their children. Children describe themselves as getting on very well with their fathers and the vast majority are willing to go to their fathers for help with problems. The findings therefore highlight the importance of supporting fathers in their role in order to promote positive child outcomes and help address any problems children experience.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The inclusion of fathers in international research on children and young people has been variable, and much greater attention has been given to the influence of mothers on child outcomes (Goldman and Burgess, 2018; Schoppe-Sullivan and Fagan, 2020). *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) has collected very detailed information from fathers throughout the different waves of the study and so provides a unique opportunity to glean insights into father-child interaction and relationships from infancy to middle childhood in Ireland. This report uses data on GUI Cohort '08 to address the following research questions:

1. What activities do fathers engage in with their children from nine months to nine years? How does this vary by paternal characteristics (such as education, employment status, income, social class and take-up of parental leave) and child characteristics (gender, illness/disability)?
2. What is the quality of relationships between fathers and children, as reported by fathers and (at age nine) children?
3. What factors are associated with parental stress among fathers?
4. What is the relationship between the nature of the father-child relationship (activities, relationship quality and parental stress) and selected child outcomes; namely, cognitive development, physical activity and wellbeing?

The study contributes to the understanding of the father's role in children's development as a basis for policy support for families.

The remainder of this chapter provides the policy and research context for the study and outlines the methodology used.

1.2 POLICY TO SUPPORT FATHERS' CARE ROLE IN IRELAND

Parental leave was first introduced in Ireland in 1998. The Parental Leave Act entitled fathers and mothers to 14 weeks of unpaid leave for each child to be taken before their child reached the age of eight and could not be transferred between parents. Parental leave was subsequently increased to 18 weeks in 2013, to 22 weeks in 2019 and to 26 weeks in 2020. The child age limit was extended to 12 years in 2019.[3] The same parental leave entitlement is available to each parent.

[3] The leave can be taken up until the child's 16th birthday where the child has a disability.

Prior to 2016 there was no legal entitlement to paid paternity leave, i.e. paid time off immediately following the birth or adoption of a child. Under the *Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016*, fathers were given an entitlement to two weeks of leave to be taken in the first six months after the child's birth or adoption. For those with the required social insurance contributions, paternity benefit is paid at a flat rate of €245 per week. For comparison, maternity leave is currently 26 weeks of paid leave and 16 weeks of unpaid leave. Some employers, including the civil service, may top-up the paternity benefit payment so that the recipient stays on full pay.[4]

A new paid leave scheme called Parent's Leave was introduced in 2019 and expanded in 2021, which entitles both mothers and fathers to five weeks of paid leave to be taken before the child reaches the age of two years. At the time of writing, the rate of payment is €245 and is not related to previous earnings.

Importantly, at the time of birth of the Cohort '08 GUI study children, fathers were entitled to 14 weeks of unpaid leave but not to any paid leave.

Comparative research suggests that where fathers take parental leave, this can lead to greater sharing of childcare between parents and that take-up of leave by fathers is strongly related to level of payment (Blum et al., 2018; Sullivan et al., 2009). When the amount and value of paid leave schemes for parents are combined, Ireland falls in the lowest of three groups of 43 countries, and well below the highest performing countries (Blum et al., 2018). Focusing on paid paternity leave, the European Commission notes that Ireland was one of 17 countries to have a scheme in place in 2017, that met with the minimum requirements of the EU Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers.[5] However, 14 of these countries were deemed to have well-paid schemes and Ireland was one of three countries with low replacement rates (less than 66 per cent of earnings) (European Commission, 2018).

Flexible working practices can also facilitate parents' childcare responsibilities (Eurofound, 2018; European Commission, 2018; OECD, 2011). There is currently no statutory entitlement to part-time work or flexible working hours in Ireland. The European Directive on Work-Life Balance also includes the right to request flexible

4 Civil Service Circular 18/2016 https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/per/2016/18.pdf.

5 The proposal for the Directive was adopted by the EU in 2017 and entered into force in 2019. Member States have until mid-2022 to comply. The provisions include the introduction of ten days paternity leave paid at least at the level of sick pay and strengthening parental leave entitlements to four months of non-transferable leave paid at least at the level of sick pay.

working. Legislation giving employees the right to request flexible working, including working from home, is set to be introduced in Ireland in September 2021.[6] However even in organisations where flexible working arrangements are available, such as in the civil service, men are much less likely to take them up and there is a perception that availing of these options will damage career prospects (Enright and Russell, 2020; Chung, 2020). Moreover, there is also evidence that the type of flexibility matters; research has found that men use flexibility, specifically working from home, to increase their working hours rather than care time, which results in greater work-family conflict (Russell et al., 2009; Lott, 2018).

1.3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON FATHERS

1.3.1 Paternal involvement in care and play activities

There is a large body of research which looks at the gendering of the division of labour within the household, distinguishing between time on housework and time involved in care for children. A number of studies have pointed to an increase in paternal involvement with their children over time (Gracia, 2015; Altintas and Sullivan, 2017). However, research based on time-use diaries shows that the time spent on care activities remains strongly gendered across a wide range of countries (Bittman, 1999; Bianchi and Milkie, 2010; Gracia and Ghysels, 2017; Gershuny, 2018; Sayer et al., 2004). Some cross-national variation is evident; within Europe, rates of paternal involvement are highest in the Nordic countries and lowest in southern European countries (Altintas and Sullivan, 2017).

Time-use studies also show that the type of care tasks performed differs between fathers and mothers. Fathers spend a higher proportion of their childcare time on play or helping the child while mothers complete more routine childcare tasks such as feeding, general supervision, or bringing the child to school/activities (Sayer et al., 2004; Pleck et al., 1997; Schoppe-Sullivan and Fagan, 2020). The literature suggests that mothers also undertake more responsibility for planning and managing care (Coltrane, 2000). Research has also found that the type of parent-child interaction differs between fathers and mothers, with fathers more likely to engage in physical play and be more directive, while mothers are more likely to engage in symbolic play (making believe or pretend play) (Vallotton et al., 2020). The age of the (youngest) child is a strong predictor of the type of care activities fathers engage in and the amount of time they spend (Gracia, 2014). The influence of the child's gender on fathers' time involvement is nuanced. Some studies have found that fathers' involvement is greater with sons than with daughters (Emmott and Mace, 2021; Tucker et al., 2003) and that both parents are more likely to engage in physical activities with boys and more artistic pursuits with girls

[6] A policy paper *Making Remote Work: National Remote Work Strategy* was published by the Government in January 2021: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/51f84-making-remote-work-national-remote-work-strategy/.

(McMunn et al., 2017). However, in a review of the literature on the topic, Raley and Bianchi (2006) find that the influence of child gender is contingent on the age of the child, the gender of other siblings (e.g. all male, mixed, all female), the type of activity and parent characteristics, and that few of the studies can identify causal mechanisms.

Like international studies, Irish research shows significant gender differences in involvement in care for children. Using data from the European Quality of Life Survey, which includes all adults not just parents, Russell et al. (2019) note that 26 per cent of men compared to 40 per cent of women reported that they undertook care of children on a daily basis. The mean weekly hours for those doing any childcare were 25 hours for men and 43 hours for women (ibid., p.36). Compared to men without children, fathers with a child aged 13-18 spent eight hours more per week on care; this rose to 19 hours for those with a child aged 5-12 and to 28 hours more for fathers with whose youngest child was aged 0-4 years (Russell et al., 2019). Looking at change over time, that study found men's time on care (childcare plus adult care) increased between 2007 and 2011, but then declined again in 2016; the authors argue that this indicates a recession effect, rather than a longer-term structural change (ibid., p.58).

In the only nationally representative time-use study carried out in Ireland to date, McGinnity and Russell (2008) found that fathers of children of all ages spent significantly less time on childcare than mothers on weekdays. Fathers with pre-school children spent most time on childcare, on average 2 hours 20 minutes per day, and devoted half this time to what are termed social activities (playing and talking with children including reading, games, helping with homework, accompanying children to activities) and half to physical activities. In contrast, mothers of pre-school children spent four-fifths of their time on physical activities and only one-fifth on social activities and averaged 8 hours 33 minutes of care per day.[7] Time on physical care declined substantially for both fathers and mothers with older children.

At weekends, the time fathers spent on child activities increased and the gap between fathers and mothers narrowed somewhat. At weekends it was fathers with children aged 5-10 years who spent most time on child activities: fathers of pre-school children spent an average of 2 hours 45 minutes on childcare at weekends, those with children aged 5-10 years spent an average of 4 hours 12 minutes and those whose youngest child was aged 11-17 years spent 51 minutes

[7] Time spent on paid work on weekdays showed the opposite gender pattern, with fathers much more likely to be involved in full-time employment. The gender gap in total work time (paid and unpaid) was found to be lowest in couples with pre-school children, with both parents having very little uncommitted time on weekdays.

on average. The weekend figures for mothers were 8 hours 51 minutes, 6 hours 20 minutes and 2 hours 26 minutes respectively.

Differences by fathers' educational level

The effect of educational attainment on time spent on childcare is more mixed for fathers than mothers and is related to the age of the child, the type of activity and the national setting. Aldous et al. (1998) find that higher educated fathers spend more time talking with school-age children and helping with homework while there is no effect of paternal education on time spent on physical care of younger children. In contrast, in Spain, Gracia (2014) finds higher educated fathers spend more time on physical care of young children (0-5 years) and on interactive care (teaching activities). Sayer et al. (2004) find that the relationship differs across countries; paternal education had no effect on childcare time in Norway and only weak effects in Germany but stronger effects in Canada and Italy. In contrast, mothers with higher education spent more time on childcare across the four countries studied despite very different institutional contexts. The authors argue that state policies that provide economic support to families, as in Germany and Norway, may reduce time constraints on less educated fathers. Cross-national differences are also evident in research by Gracia and Ghysels (2017): in Denmark and Spain there is an educational gradient in paternal care time[8] but not in the UK and Belgium.

Differences by parental employment and attitudes

Paternal involvement has been found to be responsive to the broader family context, in particular to wives/partners working time (Norman et al., 2014; Burgess and Davies, 2017). Longer paid work hours tend to reduce fathers' participation in care tasks (and vice versa) (Raley et al., 2012; Gracia and Ghysels, 2017) which is consistent with a 'time availability' perspective; however, there is also evidence that gender and gender role ideology still play a strong role (Bianchi et al., 2000). The male breadwinner model casts men's caregiving in economic terms (Lynch, 2007), and this concept of masculinity still influences men's sense of a socially valued caregiving role (Hanlon, 2009). Quantitative research shows that when men and women do the same number of paid work hours, men's care (and domestic work) hours are considerably lower than women's (Russell et al., 2019). Moreover, within couples, female partners undertake a higher proportion of care tasks even when they are earning more than their partners (Bittman, 2003), consistent with theories that the division of care and household tasks is part of enacting gender roles or 'doing gender'. Employment patterns when the child was an infant tend to have longer-term effects on later paternal involvement (Norman et al., 2014).

[8] Parental care time includes time playing, teaching, and socialising with children, routine and physical care, and supervisory care.

Levels of care involvement have been found to be higher where fathers hold egalitarian views (Welsh et al., 2004; Braun et al., 2011). Evertsson (2014) found that men with more egalitarian gender role ideology spent more time on childcare and housework. Similarly, Bulanda (2004) finds that fathers with more egalitarian attitudes not only spend more time with their children but also engage in a wider variety of activities. Resistance to fathers taking on a greater share of care activities has been found to be stronger where both partners hold more traditional gender role attitudes (Bianchi et al., 2000). Hochschild (1990) cautions that couples sometimes present 'household myths' about an equitable distribution of tasks to be consistent with their egalitarian attitudes, but that this does not reflect the reality of how care and domestic work are actually divided.

There is an emerging body of research on the effects of parental leave on paternal involvement. Using the US Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Petts and Knoester (2018) found that fathers who took any parental leave were more involved in developmental activities with their children subsequently (up to four years of age). Those who took longer periods of leave were more involved in both care-giving and developmental tasks. In Germany, reform of parental leave provision resulted in fathers spending more time on childcare after leave, even if it was only a short period (Bünning, 2015). In contrast, only extended periods of leave led to increases in the time fathers spent on housework.

A small number of studies have also suggested that breastfeeding may have an unintended consequence of establishing a more traditional gender division of caring. One Japanese study (Ito et al., 2013) found lower rates of paternal involvement with breastfed than non-breastfed infants in the first six months of life. Qualitative research also found that some fathers felt marginalised because of breastfeeding (Shorey and Ang, 2019). One study of new fathers in Ireland found a significant minority reported that breastfeeding reduced their bonding time with the infant (Bennett et al., 2016). However, it is unclear whether this has any longer term influence on fathers' involvement.

1.3.2 Quality of father-child relationships

Over time, attention has focused increasingly on the quality of interaction between the father and child rather than the total amount of time they spend together (Pleck, 2010). Paternal attachment to the baby is found to be stable in the pre- and post-natal period (Condon et al., 2013) but other studies suggest that the father-child relationship becomes stronger over the first year of life (Shorey and Ang, 2019). Fathers express greater closeness to the child where they themselves have better emotional wellbeing and have a better-quality relationship with the child's mother (Condon et al., 2013; Brown and Aytuglu, 2020). Feelings of closeness are

also responsive to the child's temperament[9] (Condon et al., 2013). A number of studies suggest an intergenerational dynamic to fathering, with fathers being more involved with, and feeling closer to, their children when they themselves had good relationships with their fathers (Shorey and Ang, 2019; Jessee and Adamsons, 2018; Brown and Aytuglu, 2020).

Looking at changes over time, Driscoll and Pianta (2011) found moderate stability in closeness and somewhat greater stability in conflict with the child for both parents from infancy to six years of age. Over this period, parents reported increased feelings of closeness while conflict decreased. At ages four and six, closeness and conflict were higher for mothers than for fathers. Gender differences were evident, with fathers reporting more closeness with daughters than sons. Paternal involvement and feelings of closeness are strongly related (Palkovitz, 2019). Nine-year-old children are more likely to report a good relationship with their father when he had been more involved in infancy (Jessee and Adamsons, 2018).

There has been a lack of research on parental stress among fathers (Craig and Churchill, 2018). One Australian study indicates that stress levels are lower for both fathers and mothers where they have non-employed partners but, in contrast, a partner's transition to non-employment is associated with higher stress levels (Craig and Churchill, 2018). Paternal stress is found to be responsive to child temperament (Louie et al., 2017; McBride et al., 2002) as well as being influenced by the prior mental health of the father (Skjøthaug, 2020).

GUI has provided the opportunity for researchers to explore the quality and nature of father-child relationships in Ireland. Using GUI data, Nixon et al. (2013) found that, at nine months, the strongest influence on paternal stress was the quality of the partner relationship but stress levels were also higher where the infant was seen as having a difficult temperament and where the father had depressive symptoms. No difference was evident by household income. Using the same data, Matvienko-Sikar et al. (2018) highlighted higher levels of parenting stress among mothers than fathers. Paternal stress was found to be influenced by attachment to the infant and the father's own health status, with no differences by paternal education or employment status. Fathers who had higher stress levels were less sensitive to the infants while child development was enhanced where paternal sensitivity was greater (Nixon et al., 2013).

[9] Temperament is a psychological concept that refers to the way in which the child responds to the world. Temperament is seen to be inherent; Meadows (2010) defines temperament as biologically based individual differences in behavioural tendencies which present early in life and remain relatively stable across contexts.

Looking at the older GUI cohort (born in 1998), Fahey et al. (2012) reported a greater likelihood of 'non-optimal' parenting styles where fathers were living in households below the poverty line and experiencing financial difficulties. Having an authoritarian or neglectful parenting style among fathers (as for mothers) was associated with increased socio-emotional difficulties among nine-year-olds (Nixon, 2012). Both paternal conflict and closeness were positively associated with socio-emotional difficulties (measured at the same timepoint) (Nixon, 2012). Levels of child emotionality were related to reduced closeness and increased conflict with fathers (as with mothers) (Nixon, 2012). At 13 years of age, a relationship is found between paternal (and maternal) and adolescent depressive symptoms (Lewis et al., 2017). Nixon (2021) found that the dynamics differed by gender, with the effect of mother-child conflict being stronger than father-child conflict on socio-emotional difficulties for girls, though girls experienced greater depressive symptoms where their fathers were less responsive. Father-child conflict mattered more than mother-child conflict for depressed mood among boys. Conflict between (both) parents and young people was also associated with increased levels of anti-social behaviour (Nixon, 2021). At 17 years of age, paternal illness was related to both externalising and internalising difficulties, with the latter also influenced by fathers' depression (Smyth and Darmody, 2021). Earlier conflict with fathers was linked to later internalising and externalising difficulties while a positive relationship with their fathers appeared to be a protective factor in relation to school-based misbehaviour and truancy (Smyth and Darmody, 2021).

Interestingly, analyses of the qualitative data collected in the first wave of GUI suggested a mismatch between the ideal of shared parenting and involved fatherhood and its enactment, with mothers more involved in routine care as well as 'managerial' tasks (such as scheduling appointments) (Ralph, 2016). The division of labour was found to be responsive to paid employment patterns, with greater paternal involvement in dual-earner families.

In a UK context, Goldman and Burgess (2018) have highlighted the lack of collection of information directly from non-resident fathers in national cohort studies (with the exception of the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children study) and the invisibility of non-resident fathers in many household surveys. The GUI study has adopted good practice in this regard by conducting postal surveys of non-resident parents, usually fathers. However, at the time of writing, the survey data from the non-resident fathers have not been released for analysis. In a qualitative study of the children of non-resident fathers in Ireland, Nixon et al. (2012) found that regular contact was a necessary but not a sufficient factor in perceived father-child closeness. Even with regular contact, fathers were seen as distanced from what was happening in their everyday lives by the children interviewed.

1.3.3 Fathers and child outcomes

A number of studies have focused on the impact of paternal involvement on child outcomes in terms of cognitive and socio-emotional development. However, the conclusions reached have often been variable, at least in part because of differences in whether they focused on the total amount of time involved or the types of activities, the definitions of parental involvement used and whether studies looked at both maternal and paternal involvement simultaneously.

Using the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) data, Cano et al. (2019) found a modest positive effect of total father-child time from four to eight years of age on vocabulary test scores. However, there were moderate to large effects of father-child time on educational activities such as reading and playing educational games. These effects were evident even when maternal involvement was taken into account and were stronger for sons than for daughters. Using the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) data, greater paternal involvement (a measure which included care, play and educational activities) was associated with higher school test scores at 4/5 and 6/7 years of age (Emmott and Mace, 2021). Using Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) data, McMunn et al. (2017) found a strong relationship between fathers' involvement and child cognitive outcomes, though the measure of involvement used centred on reading and other aspects of the home learning environment. In a meta-analysis of other studies, McWayne et al. (2013) found a small but significant relationship between direct father involvement and early cognitive skill development, with a stronger effect of positive parenting behaviour, suggesting that both the quantity and quality of father involvement matter.

Using ALSPAC data in the UK, Emmott and Mace (2021) found that greater paternal involvement was associated with reduced behavioural difficulties (measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)), with similar findings for the US reported by Aldous and Mulligan (2002) and Amato and Rivera (1999). In the US, paternal involvement has been found to be associated with fewer internalising or externalising difficulties in adolescence, even if the father is no longer living with the young person (Gold et al., 2020). Analyses of MCS data have shown less clear-cut patterns. Kroll et al. (2016) discovered that overall measures of care were not linked to total difficulties score on the SDQ at age seven but that positive parenting beliefs at nine months and creative play at age five did contribute to reduced behavioural difficulties. McMunn et al. (2017) indicated that paternal involvement at age three enhanced later socio-emotional wellbeing but the relationship was not a strong one. Flouri and Buchanan (2003), using the earlier British National Child Development Study (NCDS) data, found that father involvement at age seven was associated with fewer adolescent problems but only in non-intact families.

This review of the literature suggests a lack of research in Ireland on levels of father-child involvement and the quality of the relationship and how these change as young children develop. This study fills a gap in existing research by taking a longitudinal perspective covering the period from infancy to middle childhood. The methodological approach used in the study is outlined in the following section.

1.4 DATASET AND METHODOLOGY

1.4.1 The *Growing Up in Ireland* study

The *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) study was commissioned by the Department of Health and Children through the (then) Office of the Minister for Children, in association with the Department of Social Protection and the Central Statistics Office. The study has been carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The study focuses on two cohorts of children: a nine-month (infant) cohort, now referred to as Cohort '08, and a nine-year-old (child) cohort, now referred to as Cohort '98. Analyses in this report are based on Cohort '08 because it provides the opportunity to look at levels of paternal involvement from infancy into middle childhood.

The Cohort '08 survey was based on a nationally representative sample of 11,134 children drawn from the Child Benefit register. Parents were first surveyed when the child was nine months old (Wave 1) and followed up when the child was three years of age (2010/2011) (Wave 2), five years of age (2012/2013) (Wave 3), 7/8 years (an inter-wave postal survey of primary caregivers) (Wave 4), and nine years of age (2017/2018) (Wave 5). At all full waves, detailed interviews were conducted with the primary caregiver (who was the mother in over 99 per cent of cases) and the secondary caregiver (usually the father), if resident in the household. Where fathers were not living in the household, information was collected from the mother on the extent of contact between the child and their father. In addition, a postal survey of non-resident parents was conducted. At the time of writing, these data have not yet been released.

At Wave 5, 8,032 families took part in the study, making up 78 per cent of the base sample of those still living in Ireland (McNamara et al., 2020). As in other cohort studies, attrition rates were higher among more disadvantaged groups in terms of income, social class and education (McNamara et al., 2020). Analyses in the remainder of this report are mainly based on the Anonymised Microdata Files (AMFs), though the section on the child's relationship with their non-resident father uses the (more detailed) Researcher Microdata Files (RMFs). The data for all waves have been re-weighted (statistically adjusted) to ensure that the information is representative of the population of children and young people in

Ireland. The weights for Wave 5 consisted of carrying forward the earlier weight (which controlled for initial non-response and attrition up to the five-year wave) and adjusting it for attrition between the five-year and nine-year waves. This weight took account of a range of factors, including social class, income, educational attainment, age, employment status and child gender, among other factors (McNamara et al., 2020).

1.4.2 Sample definition and non-response

This report focuses on the role of fathers in the lives of their children from infancy (nine months) to middle childhood (nine years). The analyses presented in this report are largely based on those cases where both mothers and fathers were living with the child and where fathers completed the survey at all waves of data collection (except the Wave 4 postal survey). This restriction was necessary because information on fathers' involvement and relationship with the child was not otherwise available. However, analyses are also included on the child-reported quality of relationship with non-resident fathers. Case numbers in the GUI sample were too small to look at lone-father or same-sex-couple households.

As discussed above, 8,032 families took part in the fifth wave of the survey, with 7,507 of these having taken part in Waves 1, 2 and 3 of the study. Confining the focus to cases where a female primary caregiver and a male secondary caregiver[10] were both living in the household at Wave 1 reduces the number of cases to 6,820 (Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1 SAMPLE INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSES

	N (unweighted)
Families interviewed in Wave 5	8,032
Families participated at all waves (1, 2, 3 and 5)	7,507
Of which: **Female primary caregiver and male secondary caregiver present at Wave 1**	6,820
Female primary caregiver and male secondary caregiver present at all waves	5,997
Father completed interview in all waves	4,090

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.

Over 500 of this initial group of fathers were no longer living in the household for at least one subsequent wave of the study. The profile of fathers who left the household was more disadvantaged in a number of respects, with lower educational levels, higher unemployment levels and greater financial difficulties (Table 1.2). In the remainder of the report, sensitivity analyses are presented to

[10] The number of male primary caregivers is too small to analyse separately.

explore the potential implications of the selectivity of the group of fathers analysed for the patterns found.

TABLE 1.2 PROFILE OF FATHERS WHO SUBSEQUENTLY LEFT THE HOUSEHOLD

	Fathers in household at all waves (%)	Fathers who left the household (%)
Educational level at Wave 1:		
Lower secondary	14.9	25.3
Upper secondary	29.1	32.1
Post-secondary	21.3	21.7
Degree or higher	34.8	20.8
Financial difficulties at Wave 1	8.3	17.5
Father migrant	17.4	23.5
Father's employment status at Wave 1:		
Working <= 40 hours	43.7	34.6
Working long (>40) hours	38.8	31.2
Non-employed	17.5	34.2
Unweighted N	6,253	567

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5. All between-group differences are significant at the p<.001 level. This includes cases where fathers did not complete the secondary caregiver questionnaire (see Table 1.3) but where information on the father's characteristics was provided by the primary caregiver.

The analyses focus on changes over time in paternal involvement and the quality of the father-child relationship. As this information was collected directly from fathers, analyses are confined to waves at which the father completed the secondary caregiver questionnaire. This reduces the number of cases further to 4,090. Non-respondents had lower educational levels and were more likely to be non-employed and experience financial difficulties (Table 1.3). Migrant fathers were somewhat more likely to complete all questionnaire waves than Irish-born fathers. To the extent that involvement is greater among more advantaged fathers, confining analyses to those who completed all waves is likely to overestimate the average level of involvement across fathers in general. However, the use of weighting should compensate for this difference as less advantaged families are assigned a higher weight (because of lower levels of participation). Comparing the first and final columns in Table 1.3 shows that the weighting makes an appreciable difference to the under-representation of disadvantaged groups in terms of educational level, financial difficulties and migrant status. However, the weighting does not adjust sufficiently for the level of paternal non-employment. The use of factors such as paternal education, financial difficulties and employment status as controls in all of the models presented should help ensure that the patterns are not affected by the under-representation of non-employed fathers.

TABLE 1.3 PROFILE OF FATHERS RESIDENT AT ALL WAVES WHO COMPLETED THE SECONDARY CAREGIVER MAIN INTERVIEW

	Completed all waves (%)	Did not complete all waves (%)	Unweighted Total (%)	Weighted completed all waves (%)
Educational level at Wave 1:* **				
Lower secondary	13.4	19.7	14.9	17.1
Upper secondary	27.8	33.2	29.1	30.3
Post-secondary	21.6	19.3	21.1	21.4
Degree or higher	37.1	27.9	34.8	31.3
Financial difficulties at Wave 1* **	7.0	10.6	8.2	8.1
Father migrant*	17.7	15.7	17.1	16.8
Father's employment status at Wave 1:* **				
Working <= 40 hours	49.4	30.0	43.3	49.9
Working long (>40) hours	42.8	32.2	39.4	42.5
Non-employed	7.7	37.8	17.3	7.7
Unweighted N	4,090	1,907	5,997	

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

1.4.3 Variables included in the analyses

1.4.3.1 Outcomes

Three aspects of father-child involvement and relationship are explored in this study: paternal involvement in activities with the child, the quality of the father-child relationship (from both father and child perspective) and the level of parental stress.

Father-child activities

Chapter 2 examines the extent to which fathers are involved in activities with their children. Information on paternal involvement changed over waves, reflecting the developmental stage of the child. It should be noted that, at Wave 2 (three years of age), information was collected on home learning activities conducted with the child by 'someone in the household' without distinguishing whether these were conducted by the mother and/or father so no measure of paternal involvement can be derived.

At nine months, the father was asked about a set of activities which combined both care for, and stimulating play with, the infant. Fathers were asked whether the following set of activities were always done by themselves, usually done by themselves, about equally by them and their partner, usually by their spouse/ partner or always by their spouse/partner:[11]

[11] In addition, response categories included 'someone else does this' and 'no one does this'.

- Bathing child;
- Feeding child;
- Showing them pictures in books;
- Cuddling them;
- Playing with them;
- Taking them for walks/outings/visiting relatives or friends;
- Reading stories to them;
- Changing nappies;
- Getting up in the night to see to them;
- Singing to them;
- Getting them up in the morning;
- Putting them to bed;
- Dressing them in the morning;
- Picking them up when they cry.

These items were regrouped by the authors into three categories (mainly/always mother; shared equally; and mainly/always father) and summed to give a scale (with a reliability of 0.677). This scale ranges from 14 (where mothers always or mainly do all of the tasks) to 42 (where fathers always or mainly do all of the tasks); if couples divide all tasks equally, they will receive a score of 28. Thus, higher values indicated greater (relative) paternal involvement. This measure differs from one based on frequency of activity or time spent on activity. Some fathers may engage in these activities more frequently but if there is a more gendered division of tasks in the couple, he will get a lower score than a father who engages less frequently in these activities but is within a couple where the tasks are more equally divided. Unfortunately, similar questions were not asked of the mother so the consistency of reports on the division of tasks cannot be assessed. Other research points to a mismatch in couple accounts of the household division of labour (CSO, 2021).

At five and nine years of age, the questions asked separately of mothers and fathers focused more on play and outings rather than direct care for the child. Fathers were asked how often (ranging from every day to never) they engaged in the following activities with the child:

- Play using toys or games/puzzles;
- Playing computer games;
- Visiting the library;

- Listening to the child read;
- Reading to the child;
- Using the computer in educational ways;
- Sport or physical activities;
- Going on educational visits such as museums, farms;
- Going shopping.

The items were summed to give an overall scale where high values indicated more frequent engagement in activities with the child. At Wave 3, the item 'listening to the child read' was excluded from the scale as a significant group of five-year-old children were not yet able to read. The reliability for the scale was 0.609 at Wave 3 and 0.626 at Wave 5.

Father-child relationship quality

Chapter 3 looks at the quality of the relationship between fathers and children. In the first wave of the study, the Quality of Attachment Scale (Condon and Corkindale, 1998) was administered to both parents, though fathers were asked fewer items (five compared with nine for mothers). This scale captured feelings towards the infant and about themselves as parents, with higher scores indicating greater attachment levels. A sample item was 'When I am with [baby] and other people are present, I feel proud of [baby]'.

At three, five and nine years of age, the closeness/positive and conflict subscales of the Pianta (1992) Child-Parent Relationship Scale were administered to both parents. The positive subscale consists of seven items that captured getting on with the child and feelings of effectiveness as a parent (e.g. 'I share an affectionate warm relationship with my child'). The score ranges from 10 (low) to 50 (high). The conflicts subscale captured difficulties in the relationship e.g. 'My child sees me as a source of punishment and criticism' and contains eight items. Its score range is between 8 and 40 (McCrory et al., 2013).

At the age of nine years, the child was asked about how well they got on with their mothers and fathers, with response categories 'very well', 'fairly well' and 'you don't get on'.

Parental stress

Chapter 4 analyses the extent to which the demands of parenting result in feelings of stress. Parental stress was measured using the Berry and Jones (1995) stressors subscale of the Parenting Stress Scale, which included items such as 'Caring for my child sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give' and 'I sometimes

worry whether I am doing enough for my child'. Scores ranged from 6 to 30, with higher scores reflecting higher stress levels.

Child outcomes

Chapter 5 examines the relationship between paternal involvement, the quality of the father-child relationship and a set of child outcomes at age nine selected to capture the main domains of children's lives (cognitive/educational development, physical activity, and child wellbeing).

Cognitive development was captured using the vocabulary part of the Drumcondra Reading Test, a test linked to the national curriculum, which consisted of a series of multiple-choice items (McNamara et al., 2020). The test scores are adjusted to reflect the class level of the child and, for analyses in this report, are rescaled to have a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15.

The measure of physical activity was based on the child self-report at age nine of how many days they had been physically active for at least 60 minutes in the past seven days.

Child self-concept was captured at nine years of age using the Piers-Harris Self-Concept scale (McNamara et al., 2020). Three subscales are used here: behavioural adjustment (a positive self-rating of behaviour); happiness and life satisfaction; and freedom from anxiety (low incidence of feeling nervous, fearful or shy). For all three subscales, higher scores indicate more positive self-image.

1.4.3.2 Explanatory variables

This study adopts the perspective that fathering is embedded in a broader set of family and contextual networks (Cabrera et al., 2014). The analyses therefore take account of father characteristics, child characteristics and household factors.

Socio-demographic factors

The GUI study collects information on a rich set of parental background characteristics. The analyses take account of father's educational attainment level (ranging from lower secondary (Junior Certificate or less) to postgraduate degree), whether the father is of migrant origin, and whether the family lives in an urban or a rural area. Social class and total household income are not included in the models. Initial analyses indicated that social class had no additional effect on the outcomes once father's education was included. Changes in income were closely related to changes in parental employment status so income was not included in order to obtain a clearer picture of the influence of father's and mother's employment situation (see below). However, whether the household reports

having difficulties or great difficulties making ends meet is included as a measure of financial strain. Financial strain may impact directly on parental stress and therefore indirectly on the quality of the parent-child relationship (Conger et al., 1994; see also Nixon et al., 2013; Watson et al., 2014). Father's and mother's reported illness or disability are included in the models since paternal illness may affect the capacity of fathers to be involved in activities with their children and maternal illness may require fathers to become more involved in day-to-day activities with their children. In looking at fathers' involvement with nine-month-old infants, the models control for whether the baby is currently breastfed or had been in the past, as previous research (Ito et al., 2013) shows this may impact on levels of paternal involvement.

Gender role attitudes

International research has shown that paternal involvement is related to having less traditional gender role attitudes (Braun et al., 2011). Gender role attitudes among fathers and mothers were not measured directly in GUI. However, fathers were given six statements about the most important things to do as a parent and asked to rank them from one to three in order of importance; these comprised showing the child love and affection, taking time to play with the child, taking care of the child financially, giving the child moral and ethical guidance, making sure the child is safe and protected, and teaching the child and encouraging their curiosity.[12] Under a third of fathers ranked taking care of the child financially in their top three responses. Hanlon (2009) points to the way in which viewing the man as the breadwinner feeds into a traditional and narrow view of the role of men as caregivers. For the purposes of this report, this emphasis on financial responsibility is taken as a proxy for adopting a more traditional view of the man as the breadwinner. In keeping with research on broader measures of gender role attitudes among men (see, for example, Lomazzi et al., 2019), attitudes tend to be more traditional among men in the GUI sample with lower levels of educational attainment and income. Nonetheless, there is considerable variation (analyses not shown here) in attitudes within education and income groups, indicating that emphasising their financial responsibility for their children does not merely reflect more straitened economic circumstances.

Family resources

The time available for, and spent with, a specific child may reflect broader demands on fathers (and mothers). It has been argued that as the number of children increases, the parental resources available to a specific child will decline as parents may have less time to spend with individual children and financial resources will be spread over a larger number of children (a phenomenon known as 'resource dilution' in the academic literature) (Downey, 2001). Having a twin or triplet could

[12] This question had been adapted from the US Early Childhood Longitudinal Study and no comparable question was devised for mothers.

be expected to operate in a similar direction, that is, reducing involvement with a particular child. Alternatively, the extra workload involved in twins or triplets may mean an 'all hands on deck' approach which results in greater paternal involvement. The analyses control for the number of siblings the study child has (taking account of changes over time in family size) and whether the child is a non-singleton (a twin or triplet). Whether the child is the eldest child is also taken into account in the models of parental stress as stress levels might be expected to be higher given the adjustment to a new role.

Parental employment situation

A further set of demands relates to paid employment. The analyses use combined measures of employment status and number of hours worked, given earlier findings on the variation in paternal involvement by maternal working hours (Norman et al., 2014). The analyses take account of changes in parental employment over time, especially important given the significant impact of the Great Recession (2008-2009) on employment levels over this period. Because use of non-parental care is closely related to parental employment situation, it is not included in the models presented. Measures of whether the father had taken unpaid parental leave when the child was an infant and whether he had availed of family-friendly work practices (such as flexible working hours or working from home) subsequently are also included to capture the potential implications of such measures for father-child involvement.

Child characteristics

Given the body of research which shows differences in the level and type of paternal interaction with sons and daughters (see, for example, McMunn et al., 2017), all of the analyses control for child gender. In addition, whether the child has a chronic illness or disability (as reported at nine months) is included as their condition may require additional parental support and/or may be a source of stress to the parents.

1.4.4 Methods

Chapters 2 to 4 begin by presenting descriptive analyses of the level of father involvement, quality of relationships and parental stress respectively. Multivariate models are then presented which look at the relationship between father, child and family characteristics and the outcome in question. These are presented as nested models which look, in turn, at; socio-demographic factors, family resources, attitudes and behaviours, parental employment, and prior level of involvement (in Chapter 2).

As indicated in Section 1.4.3, some outcomes, namely, father-child closeness, father-child conflict and paternal stress, were measured consistently across a

number of waves.[13] This facilitates the use of multilevel growth curve modelling which regards waves of measurement as nested within individuals, an approach that has a number of advantages (Steele, 2014; Ntoumanis, 2014; Macmillan and Furstenberg, 2016). First, the null model (that is, the model without any explanatory variables) allows us to unpack the extent to which the outcome in question varies between individual fathers and over time by comparing the level of variance between fathers and between waves of the study. Second, it means that the effects of both time-constant factors (such as being of migrant origin), and time-varying characteristics (such as parental employment or number of siblings) can be analysed. Third, it allows us to examine whether the pattern of change over time differs for different groups of fathers (or children) by looking at the interaction between time (child age) and factors such as fathers' education or child gender. Such an approach has been used previously to analyse a range of topics, including reading comprehension (Dewulf et al., 2017), behavioural problems in children (Tamura et al., 2020), student wellbeing in secondary schools (De Fraine et al., 2005) and occupational prestige after graduation (Jacob and Klein, 2019).

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

Chapter 2 looks at the level of paternal involvement in activities with the child and the factors associated with such involvement. Chapter 3 examines the quality of parent-child relationships, using measures of closeness and conflict reported by fathers and nine-year-old children's own accounts of how well they get on with their fathers. Chapter 4 explores the factors which are associated with fathers experiencing parenthood as stressful. Chapter 5 examines the influence of paternal involvement, the quality of the father-child relationship and levels of paternal stress on a selection of child outcomes, namely, reading test scores, levels of physical activity and aspects of self-image. Chapter 6 presents a summary of the main findings of the study and discusses the implications for policy development.

[13] Stress was measured at Waves 1, 2, 3 and 5 while the quality of the father-child relationship was measured at Waves 2, 3 and 5.

CHAPTER 2

Fathers' involvement in activities with the child

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the extent to which fathers were involved in different types of activities with their child from the ages of nine months to nine years. Descriptive analyses are presented before using multivariate models to examine the extent to which paternal involvement reflects socio-demographic, child, family and employment characteristics. As noted in Chapter 1, analyses are confined to those children whose families took part in all waves of the survey (from nine months to nine years) and where the fathers were present in the household at all waves and completed the secondary caregiver questionnaire. Sensitivity analyses are conducted to examine the implications of this approach for the pattern of results.

2.2 INVOLVEMENT AT NINE MONTHS OF AGE

2.2.1 Descriptive analyses

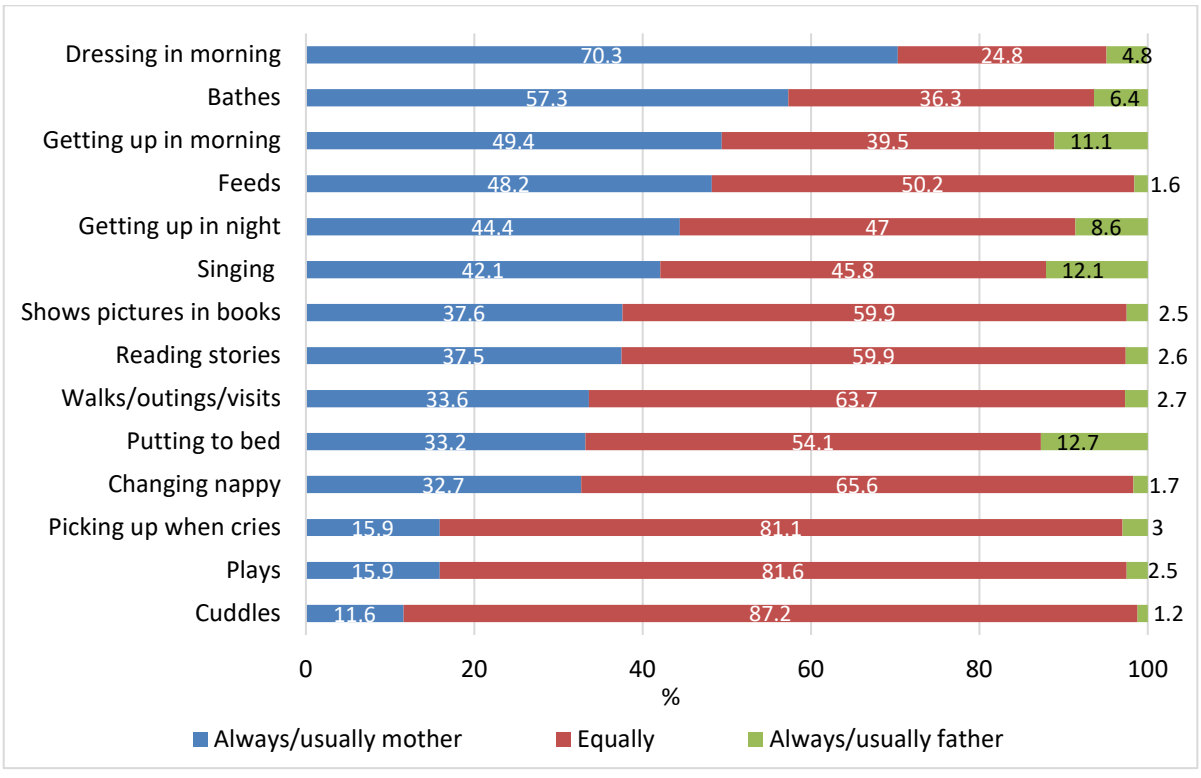
Figure 2.1 draws on fathers' reports on the extent to which different forms of care for, and activities with, the nine-month-old infant are always or usually carried out by the mother, the father or equally between the two of them. In eight of the 14 activities, over half of the fathers reported that tasks were shared equally by the parents.[14] Activities always or usually carried out by the mother comprised dressing the child, bathing the child and getting him or her up in the morning. The tasks most likely to be equally shared were picking up the child when s/he cries, playing with them and cuddling them. Where tasks were usually or always done by one of the parents, it was generally the mother, with mothers always or usually dressing the infant in the morning in 70 per cent of cases, the task with the most gendered division of labour. In only a small minority of cases were tasks usually or always done by the father; this reached over a tenth of cases for only three activities: getting the child up in the morning, singing to them and putting them to bed.

The extent of paternal involvement varied little by the gender of the child. The exception was bathing the child, where this was somewhat more likely to always or usually be done by the mother in the case of female infants (60 per cent compared with 55 per cent for male infants). The division of labour in relation to

[14] It should be noted that only fathers were asked about the division of tasks and so responses may overstate paternal involvement (Shelton and John, 1996). Furthermore, fathers were asked these questions in the main questionnaire so the responses may be subject to social desirability.

several tasks did not vary markedly by paternal education. Where a difference was evident, it was fathers with lower levels of education that reported more involvement (equally with mothers). In the case of feeding the child, 60 per cent of fathers with lower secondary education reported equal sharing compared to 37 per cent for fathers with postgraduate education; the patterns for other activities were cuddling the child (90 per cent compared with 81 per cent), playing with the child (87 per cent v. 75 per cent), changing nappies (65 per cent v. 58 per cent), taking the child on outings (70 per cent v. 58 per cent) and picking the child up when s/he cries (85 per cent v. 75 per cent). Only in the case of bathing the child did fathers' involvement increase with educational level (36 per cent of those with lower secondary education reported equal or greater responsibility compared with 50 per cent for those with postgraduate education). For two activities, getting up in the night and singing, there was an n-shaped relationship, with the least and most educated fathers reporting more involvement The extent to which these patterns reflect differential maternity leave or parental employment patterns rather than educational level per se is explored in the following subsection.

FIGURE 2.1 THE DIVISION OF LABOUR IN RELATION TO CARE FOR, AND ACTIVITIES WITH, THE NINE-MONTH-OLD CHILD (FATHER REPORTS)



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 1. Couple households only.

2.2.2 Multivariate analyses

As outlined in Chapter 1, the different tasks and activities were summed to give an overall scale of involvement, with a higher score indicating greater paternal involvement. Table 2.1 presents the results of a multivariate regression model of

the factors associated with such involvement. Fathers' overall involvement was not found to vary by child gender or whether the infant had a chronic illness or disability (Model 1). However, in keeping with the descriptive analyses above, fathers with higher levels of education tended to be less involved in infant care and activities. Additional analyses (not shown here) examined whether paternal involvement varied by social class. However, social class had no significant effect once paternal education was included in the model as they are correlated with each other. Household income was not included in this model because of its close relationship with employment patterns (discussed below). Levels of paternal involvement did not vary by urban or rural location, so this factor was not included in the model.

Model 2 adds in measures of family size and whether parents were potentially constrained by illness or disability. Fathers were less involved with the nine-month-old if there were more children in the family but more involved if the infant was a twin or triplet. Somewhat surprisingly, fathers were somewhat less involved if the mother had a chronic illness or disability showing no substitution effect (that is, fathers compensating for mothers' potential constraints on involvement with the child). Paternal involvement did not vary by whether the father himself had a chronic illness or disability. However, on closer investigation, involvement was significantly less among fathers with an illness/disability when parental employment patterns were taken into account (compare Models 2 and 4). Thus, it appears that illness/disability impacts on father-child activities only if it is of a level sufficient to hamper employment participation as well.

Gender role attitudes among fathers were not measured in the survey (see Chapter 1). However, another measure may yield some insights into the existence of more traditional attitudes. Fathers were given six statements about the most important things to do as a parent; these included showing the child love and affection, taking time to play with the child, taking care of the child financially, giving the child moral and ethical guidance, making sure the child is safe and protected, and teaching the child and encouraging their curiosity.[15] Among the sample, the highest rankings were assigned to the love/affection and safe/protected items, with more differentiation in the other responses. Under a third of fathers ranked taking care of the child financially in their top three responses, which can be viewed as a proxy for adopting a more traditional view of the man as the breadwinner. This group of fathers did have significantly lower levels of involvement with their children, even taking account of other characteristics (Model 3).

15 The statement read 'Parents do many things for their children. Of the list of things below, which three do you think are the most important for you, as a parent to do? Please rank them by entering 1 (most important), 2 (second most important) and 3 (third most important).' This question was only asked of fathers.

TABLE 2.1 REGRESSION MODEL OF FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN TASKS AND ACTIVITIES AT NINE MONTHS OLD (COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS)

Coefficient	Socio-demographic factors (M1)	Family resources (M2)	Attitudes and behaviours (M3)	Parental employment (M4)
Constant	23.557	24.118	24.449	23.518
Socio-demographic factors				
Female infant	-0.168	-0.167	-0.145	-0.087
Child has illness/disability	-0.150	-0.161	-0.193	-0.135
Father's education:				
Leaving Cert.	0.184	0.063	0.123	0.153
Post-secondary	0.046	-0.100	-0.017	0.039
Degree	-0.366*	-0.532**	-0.423*	-0.206
Postgraduate degree	-0.534*	-0.751**	-0.521*	-0.226
(Ref.: Junior Cert or lower)				
Father migrant	-0.097	-0.091	0.108	-0.017
Family resources				
No. of siblings at time of survey		-0.424***	-0.425***	-0.244***
Child non-singleton		0.782*	0.767*	0.946**
Father has illness/disability		-0.300	-0.295	-0.651**
Mother has illness/disability		-0.324±	-0.345*	-0.219
Attitudes and behaviours				
Traditional gender role attitude			-0.654***	-0.489***
Child ever breastfed			-0.261	-0.277*
Child currently breastfed			-1.256***	-0.861***
Father took parental leave:				
Short (7 days or less)			0.188	0.258
Longer (8 days or more)			0.173	0.222
(Ref.: Didn't take)				
Parental employment				
Father's employment status:				
Working long (>40) hours				-0.987***
Non-employed				1.758***
(Ref.: working <= 40 hrs)				
Mother's employment status:				
Employed but still on maternity leave				-0.740**
Working <20 hours				0.827***
Working 21-35 hours				1.583***
Working >35 hours				2.189***
(Ref.: non-employed)				
% variance explained	0.5	1.9	3.9	14.7
N	3,671			

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 1.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

Breastfeeding has been found to have benefits for the child's development but may also result in a more gendered division of labour in relation to caring for the

child (Ito et al., 2013). Over half of the infants had been breastfed, even if for only a short period of time, and a tenth were still being breastfed at the time of the survey. Fathers' involvement was somewhat lower if the infant had ever been breastfed but was markedly lower if s/he was still being breastfed. Additional analysis (not shown here) indicates that this is not just related to breastfeeding-related activities such as feeding the child or putting them to bed but relates to differences in involvement in other tasks as well.

Twelve per cent of fathers had taken parental leave by the time the infant was nine months old, with this group being fairly equally divided between those taking seven or fewer days and those taking eight or more days. The level of involvement of fathers when the infant was nine months old did not vary by whether they had taken parental leave or not (Model 3).

TABLE 2.2 PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS BETWEEN 9 MONTHS AND 9 YEARS OF AGE (COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS)

	9 months %	3 years %	5 years %	9 years %
Father's employment status				
Not in paid employment	7.7	14.0	13.2	6.7
Working up to 40 hours	49.9	41.7	41.0	41.2
Working more than 40 hours	42.5	44.3	45.8	52.1
Mother's employment status				
Not in paid employment	36.8	38.8	37.8	31.4
Working up to 20 hours	23.9	8.5	16.6	16.3
Working 21 to 35 hours	20.7	26.0	24.0	26.6
Working more than 35 hours	18.6	26.7	21.6	25.7

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.

While some family factors were significantly associated with levels of fathers' involvement, the amount of variance explained – at 3.9 per cent – was quite low. In Model 4, we see that much more of the variance is accounted for by parental employment patterns. Because male and female employment patterns are very different, the categories used in the models are different. When the child was nine months old, half of fathers were employed for up to 40 hours per week, 42 per cent were working more than 40 hours a week while 8 per cent were not in paid employment (Table 2.2). Among mothers in couple households, 37 per cent were not in paid employment, 24 per cent were working up to 20 hours per week, 21 per cent were working between 21 and 35 hours while 19 per cent were working more

than 35 hours per week.[16] Compared to fathers working up to 40 hours, fathers working longer hours had reduced involvement in activities with the child, while those who were not in paid employment had the highest level of involvement. Paternal involvement was quite responsive to maternal employment patterns, increasing with the number of hours they worked. Interestingly, paternal involvement was even lower where the mothers were employed but still on maternity leave than among those where mothers were not in paid employment at all. Previous research has found that mothers taking longer leave (part of which is unpaid) tend to be more socially and economically advantaged (McGinnity et al., 2013).[17] Lower levels of involvement among more highly educated men were found to reflect their longer working hours and higher rates of breastfeeding among their wives/partners (compare Models 2 to 4).

As noted in Chapter 1, these analyses relate to the experiences of children who were in intact couple households from nine months to nine years. Sensitivity analyses were conducted to see if including fathers who subsequently left the household would make a difference to the findings (see Appendix Table A.1). The patterns found remain largely unchanged, but the larger sample size means that some factors increase in their level of statistical significance. Noteworthy is that fact that fathers who have taken longer periods of paternal leave are significantly more likely to be involved with their children. Fathers who subsequently left the household did not differ from those who remained in their levels of care for the infant.

2.3 INVOLVEMENT AT FIVE YEARS OF AGE

2.3.1 Descriptive analyses

As discussed in Chapter 1, at three years of age measures of the home learning environment related to 'someone in the household' and did not distinguish between mothers' and fathers' involvement. At the subsequent wave, fathers were asked how often they engaged with a set of activities with the five-year-old child.[18] In contrast to many of the questions asked at nine months old, many of the items related to aspects of the home learning environment rather than care for the child (such as putting them to bed). The most frequent activities were reading to the child (37 per cent every day and 31 per cent once or twice a week), playing with the child with toys, games or puzzles (30 per cent every day and 42 per cent once/twice a week) and engaging in sport or physical activity with the child (19 per

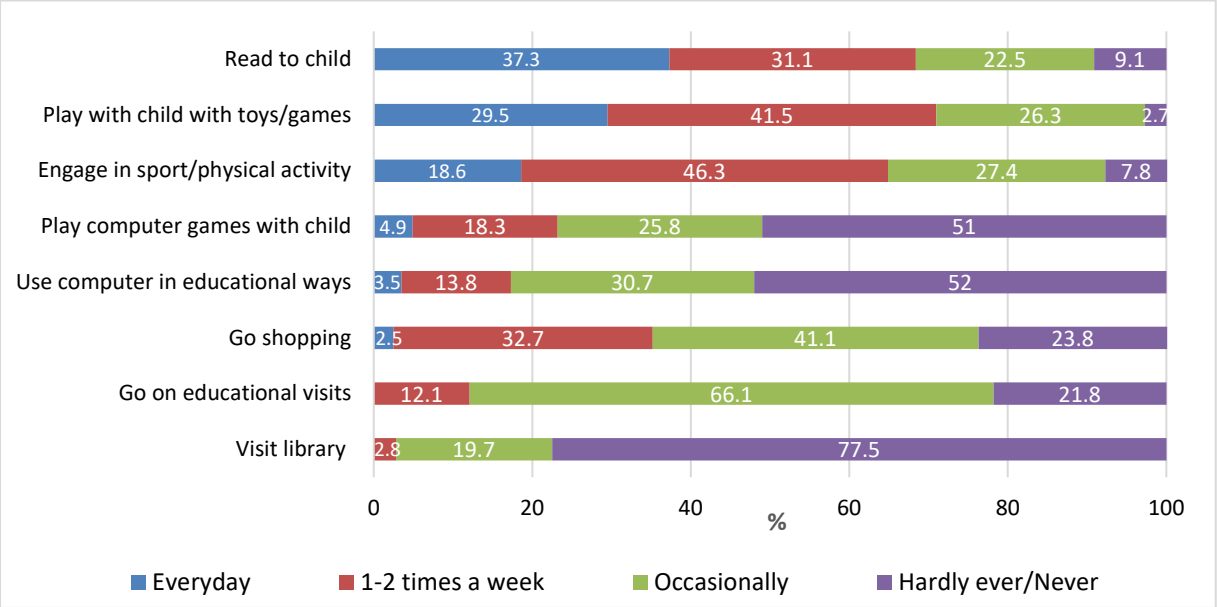
16 The employment patterns for married/cohabiting mothers are somewhat different to those across the sample as a whole. Among all mothers, 44 per cent were not employed at nine months, 23 per cent were working up to 20 hours per week, 18 per cent were working 21-35 hours and 16 per cent were working more than 35 hours.

17 In 2008 (the year of the Wave 1 survey) mothers were entitled to 26 weeks of paid maternity leave and a further 16 weeks of unpaid leave. Therefore, any mothers still on leave when the child was nine months were on unpaid leave.

18 They were also asked how often they listened to the child read. However, this was 'not applicable' for many children because of variation in the age at which they started school. Therefore, it is not reported here.

cent every day and 46 per cent once/twice a week) (Figure 2.2). Fathers tended to go shopping with the child at least occasionally, with over a third doing so at least once or twice a week. Around half of fathers never or hardly ever engaged in computer-related activities with their child, either in terms of computer games or using the computer for educational purposes with them. Educational visits (such as trips to the museum or zoo) tended to be occasional while visits to the library were less common.[19]

FIGURE 2.2 FATHER-CHILD ACTIVITIES AT FIVE YEARS OF AGE (COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS)



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 3.

In contrast to the situation at nine months old, there were clear differences in activities by the gender of the five-year-old child. Fathers were more likely to play with toys with their sons (33 per cent compared with 26 per cent) and engage in sports or physical activities (24 per cent compared with 13 per cent) every day. They were also less likely to play computer games frequently with their daughters (20 per cent at least once a week compared with 26 per cent). In contrast, fathers were somewhat more likely to visit the library with their daughters, 25 per cent doing so at least occasionally compared with 20 per cent in the case of sons.

Taking the child to the library varied markedly by paternal education, with 70 per cent of fathers with lower second-level education never doing so compared with 44 per cent of those with a postgraduate degree. Reading to the child every day also varied markedly, being 52 per cent for those with postgraduate education and 27 per cent for those with lower second-level education. Those with higher levels

[19] For educational visits and visits to the library, 'every day' and 'once or twice a week' are combined because of the small numbers involved.

of education were also more likely to play with toys with their child and slightly more likely to use the computer in educational ways and take the child on educational visits at least once a week.

2.3.2 Multivariate analyses

As discussed in Chapter 1, father-child activities at age five were summed to give an overall measure of the frequency of such involvement. In keeping with the descriptive analyses, fathers were much less likely to engage in activities with their daughters than with their sons (Table 2.3). The lower level of father activities with girls persisted even when a range of other factors were taken into account (Models 1 to 6). The child having a chronic illness or disability was not associated with the frequency of such interaction. There was a marked gradient by paternal education, with the most frequent involvement among fathers with a postgraduate education. As noted above, this is a not surprising pattern as many of these activities reflect the overall home learning environment, which has been found to vary by socio-economic characteristics (Lareau, 2011). Migrant fathers were found to be somewhat more involved with their five-year-olds, a pattern that was partly related to their employment patterns (compare Models 1 and 5). Because some of the activities (such as visiting the library) will be influenced by the provision of local facilities, whether the family lived in an urban or rural locality was included in the model. In keeping with expectations, fathers in urban areas were significantly more likely to be involved in these activities with their children.

Paternal involvement in these activities was significantly less frequent in larger families but did not differ for twins or triplets. Involvement did not vary by paternal or maternal illness/disability either measured at Wave 1 (nine months) or Wave 3 (five years). As when the child was nine months old, involvement was less frequent among fathers who strongly emphasised their role as breadwinner. Fathers who had taken a longer spell of parental leave before the child was nine months old had somewhat greater levels of involvement, though this difference was at the margins of significance.

TABLE 2.3 REGRESSION MODEL OF FREQUENCY OF INVOLVEMENT OF FATHER IN ACTIVITIES AT FIVE YEARS OF AGE (WAVE 3) (COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS)

	Socio-demographic factors (M1)	Family resources (M2)	Attitudes and behaviours (M3)	Parental employment at Wave 1 (M4)	Parental employment at Wave 3 (M5)	Fathers' involvement at Wave 1 (M6)
Constant	22.492	23.889	24.000	24.085	23.775	19.140
Female child	-0.428**	-0.467**	-0.458**	-0.454***	-0.463***	-0.442**
Child has illness/disability	0.162	0.072	0.073	0.091	0.085	0.109
Father's education:						
Leaving Cert.	0.943***	0.847***	0.843***	0.870***	0.890***	0.867***
Post-secondary	1.345***	1.195***	1.173***	1.206***	1.226***	1.234***
Degree	2.030***	1.974***	1.922***	1.995***	1.963***	2.029***
Postgraduate degree	2.496***	2.413***	2.357***	2.439***	2.308***	2.390***
(Ref.: Junior Cert or lower)						
Father migrant	0.494**	0.421*	0.417*	0.354*	0.246	0.287±
Urban area	0.870***	0.738***	0.726***	0.672***	0.623***	0.636***
No. of siblings at five-year wave		-0.780***	-0.773***	-0.740***	-0.726***	-0.695***
Child non-singleton		0.471	0.458	0.435	0.516	0.348
Father has illness/disability at Wave 1		-0.251	-0.266	-0.376	-0.457	-0.309
Mother has illness/disability at Wave 1		0.309	0.290	0.272	0.215	0.249
Father traditional gender role attitude			-0.385**	-0.351*	-0.308*	-0.220
Father took parental leave:						
Short (7 days or less)			-0.143	-0.155	-0.132	-0.193
Longer (8 days or more)			0.521±	0.505±	0.477±	0.414
(Ref.: Didn't take)						
Father's employment status at Wave 1:						
Working long (>40) hours				-0.665***	-1.016***	-0.810***
Non-employed				0.203	0.477±	0.118
(Ref.: working <40 hours)						

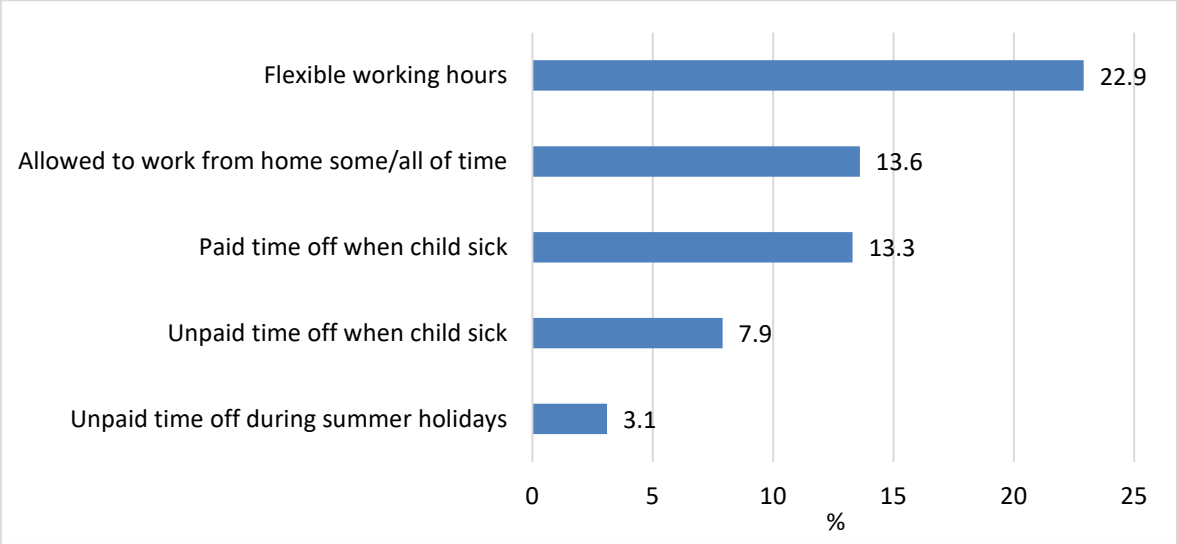
TABLE 2.3 CONTD.

	Socio-demographic factors (M1)	Family resources (M2)	Attitudes and behaviours (M3)	Parental employment at Wave 1 (M4)	Parental employment at Wave 3 (M5)	Fathers' involvement at Wave 1 (M6)
Mother's employment status at Wave 1:						
Working <20 hours				0.140	0.222	0.107
Working 21-35 hours				0.083	0.217	-0.136
Working >35 hours				0.360±	0.579**	0.083
(Ref.: non-employed)						
Father availed of family-friendly work practices					0.462 ***	0.460***
Father increased hours					-0.571**	-0.552**
Father reduced hours					0.969***	0.945***
Mother increased hours					0.338*	0.338*
Mother reduced hours					-0.205	-0.138
Father became ill/disabled					-0.319	-0.181
Mother became ill/disabled					-0.255	-0.378
Fathers' involvement with child at Wave 1						0.199***
% variance explained	6.1	9.0	9.2	9.9	12.1	14.5
N	3,671					

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 3.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

The analyses looked at parental employment patterns at both Wave 1 (nine months) and Wave 3 (five years). The impact of the recession meant that paternal non-employment almost doubled between Waves 2 and 3 of the survey, though mothers tended to increase their hours of work over this time-period (Table 2.2). Even taking account of their work patterns over four years later, fathers who were working long hours (more than 40 hours per week) when the child was an infant were less frequently involved with their child later on.

FIGURE 2.3 PROPORTION OF FATHERS WHO HAD AVAILED OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORK PRACTICES IN THE PAST YEAR (WHEN CHILD WAS FIVE YEARS OF AGE) (COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS)



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 3.

At Wave 3, fathers were asked whether they had availed of a range of family-friendly work practices allowed by their employers. The most common such practice, availed of by more than a fifth, was flexible working hours (Figure 2.3). In addition, over a tenth availed of paid time off when the child was sick or being allowed to work from home some or all of the time. Take-up of these measures was summed to give an overall scale. Those who had availed of such practices were more involved in activities with their child (Table 2.3). The frequency of involvement was also highly responsive to changes in the father's working patterns, reducing if the father increased hours (by moving from working less than 40 hours to more than 40 hours or by moving from non-employment to employment) and increasing if the father reduced hours (working fewer hours or no longer employed). The size of the impact of (changes in) maternal working patterns was somewhat smaller. Paternal involvement was greater where mothers worked full-time when the child was an infant and/or where they increased their working hours in the subsequent years.

Though the types of activities captured at nine months and five years were quite different, fathers who were more involved in infancy were more engaged in

activities with the child four years later. The effect of having a more traditional attitude to their parental role as a provider was largely mediated by early levels of involvement. In other words, more traditional fathers had less involvement in infancy and maintained this pattern. Similarly, the effect of mothers working full-time in infancy on later paternal involvement was explained by levels of fathers' involvement at nine months. Only part of the influence of fathers working long hours when the child was an infant is explained by earlier levels of involvement. Thus, early work patterns continue to have an impact on father-child activities several years later.

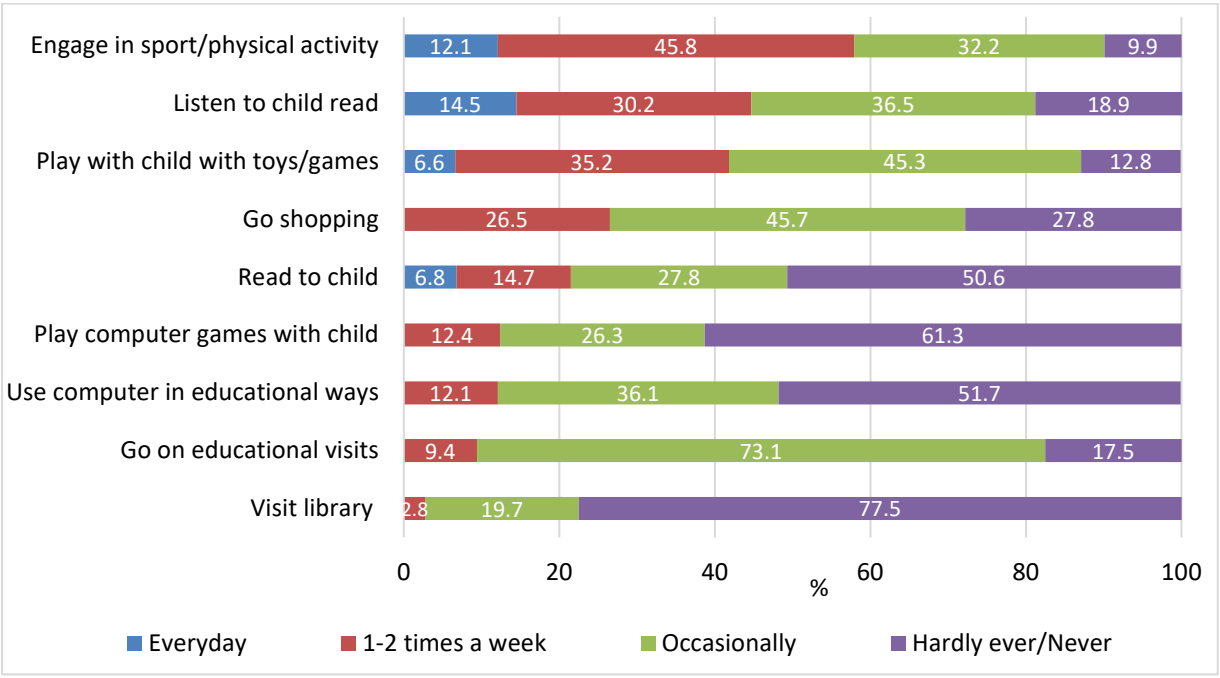
As at nine months, sensitivity analyses were conducted to see if the exclusion of fathers who left the household between Waves 3 and 5 made a difference to the findings. The patterns remained consistent when this group was included and there were no significant prior differences in involvement between fathers who left the household and those who remained (see Appendix Table A.2).

2.4 INVOLVEMENT AT NINE YEARS OF AGE

2.4.1 Descriptive analyses

At nine years of age, fathers were asked how often they engaged with the same set of activities as at five years. This time, the item on 'listening to the child read' was included in the analyses. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the greater independence of a nine-year-old in relation to their leisure activities, the frequency of father-child activities was much lower at nine than at five. The highest levels of involvement were in relation to sport/physical activity, with over half (57 per cent) engaging in such activities with their child at least once a week (Figure 2.4). Listening to the child read and playing with them with toys/games were also fairly prevalent, with over four-in-ten fathers engaging in these at least once a week. As at five years, computer-related activities were relatively uncommon as were visits to the library.

FIGURE 2.4 FATHER-CHILD ACTIVITIES AT NINE YEARS OF AGE (COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS)



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 5.
Note: For all activities except sport, listening to child read, playing with toys and reading to child, 'every day' and '1-2 times a week' are combined because of small numbers in the daily category.

At age five, many of the activities were gendered, with fathers more likely to engage in sports/physical activity, play with toys/games and play computer games with sons rather than daughters. In contrast, fathers were somewhat more likely to listen to their daughters read than their sons. Playing with games/toys, sports/physical activity, using the computer in educational ways and educational outings were more frequent among more highly educated groups. Fathers with lower second-level education were more likely to listen to their child read every day (19 per cent compared with 13 per cent) but levels for at least once a week were similar across educational levels. In contrast, reading *to* the child was more common among more highly educated groups (29 per cent at least once a week for those with postgraduate education compared to 13 per cent for those with lower second-level education).

2.4.2 Multivariate analyses

Regression models show that fathers were less frequently involved in activities with their daughters than their sons (Table 2.4). As at five years of age, more highly educated fathers were more frequently involved in such activities. Involvement was somewhat greater among fathers with a migrant background, a difference that was established from infancy (compare Models 1 and 6). Fathers were less frequently involved in larger families but slightly more likely to be involved where the child was a twin or triplet.

TABLE 2.4 REGRESSION MODEL OF FREQUENCY OF INVOLVEMENT OF FATHER IN ACTIVITIES AT NINE YEARS OF AGE (COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS)

	Socio-demographic factors (M1)	Family resources (M2)	Attitudes and behaviours (M3)	Parental employment at Wave 1 (M4)	Parental employment at Wave 5 (M5)	Fathers' involvement at Waves 1 & 3 (M6)
Constant	21.915	23.337	23.448	23.176	23.389	10.806
Female child	-0.447**	-0.479***	-0.480***	-0.461***	-0.470***	-0.251*
Child has illness/disability	0.216	0.147	0.140	0.152	0.156	0.118
Father's education:						
Leaving Cert.	0.836***	0.754***	0.722***	0.711***	0.704***	0.326±
Post-secondary	1.439***	1.313***	1.209***	1.221***	1.202***	0.722***
Degree	1.712***	1.653***	1.488***	1.538***	1.484***	0.731**
Postgraduate degree	2.314***	2.220***	2.006***	2.072***	2.001***	1.104***
(Ref.: Junior Cert or lower)						
Father migrant	0.462**	0.386*	0.382*	0.357*	0.359*	0.224
Urban location	0.156	0.056	0.025	0.000	0.023	-0.300*
No. of siblings at Wave 5		-0.692***	-0.675***	-0.628***	-0.639***	-0.336***
Child non-singleton		0.627±	0.623±	0.705±	0.589	0.422
Father has illness/disability at Wave 1		-0.739*	-0.745*	-0.813**	-0.745*	-0.560*
Mother has illness/disability at Wave 1		-0.010	-0.031	0.003	-0.027	-0.112
Father became ill/disabled by Wave 3		-0.305	-0.297	-0.300	-0.310	-0.118
Mother became ill/disabled by Wave 3		-0.446±	-0.420±	-0.418±	-0.355	-0.312
Father traditional gender role attitude			-0.452**	-0.402**	-0.427**	-0.234±
Father took parental leave:						
Short (7 days or less)			-0.160	-0.142	-0.162	-0.117
Longer (8 days or more)			0.232	0.220	0.219	-0.028
(Ref.: Didn't take)						
Father availed of family-friendly work practices			0.230**	0.231**	0.220**	0.034
Father's employment status at Wave 1:						
Working long (>40) hours				-0.413**		
Non-employed				0.181		
(Ref.: working <40 hours)						

TABLE 2.4 CONTD.

	Socio-demographic factors (M1)	Family resources (M2)	Attitudes and behaviours (M3)	Parental employment at Wave 1 (M4)	Parental employment at Wave 5 (M5)	Fathers' involvement at Waves 1 & 3 (M6)
Mother's employment status at Wave 1:						
Working <20 hours				0.168		
Working 21-35 hours				0.420*		
Working >35 hours				0.672**		
(Ref.: non-employed)						
Father became ill/disabled by Wave 5					-0.225	-0.021
Mother became ill/disabled by Wave 5					0.188	0.130
Father's employment status at Wave 5:						
Working long (>40) hours					-0.321*	-0.036
Non-employed					-0.103	-0.141
(Ref.: working <40 hours)						
Mother's employment status at Wave 5:						
Working <20 hours					-0.007	0.017
Working 21-35 hours					0.335±	0.082
Working >35 hours					0.288	-0.070
(Ref.: non-employed)						
Fathers' previous involvement with child:						
9 months						0.074***
5 years						0.454***
% variance explained	3.5	6.1	6.6	6.9	6.7	26.2
N				3,668		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 1, Wave 3 and Wave 5.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

As when the child was younger, involvement levels were lower among fathers with more traditional views on men as breadwinners. Fathers who had availed of family-friendly work practices were more involved in activities with their children. With the economic recovery, male non-employment rates dropped between waves while the proportion working longer hours increased; female employment hours also increased (Table 2.2). Levels of involvement were less influenced by parental employment patterns than at younger ages. However, involvement was somewhat lower where fathers had worked long hours in the child's first year of life and somewhat higher whether mothers had worked full-time. This influence largely operated through the establishment of involvement patterns during infancy.

Father-child activities at age nine were significantly related to earlier levels of involvement, at nine months and five years (Table 2.3, Model 6). Thus, patterns of interaction were at least partly established in infancy.[20]

The set of activities explored at ages five and nine captures aspects of the home learning environment. This raises the question as to whether some children are living in families where *both* parents have a high level of involvement in such activities. Table 2.5 shows that there is a significant relationship between the frequency of father-child and mother-child activities at both five and nine, with some children therefore living in homes where there is a more stimulating home learning environment overall. However, the relationship is modest (r=0.3), suggesting that paternal involvement is not merely a function of greater 'concerted cultivation' in the family.[21] The analyses also show that paternal involvement is more stable between five and nine than maternal involvement.

TABLE 2.5 CORRELATION BETWEEN FATHER-CHILD AND MOTHER-CHILD ACTIVITIES AT FIVE AND NINE YEARS OF AGE

	Father-child at 5	Father-child at 9	Mother-child at 5
Father-child activities at 5			
Father-child activities at 9	0.497***		
Mother-child activities at 5	0.343***	0.185***	
Mother-child activities at 9	0.159***	0.316***	0.338***

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.

Looking at the levels of involvement of both parents, mothers engage in activities with five-year-olds more frequently than fathers (25.9 compared with 24.0). However, by nine, the pattern had reversed with more frequent paternal

20 Sensitivity analyses could not be conducted for these models as fathers' involvement in activities with their nine-year-old child was only asked of those resident in the household.

21 Lareau (2011) used the term 'concerted cultivation' to refer to the way in which middle-class parents place great emphasis on involving their children in the kinds of cultural activities that will enhance their in-school learning.

involvement (23.0 compared with 18.2), reflecting a greater decline for maternal involvement in these activities between five and nine years of age.

2.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has looked at the factors associated with fathers' involvement in activities with their children from the ages of nine months to nine years. The measures used reflect the stage of development, with the measure in infancy focused on both care and stimulating play while the measures used at five and nine years largely reflected play-based and home learning activities as well as outings rather than routine care or supervision. Fathers report equal involvement in a number of tasks and activities with infants, though where the division of labour is unequal, it is usually mothers who carry out the tasks. Interestingly, by nine years of age, fathers report higher levels of involvement in play and outings with the child than do mothers.

There was little variation in parental involvement by child gender in infancy but by five and nine years of age, a clear gendering was evident, with fathers significantly more likely to engage in activities with their sons. A social gradient became evident too, with more highly educated fathers engaging in these activities more frequently. Migrant fathers were also somewhat more likely to engage in activities with their children.

Levels of involvement were significantly lower among fathers who adopted a more traditional view of their role, focusing on financial responsibility for their children. Paternal involvement levels also reflected broader contextual factors, especially family composition and parental employment. Fathers were less involved in activities with the study child where families were larger (most likely because of the dilution of resources) but were more involved where the child was a twin or triplet, especially in infancy (most likely reflecting the increased workload linked to non-singletons). Fathers who worked longer hours tended to be less involved and this pattern tended to be set in infancy. On the other hand, paternal involvement was responsive to female employment, especially in infancy.

There was little systematic variation in paternal involvement by whether the father availed of paternal leave in the first year of the child's life, though the absence of such an effect may reflect the relatively low take-up and the short time period involved. However, fathers who subsequently availed of more family-friendly work practices (such as flexible hours or working from home) were more involved in activities with their children. Interestingly, levels of paternal involvement in infant care were even lower where the mother was on extended maternity leave (potentially a proxy for socio-economic advantage) than they were where mothers were working full-time in the home.

CHAPTER 3

The quality of father-child relationships

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the quality of the father-child relationship from the perspective of the father and, at age nine, the child themselves. The analyses focus mainly on children who are living with their fathers, but additional information is presented on the factors associated with the quality of relationships with non-resident fathers.

3.2 RELATIONSHIP AT NINE MONTHS OF AGE

The Quality of Attachment Scale (Condon and Corkindale, 1998) was administered to both parents when the infant was nine months old, though fathers were asked fewer items (five compared with nine). This scale captured their feelings towards the nine-month-old infant and about themselves as parents, with higher scores indicating greater attachment. For both parents, scores were highly skewed towards the top of the range (with a mean of 24.1 out of 25 for fathers, and 42.6 out of 45 for mothers), a pattern also reported by the scale developers (Condon and Corkindale, 1998; Condon et al., 2013). Paternal and maternal attachment were only weakly positively related (r=0.176).[22] Levels of paternal attachment did not vary by infant gender but were slightly higher among fathers with lower levels of education (24.3 for lower second-level education compared with 23.8 for postgraduate degree).

It is clear from Table 3.1 that only a small number of variables are significantly associated with the quality of paternal attachment, mainly because of the high levels found overall. Lower levels of attachment are found among fathers with tertiary education, among those with more children and among those living in urban areas. Attachment levels are also lower among fathers working longer hours and those with a more traditional attitude to males as breadwinners (Model 1). However, both these effects become non-significant when fathers' involvement in care for, and activities with, the infant are taken into account (Model 2), suggesting that long hours and traditional attitudes affect attachment via lower paternal involvement in these activities. The relationship with maternal employment patterns is somewhat puzzling. Higher levels of attachment are found among fathers whose wives/partners are on extended maternity leave and the lowest levels found among those whose wives are working full-time. The latter pattern

[22] The correlation relates to the total scales for mothers and fathers comprised of nine and five items respectively.

may be related to the use of non-parental care and thus less time spent with the infant.[23]

Levels of involvement are positively associated with the quality of attachment. As both measures are assessed at the same point in time, the relationship cannot be determined as a causal one. However, the pattern does suggest that interaction and involvement have a dynamic relationship with the quality of bonding with the baby.

As in Chapter 2, sensitivity analyses were conducted to include fathers who left the households after the first wave of the survey (see Table A.3). The factors identified as significant remained the same. There was a slight shift for maternal employment, with a larger sample size meaning that all types of maternal employment (whatever the hours) were associated with slightly lower levels of father-baby bonding. There was no evidence that fathers who subsequently left the household differed from those who stayed in their levels of attachment to the infant.

[23] Maternal attachment levels are also lower where mothers work full-time (analyses not shown here), lending support to the potential role of non-parental care in the patterns found.

TABLE 3.1 REGRESSION MODEL OF QUALITY OF PATERNAL ATTACHMENT TO INFANT AT NINE MONTHS OLD (COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS)

Coefficient	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	24.535	22.803
Female infant	0.014	0.021
Child has illness/disability	-0.025	-0.016
Father's education:		
Leaving Cert.	-0.056	-0.069
Post-secondary	-0.090	-0.095
Degree	-0.259**	-0.246**
Postgraduate degree	-0.438***	-0.424***
(Ref.: Junior Cert or lower)		
Father migrant	-0.063	-0.061
Urban location	-0.161**	-0.158**
Financial difficulties	0.051	0.023
No. of siblings Study Child has at Wave 1	-0.113***	-0.094***
Child non-singleton	0.157	0.086
Father has illness/disability	0.004	0.053
Mother has illness/disability	-0.023	-0.007
Traditional gender role attitude	-0.089±	-0.051
Child ever breastfed	-0.071	-0.051
Child currently breastfed	0.005	0.069
Father took parental leave:		
Short (7 days or less)	0.008	-0.011
Longer (8 days or more)	0.041	0.024
(Ref.: Didn't take)		
Father's employment status:		
Working long (>40) hours	-0.111*	-0.038
Non-employed	0.139	0.014
(Ref.: working <40 hours)		
Mother's employment status:		
Currently on maternity leave	0.156±	0.209*
Working <20 hours	-0.069	-0.131±
Working 21-35 hours	0.018	-0.101
Working >35 hours	-0.018	-0.181**
(Ref.: non-employed)		
Fathers' involvement in care/activities with child		0.074***
% variance explained	1.9	4.7
N	3,671	

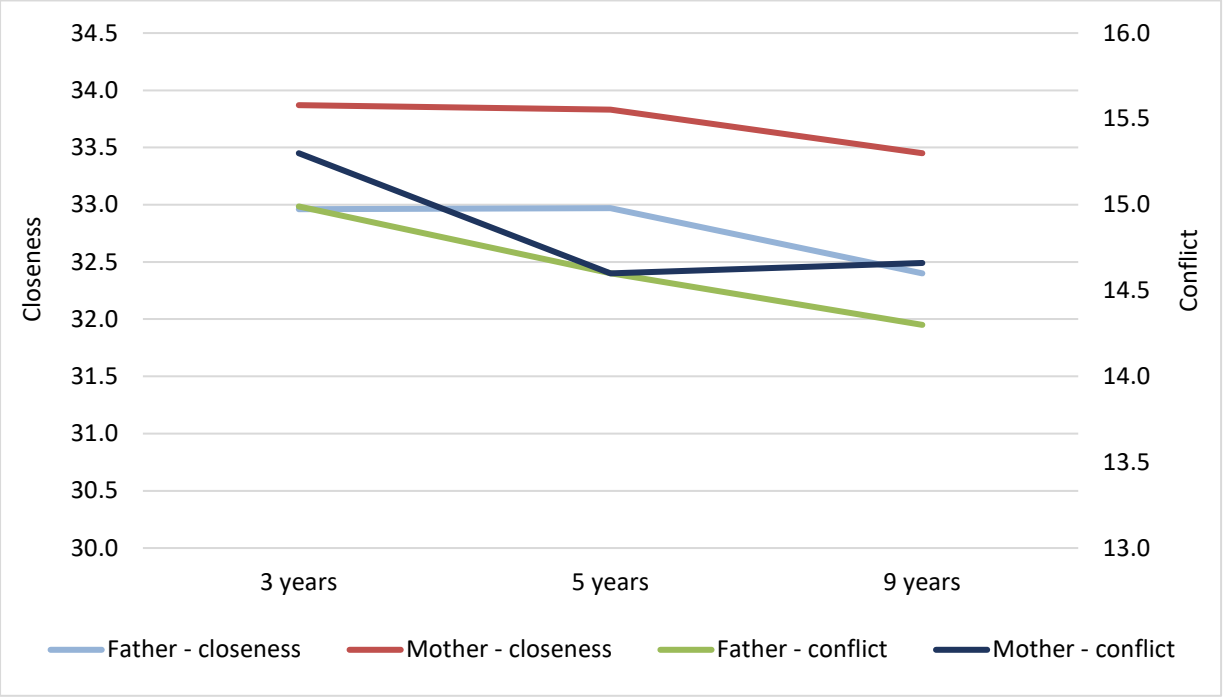
Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 1.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

3.3 THE QUALITY OF THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THREE AND NINE YEARS OF AGE

From the ages of three to nine, the quality of parent-child relationships for both parents was measured using the closeness/positive and conflict subscales of the Pianta (1992) Child-Parent Relationship Scale. Both sets of relationships were

characterised by high levels of closeness or positive feelings and low levels of conflict or negative feelings. Levels of closeness were somewhat higher among mothers than fathers, with a somewhat greater decline in closeness between five and nine years reported by fathers (Figure 3.1). Mothers reported somewhat higher levels of conflict than fathers with the child at three and nine, but not at five. Fathers reported a steady decline in conflict as the child grew older; for mothers, conflict declined between three and five but stabilised thereafter.

FIGURE 3.1 QUALITY OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THREE AND NINE YEARS OF AGE



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 2 to 5.
Note: The scale range for closeness is 7 to 35 and for conflict 8 to 40.

Changes in the quality of the father-child relationship were explored using a series of multilevel models, with the waves of the study regarded as 'nested' within the father (see Chapter 1). Such an approach allows us to look at the influence of characteristics (such as child gender) that are fixed over time and other characteristics (such as paternal employment status) that may change over time.

3.3.1 Feelings of closeness between fathers and children

In keeping with the descriptive analyses in Figure 3.1, the models show a significant decline in reported closeness at nine years of age compared to at younger ages. Fathers reported feeling closer to their daughters than their sons while the child having a chronic illness or disability was associated with slightly lower levels of closeness. Levels of closeness were highest for fathers with lower second-level education and lowest for those with undergraduate or postgraduate degree qualifications. Closeness did not vary between migrant and Irish-born fathers or by the level of financial strain experienced by the household. Levels of reported

closeness were somewhat lower among fathers living in urban areas. Fathers reported higher levels of closeness to the child in larger families, but levels did not vary between singletons and non-singletons. Fathers who themselves had a chronic illness or disability reported lower levels of closeness, though maternal health status had no significant influence. Take-up of parental leave had no significant relationship with feelings of closeness. Fathers with more traditional attitudes to their role reported slightly lower levels of closeness (though this difference was significant only at the 10 per level).

TABLE 3.2 MULTILEVEL REGRESSION MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH POSITIVE FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

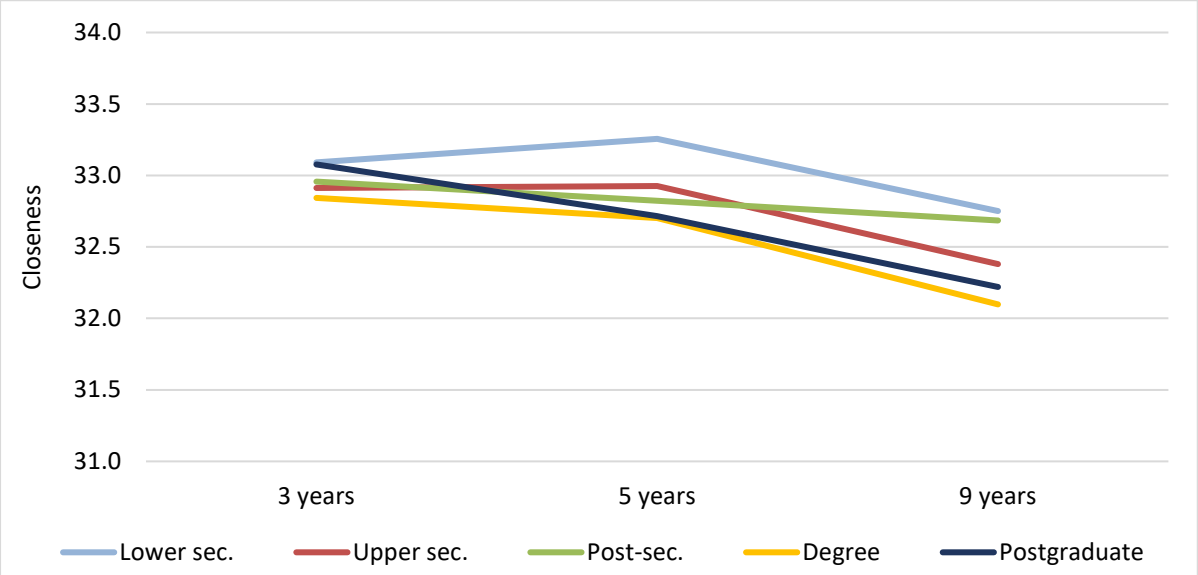
Coefficient	Null model (M1)	Socio-demographic factors (M2)	Quality of attachment (M3)	Parental employment (M4)
Constant	32.755	33.328	33.229	33.233
Age:				
5 years		0.002	0.002	-0.044
9 years		-0.571***	-0.572***	-0.558***
Female child		0.198**	0.192**	0.210***
Child has illness/disability		-0.127±	-0.123±	-0.126±
Father's education:				
Leaving Cert.		-0.313**	-0.273**	-0.293**
Post-secondary		-0.291**	-0.234*	-0.269**
Degree		-0.435***	-0.342**	-0.400***
Postgraduate degree		-0.430***	-0.282*	-0.355**
(Ref.: Junior Cert or lower)				
Father migrant		0.002	0.024	0.011
Urban location		-0.143*	-0.101±	-0.118±
Financial difficulties at Wave 1		0.169	0.151	0.166
No. of siblings at Wave 1		0.088**	0.119***	0.156***
Child non-singleton		-0.019	-0.129	-0.182
Father has illness/disability		-0.258*	-0.241±	-0.211±
Mother has illness/disability		-0.093	-0.115	-0.120
Father traditional gender role attitude		-0.109±	-0.081	-0.059
Father took parental leave:				
Short (7 days or less)		0.128	0.137	0.139
Longer (8 days or more)		-0.134	-0.139	-0.154
(Ref.: Didn't take)				
Father's employment status at Wave 1:				
Working long (>40) hours		-0.116±	-0.087	-0.063
Non-employed		0.087	0.057	0.010
(Ref.: working <40 hours)				
Mother working >35 hours at Wave 1		0.047	0.053	-0.025
Quality of attachment at 9 months			0.284***	0.268***
Time-varying factors				
Financial difficulties				-0.034
Father working long hours				0.049
Father non-employed				0.093
Mother working full-time				0.074
Father-child involvement				0.062***
Variance:				
Between fathers	2.176***	2.148***	1.988***	1.897***
Between study waves	4.386***	4.275***	4.278***	4.275***
N	4,085			

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

Fathers working longer hours in the infant's first year of life had slightly lower levels of reported closeness, though this was largely due to lower levels of attachment at nine months. Higher levels of attachment at nine months were significantly associated with having a positive father-child relationship later on. Changes in paternal or maternal employment status or in financial difficulties had no significant relationship with levels of closeness. However, increased paternal involvement in activities with the child was linked to increased feelings of closeness.

Using multilevel modelling means that we can look at the extent of variation between fathers and between survey waves. The variance terms indicate that there is more variation over time than there is between fathers, though fathers differ significantly in their levels of closeness with their children.

FIGURE 3.2 CHANGES IN FATHER-CHILD CLOSENESS BETWEEN THREE AND NINE YEARS OF AGE BY PATERNAL EDUCATION



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 2 to 5.

The use of multilevel growth curve modelling means that we can test whether fathers in particular groups have different relationship trajectories over time. Additional analyses (not shown here) examined the interaction between the child's age and time-constant characteristics such as gender and paternal education. Fathers reported the same pattern of change over time in relation to closeness with their sons and daughters. However, the pattern of change varies significantly by paternal education (Figure 3.2), with fathers with undergraduate or postgraduate degrees reporting a sharper decline in levels of closeness than those with lower levels of education. Closeness also declines less over time in larger families.

Because of the approach to modelling used here, sensitivity analyses cannot be carried out in the same way as in Chapter 1. However, analyses indicate that average levels of closeness between father and child at three and five years of age do not differ by whether the father subsequently left the household.

3.3.2 Father-child conflict between three and nine years of age

The multilevel model shows a decline in reported father-child conflict between the ages of three and nine (Table 3.3). Although fathers reported higher levels of closeness with their daughters on average, no significant variation in conflict levels was evident by child gender. Levels of conflict did not vary by paternal education. Those who had children with a chronic illness or disability reported higher levels of conflict as did those living in urban areas. Migrant fathers reported higher levels of conflict while levels were lower for children in larger families. Paternal and maternal illness or disability were significantly related to higher levels of conflict, with a larger effect than for the child's own disability. Those with a more traditional view of fatherhood reported slightly higher conflict levels, mainly because of somewhat lower attachment levels in infancy. The quality of attachment at nine months was significantly related to having lower levels of conflict later on.

Changes in paternal employment patterns were not significantly associated with father-child conflict. However, the mother moving into full-time employment was related to lower levels of conflict. This is somewhat surprising but may relate to more use of non-parental childcare or after-school care in these circumstances and therefore reduced opportunity for conflict. An increase in paternal involvement in activities with the child also served to reduce conflict.

The variance terms show that there is about as much variation over time in conflict levels as there is between fathers. Patterns of variation over time did not vary systematically by child illness/disability, migrant status or urban/rural location. However, the decline in conflict over time was greater in larger than in smaller families (analyses not shown here).

As with reported closeness, levels of conflict between fathers and children at three or five years did not differ by whether the father subsequently left the household.

TABLE 3.3 MULTILEVEL REGRESSION MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH FATHER-CHILD CONFLICT

Coefficient	Null model (M1)	Socio-demographic factors (M2)	Quality of attachment (M3)	Parental employment (M4)
Constant	14.710	14.321	14.521	14.529
Age:				
5 years		-0.338***	-0.336***	-0.317***
9 years		-0.603***	-0.603***	-0.598***
Female child		-0.083	-0.072	-0.083
Child has illness/disability		0.375*	0.362*	0.360*
Father's education:				
Leaving Cert.		0.055	-0.025	0.010
Post-secondary		-0.011	-0.131	-0.076
Degree		0.240	0.050	0.125
Postgraduate degree		0.357	0.058	0.146
(Ref.: Junior Cert or lower)				
Father migrant		0.401*	0.359*	0.362*
Urban location		0.600***	0.516***	0.523***
Financial difficulties at Wave 1		0.386	0.423	0.384
No. of siblings		-0.405***	-0.470***	-0.505***
Child non-singleton		0.071	0.263	0.308
Father has illness/disability		0.651*	0.617*	0.583*
Mother has illness/disability		0.567**	0.615**	0.614**
Father traditional gender role attitude		0.320*	0.263±	0.246±
Father took parental leave:				
Short (7 days or less)		-0.265	-0.282	-0.278
Longer (8 days or more)		0.131	0.142	0.144
(Ref.: Didn't take)				
Father's employment status at Wave 1:				
Working long (>40) hours		0.148	0.091	0.097
Non-employed		-0.106	-0.046	-0.092
(Ref.: working <40 hours)				
Mother working >35 hours at Wave 1		-0.282±	-0.292±	-0.153
Quality of attachment at 9 months			-0.578***	-0.568***
Time-varying factors				
Financial difficulties				0.070
Father working long hours				-0.079
Father non-employed				0.116
Mother working full-time				-0.248*
Father-child involvement				-0.039***
Variance:				
Between fathers	13.132***	12.718***	12.071***	11.977***
Between study waves	14.313***	14.208***	14.214***	14.222***
N	4,085			

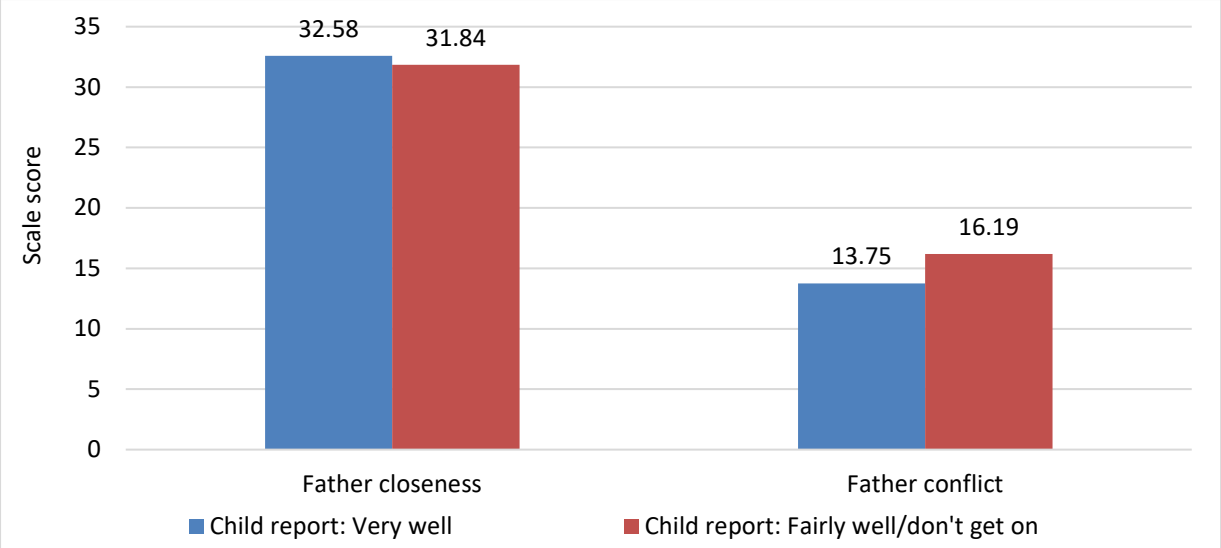
Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

3.4 RELATIONSHIP QUALITY FROM THE CHILD PERSPECTIVE

3.4.1 Getting on well with their father

The analyses so far have looked at the father's perspective on relationship quality. When the child was nine years of age, they were asked how well they got on with their Dad and her Mum. Twenty-two per cent of children reported getting on 'fairly well' or not getting on with their father,[24] with the remainder saying 'very well'. The figure for mothers was very similar, with 20 per cent saying 'fairly well' or not getting on. There was some commonality in father and child reports, with those children describing themselves as getting on very well with their father having higher levels of closeness and lower levels of conflict reported by their father (Figure 3.3). However, the relationship was not a strong one, with a correlation of just -0.11 with closeness and 0.19 with conflict.

FIGURE 3.3 FATHER-REPORTED CLOSENESS/CONFLICT BY CHILD'S REPORT OF RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AT AGE NINE



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 5.

In contrast to paternal reports of relationship quality, very little variation in child reports was evident by socio-demographic factors (Table 3.4). The exception was gender, with girls more likely to report getting on very well with their fathers than boys, somewhat poorer relationships where fathers held a traditional view of their role and slightly better relations where mothers had a chronic illness or disability. Parental employment status was not associated with how well children felt they got on with their fathers.

[24] The numbers who report not getting on with their (resident) father are too small for detailed analyses.

TABLE 3.4 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILD GETTING ON 'VERY WELL' WITH FATHER (ODDS RATIOS)

Coefficient	Socio-demographic factors (M1)	Parental employment (M2)	Father-child activities (M3)	Prior father-child relationship (M4)	Current father-child relationship (M5)
	Odds ratio	Odds ratio	Odds ratio	Odds ratio	Odds ratio
Constant	3.595	3.842	1.897	0.818	0.969
Female child	1.340**	1.339**	1.367***	1.356***	1.359***
Child has illness/disability	0.930	0.931	0.922	0.925	0.963
Father's education:					
Leaving Cert.	0.979	0.951	0.929	0.962	0.993
Post-secondary	0.851	0.863	0.811	0.839	0.882
Degree	0.795	0.768	0.718	0.757	0.783
Postgrad. degree	1.021	0.989	0.905	0.970	0.969
(Ref.: Junior Cert)					
Father migrant	0.886	0.879	0.860	0.857	0.892
Urban location	1.142	1.144	1.141	1.192±	1.219*
No. of siblings	1.024	1.031	1.059	1.043	1.018
Child non-singleton	0.860	0.853	0.824	0.836	0.774
Father has illness/disability	0.915	0.940	0.959	0.989	1.039
Mother has illness/disability	1.269±	1.280±	1.280±	1.316±	1.318±
Father traditional gender role attitude	0.736**	0.738**	0.746**	0.758**	0.744**
Father took parental leave:					
Short (7 days +)	0.929	0.921	0.928	0.899	0.915
Longer (8 days +)	0.718±	0.723±	0.716±	0.753	0.782
(Ref.: Didn't take)					
Availed of family-friendly work practices	1.037	1.035	1.025	1.029	1.028
Father at Wave 5:					
Working >40 hours		0.992	0.998	0.996	0.985
Non-employed		0.829	0.835	0.865	0.917
(Ref.: <40 hours)					
Mother at Wave 5:					
Working <20 hours		0.972	0.968	0.965	0.952
Working 21-35 hrs		0.880	0.870	0.847	0.856
Working >35 hours		1.063	1.062	1.059	1.058
(Ref.: non-empl.)					
Financial difficulties (W5)		0.905	0.910	0.914	0.925
Fathers' involvement with child:					
9 months			0.988	0.980	0.978
5 years			0.999	0.994	0.995
9 years			1.045***	1.042**	1.041**
Relationship quality at 5:					
Positive/close				1.053**	1.037±
Conflict				0.967***	1.011
Relationship quality at 9:					
Positive/close					1.027
Conflict					0.925***
Nagelkerke R^2	1.8	1.9	2.7	4.1	7.9

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5. Note odds ratios of less than 1 indicate that there is a lower likelihood of getting on very well with father.

Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Nagelkerke R^2 is a measure of goodness of fit for a logistic regression model; higher scores indicate that more of the variance is explained.

Children reported more positive relationships where their fathers engaged in activities with them more frequently. Children who had more conflictual and less close relationships with their father at age five were less likely to report getting on very well with them four years later. This pattern was largely driven by ongoing conflictual relationships at the age of nine (compare Models 4 and 5).

3.4.2 The quality of the relationship with non-resident fathers

The analyses so far have focused on children who were living with their fathers (over the period from nine months to nine years). In cases where children were not living with their fathers, the GUI study collected information from the mother on the frequency of contact between the child and the non-resident father. Children were also asked about how well they got on with their (non-resident) father but around a fifth of this group did not answer the question. Children not living with their fathers were less likely to report that they got on very well with them (65 per cent compared with 79 per cent of those living with their fathers), though it is worth noting that the majority did indicate a positive relationship.

TABLE 3.5 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILD GETTING ON 'VERY WELL' WITH NON-RESIDENT FATHER (ODDS RATIOS)

Factors	Coefficients
Constant	4.303
Female child	1.333*
Frequency of face-to-face and other contact with the child (high value=less contact)	0.900*
Whether child stays over with the father at least once a fortnight	2.433***
Father has other child(ren)	0.828
Quality of relationship of mother with father (high value=worse)	0.802***
Nagelkerke R^2	14.8

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 5.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

Table 3.5 shows the factors associated with the quality of the relationship with non-resident fathers, from the child's perspective. Information on education or occupation was not collected from the non-resident father so cannot be included in the model. As with all nine-year-olds, girls reported better relations with their fathers than boys. Nine-year-olds who stayed over with their father at least once a fortnight were more than twice as likely as other children to report they got on very well with their father. Having more frequent face-to-face or other contact with the father had an additional positive impact on the quality of the relationship. Whether the father had other children outside the study child's household did not have a significant relationship with getting on well with the father. Interestingly, where the mother reported more negative relations with the father, children

reported more negative relations too, even over and above the frequency of their interaction.

3.4.3 Fathers as a source of help with problems

Nine-year-olds were asked whether they would talk to a list of people if they had a problem. Among those living with both parents, the vast majority (95 per cent) said they would talk to their mother, but a very high proportion (84 per cent) said they would talk to their father. Table 3.6 explores factors associated with willingness to talk to their father about a problem. Given the high levels of willingness overall, only a small number of factors are significantly related to the outcome. Girls are less likely to be willing to talk to their fathers about a problem than boys, despite being more positive about the quality of the relationship. There is little variation by socio-demographic factors, except for somewhat lower levels of willingness to confide among those in larger families.[25]

Children are more willing to go to their father if he had been more involved in their care when they were infants and where they engaged in activities with him more frequently at the age of nine. In terms of relationship quality, only levels of conflict at nine were significantly related to the outcome, with children having more conflictual relationships with their fathers being less willing to confide in them. Not surprisingly, the strongest association was with the child's report that they got on very well with their father.

[25] Urban/rural location was not included in the model, but additional analyses indicated no significant difference in children being willing to go to their father between urban and rural areas.

TABLE 3.6 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILD TALKING TO THEIR FATHER ABOUT PROBLEMS (ODDS RATIOS)

Coefficient	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	2.652	2.029
Female child	0.712***	0.690***
Child has illness/disability	0.983	0.990
Father's education:		
Leaving Cert.	0.813	0.814
Post-secondary	0.856	0.867
Degree	0.937	0.955
Postgrad. degree	0.902	0.902
(Ref.: Junior Cert)		
Father migrant	0.984	0.990
No. of siblings	0.859**	0.857**
Child non-singleton	1.318	1.350
Father has illness/disability	0.909	0.901
Mother has illness/disability	0.853	0.828
Traditional gender role attitude	0.838±	0.862
Father took parental leave:		
Short (7 days +)	0.895	0.901
Longer (8 days +)	1.231	1.276
(Ref.: Didn't take)		
Availed of family-friendly work practices	1.048	1.045
Father at Wave 5:		
Working >40 hours	1.082	1.087
Non-employed	0.805	0.810
(Ref.: <40 hours)		
Mother at Wave 5:		
Working <20 hours	1.039	1.042
Working 21-35 hrs	1.020	1.040
Working >35 hours	0.925	0.921
(Ref.: non-empl.)		
Financial difficulties (W5)	0.828	0.836
Fathers' involvement with child:		
9 months	1.027±	1.030*
5 years	0.995	0.995
9 years	1.040**	1.036*
Relationship quality at 5:		
Positive/close	0.989	0.984
Conflict	0.990	0.988
Relationship quality at 9:		
Positive/close	1.021	1.019
Conflict	0.979*	0.988
Gets on very well with father		1.747***
Nagelkerke R^2	3.8	5.1

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

3.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has looked at the relationship between fathers and children from both perspectives. Fathers describe a relationship that has high levels of attachment in infancy and closeness in early and middle childhood, with low levels of conflict. Both closeness and conflict decline as the child develops, most likely reflecting the increased importance of friendships alongside family relationships. At the same time, it is worth noting that four-fifths of nine-year-olds describe themselves as getting on very well with their (resident) fathers and say they would go to them for help with problems.

Paternal attachment in infancy is somewhat lower among more highly educated fathers, those in urban areas, those with more children and those working longer hours. Closeness continues to be somewhat lower into early and middle childhood for more educated and urban families, with levels of father-child conflict also higher in urban settings. In contrast to the patterns in infancy, fathers report closer and less conflictual relationships in larger families, though it is worth noting that nine-year-olds are somewhat less likely to seek help from their fathers in these families. Fathers with more traditional views of their role indicate more conflict with their children and the nine-year-olds are somewhat less likely to say they get on very well with them. Some gendering of relationships is evident, with father-daughter relationships characterised as more positive by both parties. However, levels of conflict do not differ by child gender.

The kinds of father-child activities explored in Chapter 2 are closely linked to the quality of the relationship. More frequent involvement fosters closer relationships from both the father and child perspectives and is linked to a significant reduction in conflict.

The chapter provides new insights into the quality of the relationship between nine-year-olds and non-resident fathers. The majority of those who answered the question reported they got on very well with their fathers and a more positive relationship was found to be related to more frequent contact, especially sleep-overs, and a better-quality relationship between the parents.

CHAPTER 4

Parenting stress among fathers

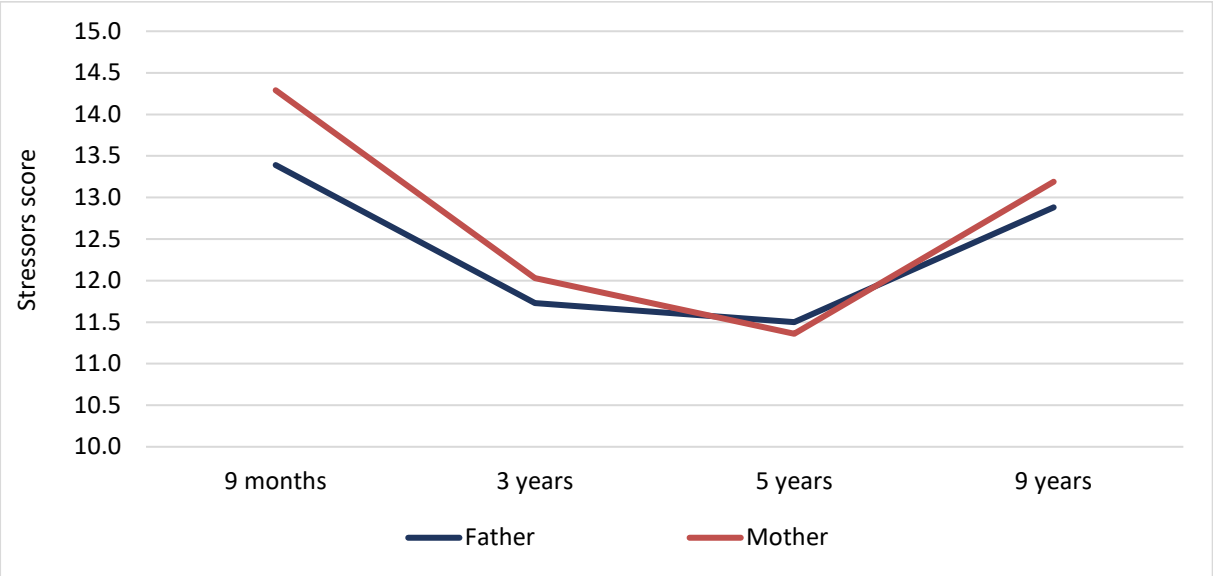
4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the levels of parenting stress experienced by fathers, exploring the factors associated with (changes in) stress levels and comparing stress levels among fathers to those reported by mothers in couple households. Stress was measured using the Berry and Jones (1995) stressors subscale of the Parenting Stress Scale, which included items such as 'Caring for my child sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give' and 'I sometimes worry whether I am doing enough for my child'. Scores ranged from 6 to 30, with higher scores reflecting higher stress levels.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSES

Figure 4.1 shows changes in levels of stress among fathers and mothers over the period from nine months to nine years of age. Average scores are medium to low (11.5-14.5 out of 30). Both parents show the same pattern of change over time, with a reduction in stress levels from nine months to three years, a further slight decrease to five years and an increase in levels between five and nine years. Mothers report significantly higher stress levels than fathers at all timepoints, except five years of age, with the largest difference in infancy (Figure 4.1).

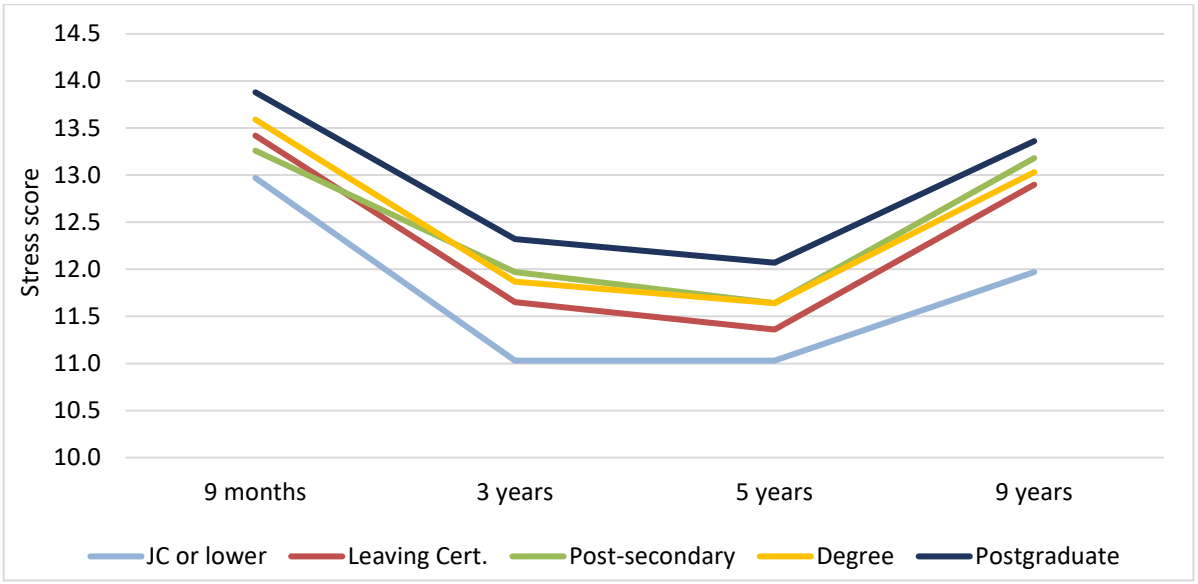
FIGURE 4.1 PARENTING STRESS AMONG FATHERS AND MOTHERS FROM NINE MONTHS TO NINE YEARS OF AGE



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.

Fathers' stress levels did not vary significantly by child gender at any waves of the study. Significant variation in stress levels was evident by father's educational level (Figure 4.2), with consistently lower stress scores among fathers with a Junior Certificate or less and consistently higher scores among fathers with a postgraduate degree. The extent to which these patterns relate to other factors such as employment dynamics is explored in the following section.

FIGURE 4.2 PARENTING STRESS AMONG FATHERS BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL FROM NINE MONTHS TO NINE YEARS OF AGE



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.

4.3 MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES

Table 4.1 shows a multilevel model of the factors associated with (changes in) paternal stress levels. Waves are treated as clustered within fathers, allowing us to examine the influence of both time-invariant factors (such as child gender) and time-varying factors (such as experience of financial difficulties). The variance terms in the null model (Model 1) indicate that there was greater variation over time in stress levels than between individual fathers.

TABLE 4.1 MULTILEVEL REGRESSION MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PATERNAL STRESS LEVELS OVER TIME

Coefficient	Null model (M1)	Socio-demographic factors (M2)	Quality of attachment and parental employment (M3)	Couple relationship (M4)	Father-child relationship (M5)	Father-child activities (M6)
Constant	12.456	9.994	10.033	10.001	10.203	10.394
Age:						
9 months		2.259***	2.270***	2.257***	-	-
3 years		0.375***	0.376***	0.366***	0.241***	-
9 years		1.489***	1.482***	1.469***	1.511***	1.489***
(Ref.: 5 years)						
Female child		-0.098	-0.085	-0.108	-0.068	-0.073
Child has illness/disability		0.267*	0.259*	0.255*	0.149	0.152
Father's education:						
Leaving Cert.		0.554***	0.464***	0.469**	0.449**	0.459**
Post-secondary		0.580***	0.550***	0.604***	0.678***	0.695***
Degree		0.752***	0.561***	0.642***	0.535***	0.562***
Postgraduate degree		0.988***	0.710***	0.853***	0.783***	0.816***
(Ref.: Junior Cert or lower)						
Father migrant		0.611***	0.605***	0.648***	0.573***	0.579***
Urban location		0.259**	0.197*	0.188*	0.062	0.069
First-born child		0.892***	1.032***	1.035***	1.099***	1.112***
Child non-singleton		0.537*	0.694**	0.837**	0.695**	0.705**
Father has illness/disability		0.340±	0.350±	0.337±	0.234	0.227
Mother has illness/disability		0.396**	0.445**	0.397**	0.172	0.176
Father traditional gender role attitude		0.334**	0.281**	0.250*	0.178±	0.172±
Father took parental leave:						
Short (7 days or less)		0.056	0.043	0.082	0.149	0.146
Longer (8 days or more)		-0.089	-0.075	-0.032	-0.072	-0.065
(Ref.: Didn't take)						

TABLE 4.1 CONTD

Coefficient	Null model (M1)	Socio-demographic factors (M2)	Quality of attachment and parental employment (M3)	Couple relationship (M4)	Father-child relationship (M5)	Father-child activities (M6)
Quality of attachment at 9 months			-0.458***	-0.382***	-0.188***	-0.186***
Quality of couple relationship (Wave 5)				-0.122***	-0.087***	-0.085***
Time-varying factors (measured across waves)						
No. of siblings		0.339***	0.342***	0.344***	0.131**	0.125*
Financial difficulties		0.543***	0.580***	0.591***	0.486***	0.486***
Father working long hours			0.116±	0.112±	0.088	0.080
Father non-employed			-0.057	-0.064	-0.021	-0.016
Mother working full-time			0.065	0.070	0.078	0.078
Relationship quality (father report):						
Positive/close					-0.086***	-0.084***
Conflict					0.206***	0.206***
Father-child involvement						-0.024*
Variance:						
Between fathers	6.086***	6.079***	5.668***	5.382***	5.031***	5.027***
Between study waves	10.425***	9.438***	9.438***	9.404***	8.415***	8.413***
N	4,027					

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

In keeping with the descriptive analyses, paternal stress levels were highest when the child was nine months old, reduced until the age of five and increased again by nine years of age (Table 4.1). Stress levels did not vary by child gender but were somewhat higher where the child had a chronic illness or disability. This pattern was largely due to higher levels of father-child conflict for this group of children (compare Models 2 and 5).[26] Stress levels were found to increase with paternal education and were also higher among fathers with a migrant background and those living in urban areas.

Stress levels were higher in relation to first-born children and in larger families; the latter pattern was largely related to differences in the quality of the father-child relationship in larger families (compare Models 4 and 5). Fathers who had a more traditional view of the breadwinner role tended to report higher stress levels on average. Stress levels were somewhat higher where fathers themselves had an illness or disability but were also significantly higher where their wife or partner had an illness/disability, largely because of the influence on the father-child relationship quality.

Fathers who reported greater attachment with the infant at nine months continued to have lower parental stress levels for the next eight years. Some of this effect was because these fathers tended to have more positive/close and less conflictual relationships with their children (see above). However, a direct effect remained, even controlling for later relationship quality. Thus, it appears that early bonding has a protective effect on experiences of stress, even in changing circumstances.

Chapter 2 described changes in parental employment patterns over the first nine years of the child's life. These changes had little effect on experiences of parental stress. However, stress levels were slightly higher among fathers who worked longer hours (though only at the 10 per cent significance level), a pattern related to somewhat poorer quality relationships for this group. While parental employment per se did not make a difference, changes in financial difficulties were significantly related to levels of parental stress, with increasing economic strain resulting in higher stress.

As might be expected, fathers reported lower stress levels where they had a positive relationship with the child and much higher stress levels if the relationship

[26] Further research could usefully explore the extent to which these patterns vary by different types of child illness/ disability.

was more conflictual.[27] Over and above the influence of father-child relationship quality, having a more positive relationship with the child's mother was significantly related to lower stress levels. More frequent father-child activities were related to much lower stress levels, but this was largely due to the way in which such activities fostered a more positive relationship.

Interaction terms (analyses not shown here) were used to investigate whether the trajectory of stress levels was similar across different groups of fathers. In keeping with the descriptive analyses presented in Figure 4.2, increases over time in stress levels (between five and nine years of age) were greater for those in more highly educated groups compared to fathers with lower secondary qualifications. The pattern of change over time did not differ significantly by child disability or migrant status. Perhaps not surprisingly, the effect of the child being a non-singleton on paternal stress is found to be even stronger in infancy than in early or middle childhood.

The nature of the model means that we cannot conduct sensitivity analyses in the same way as in Chapter 2. However, analysis indicates no significant differences in average stress levels among fathers who subsequently left the household compared to those who remained.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has looked at the factors associated with fathers finding their parental role stressful. As for mothers, the greatest stress over the period from nine months to nine years is reported in infancy as fathers adjust to their role. Stress levels then decline to age five before increasing again between five and nine years of age.

Paternal stress levels are found to relate to other demands within and outside the household. Levels are higher where there are more children or the child is a twin or triplet but also in relation to first-born children, as fathers experience greater difficulties in adjusting to the new role. The experience of financial strain appears to spill over into relationship strain. The demands of child or maternal illness/disability also foster greater feelings of stress in relation to the parenting role.

While financial strain is a significant driver of paternal stress, the influence of other dimensions of disadvantage is less clear-cut. Indeed, fathers with higher levels of

[27] It should be noted that Model 5 relates to the period between three and five years as relationship quality was measured on a different scale at nine months. Model 6 relates to patterns at five and nine years because information on father-child activities was not collected at three years of age.

education tend to report higher stress levels, a pattern that is not accounted for by the other factors examined in the models. Further research could usefully explore whether this relates to other work demands (such as responsibility or pace) impacting on family life that are not captured by working hours alone. Qualitative research could unpack the extent to which the pattern potentially reflects differential expectations of the role of fathers among more advantaged groups, given Lareau's (2011) work on the emphasis placed by middle-class parents on active engagement in stimulating learning activities with their children.

Earlier bonding with the infant appears to have a protective role in relation to later parental stress. Not surprisingly, parental stress levels are responsive to the quality of the father-child relationship, reducing with increased feelings of closeness and increasing where relationships are more conflictual.

CHAPTER 5

Child outcomes and paternal involvement

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the extent to which a selected set of child outcomes are associated with levels of paternal involvement, the quality of the father-child relationship and levels of paternal stress. The analyses focus on three key domains in children's lives: cognitive development (Drumcondra reading test scores), involvement in physical activity (given the role of fathers in sport with their children, discussed in Chapter 2) and aspects of child wellbeing, measured using the Piers-Harris Self-Concept scale. As in Chapters 2 to 5, the analyses focus on children living with both parents over the period from infancy (nine months) to middle childhood (nine years).

5.2 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Table 5.1 looks at the factors related to reading test scores at the age of nine. For clarity, the analyses include only paternal and broader family characteristics rather than maternal factors. The models show that, within couple households, paternal resources appear to play a stronger role in cognitive development than father-child relationships and interaction, with very marked differences by paternal education, financial difficulties in infancy and, to a lesser extent, by migrant status. Children in larger families and who were non-singletons tended to have lower reading scores.

Reading scores tended to be higher where fathers had taken longer parental leave or availed of family-friendly working practices. However, these patterns are likely to reflect the occupational position of the father rather than a direct effect of leave arrangements on child cognitive development. Test scores tended to be higher where fathers worked longer hours and where mothers worked 21 to 35 hours per week. Reading scores did not vary by whether the father held a traditional view of his role.

TABLE 5.1 REGRESSION MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH DRUMCONDRA READING TEST SCORES AT NINE

Coefficient	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	97.233	98.243
Female child	1.514**	1.592**
Child has illness/disability (at 9 months)	-0.148	-0.170
Father's education:		
Leaving Cert.	3.404***	3.415***
Post-secondary	4.665***	4.633***
Degree	7.994***	7.941***
Postgrad. degree	9.631***	9.645***
(Ref.: Junior Cert)		
Father migrant	-1.945**	-1.972**
Urban location	0.467	0.523
First-born child	0.657	0.591
No. of siblings at Wave 5	-0.718*	-0.739*
Child non-singleton	-3.075*	-3.107*
Father has illness/disability at Wave 5	0.316	0.332
Mother has illness/disability at Wave 5	0.442	0.419
Traditional gender role attitude	-0.371	-0.444
Father took parental leave:		
Short (7 days +)	-0.912	-0.920
Longer (8 days +)	2.661*	2.567*
(Ref.: Didn't take)		
Availed of family-friendly work practices	0.457±	0.466±
Father at Wave 5:		
Working >40 hours	1.233*	1.227*
Non-employed	-1.199	-1.240
(Ref.: <40 hours)		
Mother at Wave 5:		
Working <20 hours	0.690	0.673
Working 21-35 hrs	2.059**	2.022**
Working >35 hours	0.755	0.767
(Ref.: non-empl.)		
Financial difficulties:		
9 months	-3.088**	-3.133**
9 years	-0.135	-0.135
Fathers' involvement with child:		
9 months	-0.082	-0.086
5 years	0.116±	0.119±
Relationship quality at 5:		
Positive/close	-0.041	-0.023
Conflict	-0.023	-0.033
Parenting stress among fathers at 5	-0.161*	-0.162*
Gets on very well with father at 9		-1.729**
R^2	7.9	8.1

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

Reading scores were slightly higher (but only at the 10 per cent significance level) where fathers were involved more frequently in activities with the child when they were five years.[28] The quality of the father-child relationship at five was not significantly related to later test scores. However, higher levels of paternal stress were associated with lower reading scores. Somewhat surprisingly, reading test scores were lower among children who described themselves as getting on 'very well' with their father. Additional analyses (not shown here) indicate that this relationship holds only for fathers with the lowest levels of educational qualifications; no significant relationship is found between child-reported relationship quality and reading scores where fathers have degree-level qualifications.

5.3 INVOLVEMENT IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Nine-year-olds were asked how many days on which they were physically active for at least an hour in the past week. Few of the paternal characteristics were significantly associated with levels of physical activity, though levels were lower where children had fathers with a migrant background and for families who experienced financial difficulties when the child was an infant (Table 5.2). Consistent with the latter pattern, levels were also somewhat lower where the father was not employed. Paternal involvement in activities or the quality of the father-child relationship (from the father's perspective) were not significantly related to the child's level of physical activity. However, levels were lower where fathers reported parenting stress and higher where the child reported they got on very well with their fathers.

[28] If looked at separately, certain father-child activities (such as reading) are significantly related to reading scores. However, the intention here is to capture the totality of father-child activities rather than specific aspects of the home learning environment.

TABLE 5.2 REGRESSION MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH NUMBER OF DAYS INVOLVED IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT NINE

Coefficient	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	5.782	5.648
Female child	-0.479***	-0.490***
Child has illness/disability (at 9 months)	-0.098	-0.095
Father's education:		
Leaving Cert.	-0.173	-0.176
Post-secondary	-0.316*	-0.312*
Degree	-0.185	-0.178
Postgrad. degree	-0.159	-0.161
(Ref.: Junior Cert)		
Father migrant	-0.393***	-0.389***
Urban location	0.175*	0.167*
First-born child	-0.159±	-0.151±
No. of siblings at Wave 5	0.008	0.010
Child non-singleton	-0.159	-0.155
Father has illness/disability at Wave 5	0.143	0.143
Mother has illness/disability at Wave 5	-0.092	-0.089
Traditional gender role attitude	-0.068	-0.059
Father took parental leave:		
Short (7 days +)	-0.008	-0.006
Longer (8 days +)	-0.275±	-0.263
(Ref.: Didn't take)		
Availed of family-friendly work practices	0.028	0.027
Father at Wave 5:		
Working >40 hours	0.004	-0.004
Non-employed	-0.292±	-0.286±
(Ref.: <40 hours)		
Mother at Wave 5:		
Working <20 hours	0.151	0.154
Working 21-35 hrs	0.147	0.153
Working >35 hours	0.076	0.076
(Ref.: non-empl.)		
Financial difficulties:		
9 months	-0.483**	-0.478**
9 years	0.049	0.049
Fathers' involvement with child:		
9 months	0.010	0.010
5 years	0.009	0.009
Relationship quality at 5:		
Positive/close	0.002	0.000
Conflict	-0.007	-0.006
Parenting stress among fathers at 5	-0.031**	-0.030**
Gets on very well with father at 9		0.221*
R^2	2.7	2.8

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

5.4 CHILD WELLBEING

Three of the subscales of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept scale are analysed here: freedom from anxiety, happiness/life satisfaction and behavioural adjustment. There is little consistent variation by socio-demographic characteristics, though the children of migrant fathers report poorer behaviour and less freedom from anxiety (in other words, more anxiety) (Table 5.3). Paternal illness or disability was not significantly related to child self-image in contrast to maternal illness/disability which was associated with poorer outcomes across all three dimensions. Child self-image was not significantly related to whether the father held more traditional views of his role.

There was very little relationship between parental employment patterns and child self-image, though happiness levels were higher where fathers had taken longer parental leave. Experience of financial strain at nine years of age was linked to lower freedom from anxiety and happiness, while the experience of challenging financial circumstances during the child's infancy was related to poorer behaviour later on.

No significant relationship was found between child self-image and the level of their fathers' involvement in activities with them. A conflictual relationship with the father at five years of age is related to significantly poorer outcomes across all three dimensions. Children who describe themselves as getting on very well with their fathers have greater freedom from anxiety, happiness and more positive behaviour.

Because of gender differences in self-concept, the models were run separately for boys and girls. Important differences in the effect of the father-child relationship were evident (Table 5.4). Father-child conflict was significantly related to poorer self-image among boys for all three dimensions examined but had no significant impact on female self-image. In contrast, getting on very well with their father was associated with enhanced self-image for both boys and girls, but the size of the effect was somewhat larger for girls in relation to freedom from anxiety and happiness.

TABLE 5.3 REGRESSION MODELS OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PIERS-HARRIS FREEDOM FROM ANXIETY, HAPPINESS AND BEHAVIOURAL ADJUSTMENT

Coefficient	Freedom from anxiety	Happiness/ life satisfaction	Behaviour
Constant	7.407	5.842	8.393
Female child	-0.213***	0.021	0.172***
Child has illness/disability (at 9 months)	0.053	-0.008	0.015
Father's education:			
Leaving Cert.	0.147±	0.063	0.081
Post-secondary	0.101	0.060	-0.004
Degree	0.210*	0.054	0.147*
Postgrad. degree	0.150	0.054	0.091
(Ref.: Junior Cert)			
Father migrant	-0.154*	-0.030	-0.109*
Urban location	-0.003	0.004	-0.006
First-born child	-0.119*	-0.024	-0.018
No. of siblings at Wave 5	0.040	0.004	0.003
Child non-singleton	-0.232	-0.138	-0.284*
Father has illness/disability	-0.109	-0.011	0.062
Mother has illness/disability	-0.132±	-0.087*	-0.150**
Traditional gender role attitude	0.054	-0.032	0.013
Father took parental leave:			
Short (7 days +)	0.183	0.002	-0.003
Longer (8 days +)	0.157	0.159*	0.042
(Ref.: Didn't take)			
Availed of family-friendly work practices	-0.016	0.010	0.017
Father at Wave 5:			
Working >40 hours	-0.032	-0.016	-0.023
Non-employed	-0.118	-0.103	-0.153±
(Ref.: <40 hours)			
Mother at Wave 5:			
Working <20 hours	-0.105	-0.053	-0.070
Working 21-35 hrs	0.006	-0.016	0.089
Working >35 hours	0.037	-0.034	0.002
(Ref.: non-empl.)			
Financial difficulties:			
9 months	-0.081	-0.091	-0.136±
9 years	-0.386***	-0.127*	-0.006
Fathers' involvement with child:			
9 months	0.010	0.004	-0.002
5 years	-0.011	-0.006	0.006
Relationship quality at 5:			
Positive/close	-0.014	-0.004	-0.005
Conflict	-0.029***	-0.018***	-0.022***
Parenting stress among fathers at 5	-0.004	-0.005	-0.002
Gets on very well with father at 9	0.436***	0.282***	0.469***
R^2	3.9	3.3	6.0

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.

TABLE 5.4 REGRESSION MODELS OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AND PIERS-HARRIS FREEDOM FROM ANXIETY, HAPPINESS AND BEHAVIOURAL ADJUSTMENT, SEPARATELY FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

Coefficient	Freedom from anxiety	Happiness/ life satisfaction	Behaviour
Father-child conflict at age 5 – boys	-0.050***	-0.029***	-0.035***
Father-child conflict at age 5 – girls	-0.005	-0.005	-0.006
Gets on very well with father at 9 – boys	0.230**	0.143**	0.462***
Gets on very well with father at 9 – girls	0.694***	0.457***	0.474***

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Waves 1 to 5.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. These models control for all of the other factors included in the models in Table 5.3.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has looked at the relationship between father-child activities and relationships and key aspects of child outcomes, including cognitive development, engagement in physical activity and self-image. Overall, paternal resources, involvement and relationship with the child accounted for a modest amount of variation in child outcomes, reflecting the range of child, family, school and neighbourhood factors influencing child development. Nonetheless, some aspects of fathers' role emerge as significant. Contrary to some previous research (see Chapter 1), no systematic relationship is evident between the level of paternal involvement in activities in two-parent families and these child outcomes. In contrast, the quality of the relationship and the level of stress experienced as a father do make a difference. Nine-year-olds whose fathers report higher levels of parental stress do worse academically and are less likely to engage in frequent physical activity. Father-child conflict is associated with poorer self-image among boys but not girls. A better-quality relationship, as reported by the child, is significantly related to less anxiety, greater happiness and better behaviour among nine-year-olds.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and implications for policy

6.1 INTRODUCTION

There is some international evidence of a trend towards greater paternal involvement in care for, and activities with, their children but often fathers remain less visible in household surveys and policy discourse about families (Goldman and Burgess, 2018; Nygren et al., 2019). The *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) study offers a unique opportunity in Ireland to provide rich insights into the nature and quality of fathers' interaction with their children, and the influence of this interaction on child outcomes, as a basis for policy development. This study draws on data on 4,090 father-child dyads from GUI Cohort '08 and charts trajectories from infancy (nine months) to middle childhood (nine years). The study findings relate mainly to families[29] where the father was present across the study waves, but analyses are also included on the quality of the relationship between children and non-resident fathers.

The report addresses the following research questions:

1. What activities do fathers engage in with their children from nine months to nine years? How does this vary by paternal characteristics (such as education, employment status, income, social class and take-up of parental leave) and child characteristics (gender, illness/disability)?
2. What is the quality of relationships between fathers and children, as reported by fathers and (at age nine) children?
3. What factors are associated with parental stress among fathers?
4. What is the relationship between the nature of the father-child relationship (activities, relationship quality and parental stress) and selected child outcomes; namely, cognitive development, physical activity and wellbeing?

This chapter outlines the main findings of the study and discusses the implications for policy and practice.

6.2 MAIN FINDINGS

Table 6.1 summarises the main findings emerging from the study, indicating commonalities as well as differences in the factors associated with paternal involvement, the quality of the father-child relationship and parenting stress.

[29] The numbers of lone fathers and same-sex couples in the GUI sample are too small for analysis in this study.

TABLE 6.1 SUMMARY OF ANALYSES OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH FATHER-CHILD INVOLVEMENT, RELATIONSHIP AND PARENTING STRESS

	Father-child involvement			Father-child relationship				Parenting stress
	9 months	5 years	9 years	Attachment 9 months, father report	Closeness 3-9 years, father report	Quality of rel. 9 years, child report	Conflict 3-9 years, father report	9 months – 9 years
Father's education	Lower where father has degree or postgraduate degree	Higher where father has higher levels of education	Higher where father has higher levels of education	Lower where father has degree or postgraduate degree	Most positive for those with lower secondary education	NS	NS	Higher where father has higher levels of education
Father migrant	NS	Higher for migrant fathers	Higher for migrant fathers	NS	NS	NS	More conflict for migrant fathers	Higher for migrant fathers
Urban-rural location	NS	Higher in urban areas	NS	Lower in urban areas	Lower in urban areas	NS	More conflict in urban areas	Higher in urban areas
Child gender	NS	Lower for daughters	Lower for daughters	NS	More positive with daughters	More positive with daughters	NS	NS
Child age	NA	NA	NA	NA	Less positive at 9 years	NA	Declines with age	U-shaped pattern, highest at 9 months
Child illness/ disability	NS	NS	NS	NS	Slightly less positive if child has illness	NS	More conflict if child has illness	Higher if child has illness
Size of family	Lower if child has more siblings	Lower if child has more siblings	Lower if child has more siblings	Lower if child has more siblings	More positive if child has more siblings	NS	Less conflict if child has more siblings	Higher where child is first-born and for larger families
Non-singleton child	Higher if non-singleton	NS	Slightly higher if non-singleton	NS	NS	NS	NS	Higher if non-singleton
Father illness/ disability	Lower if illness severe enough not to be employed	NS	Lower if father has illness	NS	Less positive if father has illness	NS	More conflict if father has illness	Slightly higher if father ill

TABLE 6.1 SUMMARY OF ANALYSES OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH FATHER-CHILD INVOLVEMENT, RELATIONSHIP AND PARENTING STRESS

	Father-child involvement			Father-child relationship				Parenting stress
	9 months	**5 years**	**9 years**	**Attachment 9 months, father report**	**Closeness 3-9 years, father report**	**Quality of rel. 9 years, child report**	**Conflict 3-9 years, father report**	**9 months – 9 years**
Mother illness/ disability	Somewhat lower if mother has illness	NS	NS	NS	NS	Slighter more positive if mother has illness	More conflict if mother has illness	Higher if father ill
More traditional view of fatherhood	Lower if more traditional views	Lower if more traditional views	Lower if more traditional views	Slightly lower if more traditional views	Slightly less positive if more traditional views	Less positive if more traditional views	More conflict if traditional views	Higher if more traditional views
Father's take-up of parental/ family-friendly (FF) work practices	NS	Slightly higher if took longer parental leave; higher if availed of FF work practices	Higher if availed of FF work practices	NS	NS	Slightly more positive if took longer parental leave	NS	NS
Father's employment status	Lowest for working >40 hours, highest for non-employed	Lower if working >40 hours at 9 months; reduces with increased hours and increases with reduced hours	Lower if working >40 hours at 9 months and 9 years	Lower if working >40 hours	NS	NS	NS	NS
Mother's employment status	Lowest if still on maternity leave, highest if working >35 hours	Higher if working >35 hours at 9 months; increases with increased hours	Higher if working longer hours at 9 months	Higher if on maternity leave, lower if working >35 hours	NS	NS	Less conflict if mother working >35 hours	NS
Financial difficulties	-	-	-	NS	NS	NS	-	Higher if financial strain
Father-child involvement	NA	Higher if higher earlier involvement	Higher if higher earlier involvement	Higher if higher involvement	More positive if higher involvement	More positive if more involved	Less conflict if higher involvement	Lower where higher involvement

Notes: The results relate to models with the full set of controls (see Chapters 2 to 5). NA = not applicable. NS = not significant.

6.2.1 Father-child interaction and quality of relationship

The measures of father-child interaction in the GUI study reflect the developmental stage of the child, capturing care and play at nine months and focusing more on play, home learning and activities/outings at five and nine years of age. Mothers were reported by fathers to take the primary role in personal care of the infant such as bathing and dressing them. However, fathers reported an equal sharing of tasks in relation to eight of the 14 activities asked about. It should be noted that only fathers were asked about the division of tasks so the responses may overstate levels of paternal involvement (see Shelton and John, 1996; CSO, 2021). At five years of age, fathers frequently read to the child, played with the child with toys/games and engaged in sport or physical activity with the child. The frequency of engagement in father-child activities declined between five and nine years of age, though engaging in sport/physical activity, listening to the child read and playing with the child remained regular activities. The findings indicate that patterns of involvement tend to be established early, with higher involvement in infancy associated with greater engagement in middle childhood.

Fathers indicate high levels of attachment to their infant and high levels of closeness to their children in early and middle childhood. Levels of conflict with the child are described as low. Closeness declines somewhat as the child grows older, most likely reflecting the less frequent involvement in parent-child activities and the growing importance of friends and structured activities for nine-year-olds (see McNamara et al., 2021). Four-fifths of nine-year-olds describe themselves as getting on 'very well' with their fathers and most indicate that they would go to them for help with any problems. As for mothers, paternal stress levels are medium to low, being highest in infancy as fathers adjust to the role before declining into early childhood and increasing somewhat between five and nine years of age.

Father-child involvement and closeness were closely intertwined, with greater attachment to the infant and – later – the child, where fathers were more involved with parent-child activities. Involvement also reduced the incidence of father-child conflict. Involvement and more positive relationships were associated with an increased likelihood that children would go to their fathers for help with a problem.

6.2.2 Father and child factors

The study examines how father-child interaction and relationship quality vary by a range of child, father and household factors. There was little variation in paternal involvement by child gender in infancy, but at five and nine years of age, fathers were likely to engage in activities more frequently with their sons than with their daughters. In spite of this gender difference, nine-year-old girls were more likely than boys to report getting on very well with their fathers. Child chronic illness or disability did not affect levels of paternal involvement, but fathers reported higher

levels of conflict with their children and higher levels of parental stress in these cases. Parental illness (both mothers' and fathers') was linked to higher levels of conflict.

In infancy, fathers with higher levels of education were less involved in the care of their children, largely because of parental employment patterns (see below). At five and nine years of age, highly educated fathers were much more likely to be frequently involved in activities and outings with their children. Overall, fathers with higher levels of education tended to report somewhat lower levels of attachment to, and closeness with, their children as well as indicating higher levels of parental stress. Fathers from a migrant background tended to be more involved in activities with their children but also reported slightly higher levels of conflict and parental stress. In keeping with previous international research (Baxter, 2014; Bulanda, 2004), fathers with more traditional gender role attitudes were less involved with their children and tended to report a more conflictual relationship with them as well as higher levels of parental stress. Children were also less likely to report getting on very well with fathers who held more traditional views.

6.2.3 Household factors

Levels of paternal involvement reflected broader resources and constraints in the household. In keeping with previous research (see, for example, Downey, 2001), fathers with more children were less involved in the care of, and activities with, the study child. However, fathers appeared to be responsive to the additional workload resulting from having twins or triplets, with a greater involvement in infant care in these circumstances. Levels of infant attachment were somewhat lower in larger families but reported levels of closeness in early and middle childhood were somewhat higher while conflict was significantly lower. From the child's perspective, getting on with their father did not vary by family size but those in larger families were somewhat less likely to say they would go to their father with a problem. Paternal stress levels tended to be higher in larger families and where there were non-singletons. Financial strain emerged as an important driver of paternal stress levels but was not associated with (changes in) levels of involvement or quality of the father-child relationship.

Patterns of paid employment were clearly associated with involvement in care in infancy, with greater involvement where fathers were not employed and/or mothers were working full-time and less involvement where fathers were working more than 40 hours per week. Long working hours among fathers during infancy continued to have an influence on later involvement at five and nine years of age.

At the time of birth of the GUI study children in 2008, fathers were entitled to 14 weeks of unpaid parental leave but not to any paid paternity or parental leave.

Twelve per cent of those surveyed had taken parental leave by the time the child was nine months old, roughly evenly divided between periods of seven days or fewer and eight or more days. The level of involvement in care for, and activities with, the infant did not vary by take-up of parental leave. When the child was five, fathers were asked whether they had availed of any family-friendly work practices in the past year, with the most common such practice being flexible working hours (23 per cent). Having availed of such practices was significantly related to greater paternal involvement at both five and nine years. Interestingly, fathers whose spouses/partners were still on maternity leave when the infant was nine months old were even less likely to be involved in infant care than fathers whose spouses were not in paid employment.

6.2.4 Non-resident fathers

Nine-year-olds not living with their fathers were less likely to report getting on very well with them than those living with their fathers, though the majority (65 per cent) of those who responded indicated a positive relationship. The relationship was better where contact (especially staying over) was frequent and where the mother had a better relationship with the father.

6.2.5 Fathers and child outcomes

The study looked at the relationship between the level and nature of paternal involvement and a set of child outcomes which captured key domains in their lives, namely reading test scores, levels of physical activity, and child self-image. A summary of the main findings is presented in Table 6.2.

Reading test scores at nine years of age were strongly related to paternal resources in terms of education and financial difficulties, being much lower where levels of education were lower and experiences of financial strain more prevalent. There was little variation by other aspects of father-child interaction, though scores were lower where fathers reported greater stress in relation to parenting. Somewhat surprisingly, children who said they got on very well with their fathers tended to have lower reading test scores, though this pattern holds only for fathers with the lowest educational levels. Therefore, the pattern most likely reflects the influence of paternal resources on educational development rather than the impact of the quality of the relationship per se.

TABLE 6.2 SUMMARY OF ANALYSES OF THE PATERNAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILD OUTCOMES AT 9 YEARS OF AGE

	Reading test scores	Physical activity	Freedom from anxiety	Happiness/life satisfaction	Behaviour
Father's education	Higher where father has higher levels of education	NS	NS	Lower where father has degree or postgraduate degree	Most positive for those with lower secondary education
Father migrant	Lower where migrant father	Lower where migrant father	Lower where migrant father	NS	Lower where migrant father
Father illness/disability	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
More traditional view of fatherhood	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Father's take-up of parental/family-friendly (FF) work practices	Higher if took longer parental leave; slightly higher if availed of FF work practices	NS	NS	Higher if took longer parental leave	NS
Father's employment status	Higher if working >40 hours	NS	NS	NS	Slightly lower if father non-employed
Father-child involvement	Slightly higher if more involvement	NS	NS	NS	NS
Father-child relationship	NS for father report, lower if child has positive report	NS for father report, higher if child positive report	Lower for boys if high conflict; higher for both boys and girls if positive child report	Lower for boys if high conflict; higher for both boys and girls if positive child report	Lower for boys if high conflict; higher for both boys and girls if positive child report
Parenting stress	Lower with higher stress levels	Lower with higher stress levels	NS	NS	NS

Note: The findings relate to models with the full set of controls (see Chapter 5).

Levels of engagement with physical activity, as reported by the nine-year-old child, are lower where parenting stress levels are higher, and higher where the child gets on well with their father. Similarly, getting on well with their father is associated with more positive child self-image in terms of freedom from anxiety, happiness/life satisfaction and behaviour. Father-child conflict has a negative relationship with child self-image for boys.

6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The study findings have implications for policy in a number of domains, principally policies designed to facilitate the care responsibilities of fathers in paid employment and family support policies more generally.

6.3.1 Leave for parents and employment arrangements

Policy in Ireland has been characterised as assuming a male breadwinner model and Ireland has been ranked low in comparison to other European countries in the provision of family-friendly policies (Rush, 2011; Chzhen et al., 2019). There have been some recent developments which have improved this situation, with a statutory entitlement of two weeks of paid paternity leave paid at a flat rate (since 2016), an extension of paid leave for parents to five weeks (from 2021) and extending unpaid leave for parents to 26 weeks (from 2020). The paid parent's leave 'is deliberately non-transferrable between parents to ensure that both parents are encouraged and supported in taking time out from work to spend time with their child'.[30] The Work-Life Balance Directive entered into force in 2019 with three years for Member States to comply; this directive provides enhanced rights to leave and flexible working for parents and carers (DCYA, 2018).

There are no time-series figures available on the take-up of paternity leave but a number of estimates have been made. Köppe (2019) estimates take-up of 36-50 per cent over the period 2017 to 2018. For the period 2016-2019, the CSO (2020) has produced estimates of the numbers on maternity and paternity benefits per 100 employees aged 15 to 44 years of age. Rates were much higher for maternity than for paternity leave (5.3 compared with 3.1 in 2019). They estimate that 45 per cent of eligible fathers did not take up paternity benefit in 2018. Non-take-up rates were higher in smaller firms and in the hospitality industry (CSO, 2020). In 2020, 24,726 claims were made for paternity benefit,[31] meaning that payment was made in relation to 44 per cent of children born that year.[32]

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30 https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2021-06-24/344/?highlight%5B0%5D=parental&highlight%5B1%5D=leave.

31 https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2021-05-18/105/?highlight%5B0%5D=paternity&highlight%5B1%5D=benefit.

32 Own calculation based on CSO figures for total number of births in 2020. It should be noted that these figures include children whose fathers are not in paid employment or not eligible for paternity benefit because they do not have sufficient insurance coverage. In addition, some fathers may not be involved in the care of their children.

The fact that payments are made at a flat rate may act as a barrier to take-up, though employers may choose to top up the payment to the full salary level. Rates of payment in Ireland are found to compare unfavourably with those in many other European countries (Newman and Ryan, 2020). Again, no systematic evidence on the extent of employer top-ups is available; it is standard practice in the public sector[33] but, using IBEC survey data, Köppe (2019) estimates that only 37 per cent of private employers do so, usually larger and foreign-owned companies. The Department of Social Protection publishes figures on the number of parent's leave payments awarded but these are not disaggregated by gender so no systematic evidence is available on the take-up of paid (or indeed unpaid) leave for parents. Newman and Ryan (2020) note that the fact that salary top-ups are not paid in respect of paid parent's leave in the public sector is likely to impact on take-up rates.

International research has shown that paid leave for fathers can lead to them being more involved in caring for, and engaging with, their children (Petts and Knoester, 2018; Schaber et al., 2021) but that fathers' take-up of leave is related to financial circumstances (Blum et al., 2018). Other barriers to fathers' take-up of parental leave revealed in studies in other jurisdictions include an unsupportive work culture, (perceived) policy complexity, and gendered assumptions about caring roles (Eerola et al., 2019; Birkett and Forbes, 2019; Kaufman, 2018). The current study findings relate to a cohort of children born in a period before the introduction of universal paid paternity leave. A small number (12 per cent) did take (unpaid) leave in the first nine months of their child's life; the periods involved were short and take-up was not significantly related to their level of involvement with their children. The recent extension of paid paternity and parent's leave may contribute to greater paternal involvement in infancy, which the study findings indicate sets the tone for later father-child engagement and relationships. However, challenges remain regarding the significant mismatch between the duration of paternity and maternity leave, potentially reinforcing a gendered division of care responsibilities. Furthermore, the flat rate nature of payments (in the absence of employer top-ups) appears to act as a disincentive to take-up for some groups of fathers. The unpaid element of maternity leave is found to produce inequalities in take-up between women in higher and lower occupational positions in Ireland (Russell et al., 2009); unpaid or low paid leave for fathers is also likely to reinforce existing social class inequalities. The recent Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (2021) recommended increases in payment levels to promote take-up. Further research on fathers and the factors that facilitate or block their take-up of leave in Ireland would enhance the evidence base for policy development in this area.

33 Figures for the Civil Service indicate that the number of women taking parental leave is much higher than the number of men (DCYA, 2018). However, these figures cannot be used to calculate take-up rates as they relate to all civil servants rather than parents with children in the specified age range.

The current study also looked at the extent to which fathers availed of family-friendly work practices offered by their employer. This information was collected at Wave 3 (when the child was five years of age) and relates to the previous year, so does not provide a complete picture of take-up over the child's life. Over a third (35 per cent) of the fathers surveyed had availed of at least one form of family-friendly working arrangement in the past year. The most common practice availed of was flexible working hours (23 per cent) while 14 per cent were allowed to work from home some or all of the time. Other practices related to time off (paid or unpaid) to tend to a sick child or during summer holidays. Taking advantage of such flexibility was found to lead to greater paternal involvement. While fathers who were more inclined to care for their child might be more likely to avail of such practices, the pattern held even taking account of these fathers having less traditional views prior to the decision. Thus, family-friendly work practices do appear to facilitate paternal involvement. However, access to, and take-up of, such practices differ across groups of fathers. In the GUI sample, fathers with lower educational levels are more likely to say their employers provide practices such as flexible working hours but availing of such practices is more common among more highly educated groups.[34] Further research would perhaps be useful in unpacking the complex relationship between provision and 'choosing' to avail of such practices. The type of flexibility is also important. Previous research in Ireland suggested that men were more likely to take up working from home options but that this was associated with longer working hours and greater work-family conflict (Russell et al., 2009).

Long working hours, particularly in the child's first year, had a negative impact on fathers' level of involvement with children. There is strong legislation on working hours in Ireland (through the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997); however, a long-hours culture continues to be problematic in some workplaces. Certain occupations, such as managers, and those working in manufacturing and the transport sector are more likely to work long hours (Russell et al., 2018). Organisational level responses and enforcement of working time regulations are crucial in reducing excessive working hours, with such enforcement highly challenging in a context of remote or blended working.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a good deal of discussion about the future nature of paid employment, with the *Remote Work Strategy* (Government of Ireland, 2021) promising legislation to give employees the right to request remote working. While working from home increased during the pandemic (GUI Study Team, 2021), not all groups of employees could do so. Furthermore, there is

[34] This pattern may relate to lower educated fathers being on lower incomes, thus making it more difficult to avail of unpaid leave, for example.

emerging evidence internationally that patterns of combining work and care during the pandemic resulted in a more rather than less gendered division of labour (Xue and McMunn, 2021; Zamberlan et al., 2021).

6.3.2 Family support policy

Family support policies in Ireland have moved towards a greater focus on early prevention as well as integrated service provision with the child/young person at its core (Tusla, 2013a; 2013b; DCYA, 2016). However, implementation faces ongoing challenges around resourcing (McGregor and Devaney, 2020) as well as parental awareness of available supports (Rochford et al., 2014). Media reports largely focus on child protection, which is likely to influence public perceptions of the nature of available family support services (O'Connor et al., 2021). It has been argued that supports for families tend to focus on mothers rather than fathers (McKeown, 2001). As in other Northern European countries, social work practice in Ireland has tended to focus on mothers, with fathers being much less visible as carers (Nygren et al., 2018; see also Ferguson and Hogan, 2004). Ferguson and Hogan (2004) highlight the importance of including fathers in order to bring about better outcomes for children. An international review (Maxwell et al., 2012) has pointed to the importance of early involvement, flexibility of provision (e.g. opening hours) and a use of activity-based approaches as important elements of successful engagement.

Where fathers are considered in family support policies, in Ireland, as elsewhere, these policies tend to be targeted towards 'vulnerable' fathers (Ferguson and Hogan, 2004; Rush, 2011). Furthermore, supports for the parents of school-age children are often channelled through the home-school-community liaison element of the DEIS programme for schools serving socio-economically disadvantaged communities (Weir et al., 2018). However, the findings of the current study indicate a complex relationship between father-child relations and socio-economic disadvantage. In early and middle childhood, more advantaged fathers are more likely to engage in activities and outings with their children but also report less close relationships and feel more stressed as parents. At the same time, parental stress is exacerbated by financial strain, indicating the importance of locating family support policies within the context of broader anti-poverty strategies. A further issue emerging from the study findings is the dynamic nature of fathering. As for mothers, the level of involvement, the quality of the relationship and the stress associated with the role all change as the child develops and in response to the broader context of employment and social networks.

The challenge, in policy terms, is to provide information and support that is tailored to different groups of fathers at different stages of their children's lives. DCEDIY and the HSE provide a good deal of online information and support for parents. The language used is inclusive, referring to 'parents' rather than 'mothers' or

'fathers'; however, research could usefully be conducted on whether fathers might prefer and be more likely to use tailored support and advice.[35] The importance of experiences in the early years have been given renewed emphasis with the whole-of-government First 5 Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2019), which aims, among other objectives, to streamline and improve information and guidance for parents to help them form strong relationships with their children and promote their development, including early learning. The implementation of this strategy could usefully provide information targeted towards fathers emphasising the importance of their role and the quality of their relationship with the child in shaping children's experiences and outcomes. As part of the strategy, DCEDIY are currently leading on the development of a national model of parenting support services in order to provide a more coherent approach that improves parental access. Consultation as part of this process has indicated that parents are generally unaware of services and supports in their local area and feel largely unsupported in their role as parents (Hickey and Leckey, 2021; see also DCEDIY, 2021). A more integrated model of family support with clear access points for parents would clearly benefit fathers and mothers but, in this context, it would be worth investigating the potential for targeted support for fathers.

In conclusion, the study presents new findings on the crucial role that fathers play in the lives of their children. Future research could usefully look at the way in which father-child relationships continue to evolve into adolescence and early adulthood. The release of GUI data on the perspectives of non-resident fathers will provide a useful foundation for the exploration of fathers and children who no longer live together. A feasibility study is currently underway regarding the potential for a new birth cohort study in Ireland. Such a study could build upon the findings in this report to provide further insights into the relative roles of mothers and fathers by collecting comparable measures of their involvement in tasks and activities with their children from infancy onwards, and by looking more explicitly at the way in which gender role attitudes could influence such involvement.

[35] Hartas (2014) makes the related point that the use of gender-neutral language in family policy may conceal gender inequality and serve to marginalise women.

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APPENDIX: TABLES

TABLE A.1 REGRESSION MODEL OF FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN TASKS AND ACTIVITIES AT NINE MONTHS OLD (INCLUDING COUPLES WHO SUBSEQUENTLY SEPARATED)

Coefficient	Socio-demographic factors (M1)	Family resources (M2)	Attitudes and behaviours (M3)	Parental employment (M4)
Constant	23.373	23.953	24.266	23.506
Female infant	-0.192*	-0.180±	-0.167±	-0.139
Child has illness/disability	0.040	0.035	-0.001	-0.002
Father's education:				
Leaving Cert.	0.178	0.026	0.051	0.058
Post-secondary	0.163	-0.007	0.051	0.116
Degree	-0.183	-0.379*	-0.295±	-0.099
Postgraduate degree	-0.201	-0.438*	-0.271	-0.004
(Ref.: Junior Cert or lower)				
Father migrant	-0.087	-0.092	0.091	-0.112
No. of siblings at time of survey		-0.442***	-0.439***	-0.272***
Child non-singleton		1.047***	0.950***	1.073***
Father has illness/disability		-0.041	-0.025	-0.338±
Mother has illness/disability		-0.350*	-0.395**	-0.239±
Traditional gender role attitude			-0.586***	-0.448***
Child ever breastfed			-0.217*	-0.254**
Child currently breastfed			-1.278***	-0.929***
Father took parental leave:				
Short (7 days or less)			0.152	0.267
Longer (8 days or more)			0.475*	0.446*
(Ref.: Didn't take)				
Father's employment status:				
Working long (>40) hours				-1.008***
Non-employed				1.826***
(Ref.: working <= 40 hours)				
Mother's employment status:				
Employed but still on maternity leave				-0.551**
Working <20 hours				0.572***
Working 21-35 hours				1.443***
Working >35 hours				2.167***
(Ref.: non-employed)				
Father left household after Wave 1				-0.119
Adjusted R^2	0.2	1.8	3.7	14.6
N			5,621	

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 1.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

TABLE A.2 REGRESSION MODEL OF FREQUENCY OF INVOLVEMENT OF FATHER IN ACTIVITIES AT FIVE YEARS OF AGE (WAVE 3) (INCLUDING COUPLES WHO SUBSEQUENTLY SEPARATED)

	Model 6
Constant	19.157
Female child	-0.541***
Child has illness/disability	-0.018
Father's education:	
Leaving Cert.	0.986***
Post-secondary	1.360***
Degree	2.123***
Postgraduate degree	2.381***
(Ref.: Junior Cert or lower)	
Father migrant	0.301*
Urban area	0.544***
No. of siblings at five-year wave	-0.811***
Child non-singleton	0.137
Father has illness/disability at Wave 1	-0.072
Mother has illness/disability at Wave 1	0.075
Traditional gender role attitude	-0.280*
Father took parental leave:	
Short (7 days or less)	-0.140
Longer (8 days or more)	0.204
(Ref.: Didn't take)	
Father's employment status at Wave 1:	
Working long (>40) hours	-0.755***
Non-employed	0.188
(Ref.: working <40 hours)	
Mother's employment status at Wave 1:	
Working <20 hours	0.286±
Working 21-35 hours	-0.056
Working >35 hours	0.104
(Ref.: non-employed)	
Father availed of family-friendly work practices	0.440***
Father increased hours	-0.510**
Father reduced hours	0.931***
Mother increased hours	0.280*
Mother reduced hours	-0.147
Father became ill/disabled	-0.364
Mother became ill/disabled	-0.403*
Fathers' involvement with child at Wave 1	0.205***
Father left household after Wave 3	-0.090
Adjusted R^2	15.7
N	4,841

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 3.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

TABLE A.3 REGRESSION MODEL OF QUALITY OF PATERNAL ATTACHMENT TO INFANT AT NINE MONTHS OLD (INCLUDING COUPLES WHO SUBSEQUENTLY SEPARATED)

Coefficient	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	22.908	22.902
Female infant	0.059	0.059
Child has illness/disability	-0.001	-0.001
Father's education:		
Leaving Cert.	-0.051	-0.049
Post-secondary	-0.056	-0.054
Degree	-0.224**	-0.220**
Postgraduate degree	-0.340***	-0.336***
(Ref.: Junior Cert or lower)		
Father migrant	-0.030	-0.032
Urban location	-0.149***	-0.151**
Financial difficulties	0.018	0.016
No. of siblings Study Child has at Wave 1	-0.071***	-0.070**
Child non-singleton	0.101	0.099
Father has illness/disability	0.036	0.031
Mother has illness/disability	-0.012	-0.012
Traditional gender role attitude	-0.074±	-0.075±
Child ever breastfed	-0.043	-0.044
Child currently breastfed	-0.059	-0.058
Father took parental leave:		
Short (7 days or less)	-0.058	-0.057
Longer (8 days or more)	0.030	0.030
(Ref.: Didn't take)		
Father's employment status:	-0.002	-0.003
Working long (>40) hours	-0.026	-0.029
Non-employed		
(Ref.: working <40 hours)		
Mother's employment status:		
Currently on maternity leave	0.169*	0.171*
Working <20 hours	-0.175**	-0.174**
Working 21-35 hours	-0.124*	-0.123*
Working >35 hours	-0.156**	-0.155**
(Ref.: non-employed)		
Fathers' involvement in care/activities with child	0.067***	0.067***
Father subsequently left household		0.061
% variance explained	3.7	3.7
N	5,619	

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohort '08, Wave 1.

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