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> Giving New Zealand families a voice *Te reo o te whānau*

RESEARCH REPORT NO 5/09
DECEMBER 2009

supporting kiwi dads

ROLE AND NEEDS OF NEW ZEALAND FATHERS

A FAMILIES COMMISSION REPORT

The Families Commission was established under the Families Commission Act 2003 and commenced operations on 1 July 2004. Under the Crown Entities Act 2004, the Commission is designated as an autonomous Crown entity.

Our main role is to act as an advocate for the interests of families generally (rather than individual families).

Our specific functions under the Families Commission Act 2003 are to:

> encourage and facilitate informed debate about families

> increase public awareness and promote better understanding of matters affecting families

> encourage and facilitate the development and provision of government policies that promote and serve the interests of families

> consider any matter relating to the interests of families referred to us by any Minister of the Crown

> stimulate and promote research into families, for example by funding and undertaking research

> consult with, or refer matters to, other official bodies or statutory agencies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Families Commission wishes to thank the 1,721 fathers from throughout New Zealand who took the time to participate in this research; Research First for conducting the survey and writing the first draft of this report; Cathy Willowstarr for drafting the literature review; and Paul Callister, Warwick Pudney, and Anne Kerslake Hendricks for reviewing drafts.

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Giving New Zealand families a voice *Te reo o te whānau*

ISSN 1177-3545 (Print)
ISSN 1178-1289 (Online)

ISBN 978-0-478-34916-0 (Print)
ISBN 978-0-478-34917-7 (Online)

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A FAMILIES COMMISSION REPORT

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FAMILIES COMMISSION

CARL DAVIDSON AND PENNY PALMER
RESEARCH FIRST LTD

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

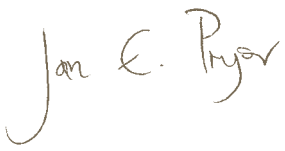
PREFACE

Shortly after the Families Commission was formed, we decided that one of our priorities should be to support families in their parenting role. We consulted widely with parents so we could understand the issues they felt were important, and identified areas where the Commission might be able to make a difference for families through our advocacy. We found, however, that we were hearing almost exclusively from mothers. We were missing the voices of fathers. This was not good enough; we were determined to learn directly from fathers how they saw their role and what issues affected them. We found other organisations were thinking along similar lines and we partnered with some of them in our initial approaches to fathers. Together, we organised two well-attended gatherings of fathers in Wellington and Auckland which we called the 'Fathering Conversations'. The 70 fathers who came to these Conversations were pleased to have a chance to talk about fathering issues, especially as they felt little attention had been given to these issues in the past. They gave us a real insight into their experiences of raising children.

The fathers who came to the Fathering Conversations were, however, not representative of Kiwi fathers generally. For one thing, they were older than the average father. We decided, therefore, to carry out a large survey of fathers to check out the issues that the Fathering Conversations had raised. Before doing that we did a literature review, from which we gathered some additional topics that we wanted to include in the survey. We are very pleased to present the results of the survey in this report.

There is a common feeling among fathers that their fathering role has been given little attention in research and policy terms. Our literature review shows that while there has been some work done in this area, fathers are justified in feeling somewhat neglected. Much of the work has been small-scale and patchy, carried out by dedicated individuals, rather than substantial pieces of work funded by Government.[1] This report partially redresses the balance. From our advocacy for fathers that will follow this report we hope that attention to fathering issues will build a momentum which has been lacking in the past.

Readers of this report will see that fathers make an important contribution to raising children. While children may be raised successfully without a father in their lives, there are distinct advantages for children with engaged and supportive fathers. The men who responded to our survey feel they were doing a good job of fathering, but many of them also felt they needed more support for the role than they were currently getting. They were also concerned about negative views of fathers, in the media and from society generally. Fathers are deserving of our support. The Families Commission will continue to do what it can to see that fathers are given the assistance and recognition they need.



Dr Jan Pryor
Chief Commissioner

[1] We acknowledge the work of the Office of the Children's Commissioner carried out in the 1990s.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 THE FATHERING CONTEXT

Fathers and fathering have been somewhat neglected in research on families. As far as we can discern, there has been no previous substantial representative survey of New Zealand fathers. We know little about the circumstances of our fathers and their support needs, despite overseas research showing that families receive enormous benefits from loving fathers. Research also shows that fathers have changed over time; they are now more likely to engage with their children, and less likely to be aloof disciplinarians. These changes appear to have caused some uncertainty over what role fathers should play. A survey of the general population a decade ago reported that the main barrier to becoming an engaged father was the traditional attitudes held by fathers themselves, their partners and society in general.

The Families Commission has been investigating issues related to parenting since 2005. When we have consulted with parents, mostly mothers have responded. We were missing the views of fathers, and so we set up consultations specifically with them. With this focus, we had no difficulty getting a good turnout of fathers, and they provided us with perspectives on modern-day fatherhood, and the issues that concern them. This was invaluable information, but we needed to find out how representative their views were. The survey described in this report has provided us with the views of a larger number of fathers, and it shows that for some issues their views are different from the small groups of fathers who attended the consultations.

1.2 RESEARCH GOALS AND DESIGN

This report presents the results of a survey of 1,721 New Zealand fathers. The goal of the survey was to provide us with a sound base from which we could advocate support for fathering. The survey covered the following areas:

> the roles that fathers play

> how these roles may have changed since the last generation

> where fathers get their support, and what support they need

> what helps and hinders fathers.

The survey had a response rate of 30 percent. The comparatively large sample size gives some robustness to the results, although the response rate means that we cannot be completely certain that the results are truly representative of all New Zealand fathers.

1.3 THE ROLE OF FATHERS

The first part of the survey addressed the roles that fathers play in New Zealand today. The survey showed that:

> on average, fathers spend about 37 hours a week in the company of their children

> fathers were involved in a full range of activities with their children, such as eating and playing together, helping with homework, reading stories and changing nappies

> fathers were heavily involved in family chores, which generally took up all or most of their spare time

- nearly half of fathers said that they shared responsibility for household chores 50/50 with their partners; approximately a third said that their partners had the main responsibility for these chores; and the remainder of fathers (one in six) said that they had the main responsibility for these chores
- fathers were usually responsible for chores around the property
- the majority (68 percent) of fathers stated they would like to spend more time with their children.

1.4 APPROACHES TO FATHERING

The second part of the survey asked fathers about their style of fathering, and how this differed from the approach of their own fathers. The survey showed that:

- fathers most commonly described themselves as a provider to their family, and at the same time, friend and playmate to their children, supportive partner, coach and carer or nurturer
- around one-third of fathers included rule-maker or disciplinarian in their description of their roles
- compared with their own fathers, many of the fathers surveyed stated that they were more engaged with their children, and a smaller proportion said they were less strict.

1.5 ROLE MODELS, ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Fathers were asked where they learnt how to be a father, and where they got information and support from.

- The majority of fathers said that fathering was instinctive, or something they just picked up; in other words, they learnt by doing.
- Other fathers said they had learnt the role from their own fathers or some other male relative.
- Most fathers did not talk with anyone about how to be a father. A smaller proportion talked to a friend or their partner.
- Somewhat less than half of the fathers had read something about fathering, fewer had attended a course on fathering and comparatively few had used some sort of support group.
- Around half of the fathers in this survey were able to take parental leave from work following the birth of their child, and about three-quarters were able to take special leave when their child was sick.

1.6 FATHERS' SUPPORT NEEDS

This part of the survey asked fathers if sufficient information on fathering was available; whether they thought more fathering courses were a good idea; what other support needs fathers had; and whether they were comfortable when interacting with support services.

- About a third of the fathers stated that they thought there was sufficient information on fathering, a third were unsure and a quarter thought that there was insufficient information.
- Close to three-quarters thought that it would be a good idea to provide more courses for fathers, particularly if they were provided by a community group, and were close to home, or at a local school or church.
- Few fathers wanted a fathering course available at work.
- Almost all were comfortable with their experiences of interacting with child-focused services.
- Previous research has shown that child and family support services are used to dealing with mothers, and some do not always deal well with fathers. Research has suggested ways in which these services could adapt themselves to the needs of fathers. The fathers in this survey said they did not feel uncomfortable when interacting with these services.
- Many fathers found antenatal classes irrelevant to their role as fathers.

1.7 SATISFACTION WITH FATHERING, BARRIERS AND SOCIETY'S LACK OF RECOGNITION

The final part of the survey asked fathers to reflect on their fatherhood experiences.

- The fathers generally believed they were doing a satisfactory (or better than satisfactory) job of being fathers.
- About a third said that spending more time with their children would be the most significant way they could improve their performance as fathers.
- The most commonly stated barrier to being a better father was work commitments.
- More than 40 percent of fathers said they did not have an opportunity to take parental leave. Other research has indicated that bonding with babies at this early stage is associated with higher levels of engagement with the children as they grow older.
- Just under half (49 percent) of the fathers in this survey felt that New Zealand society did not recognise the importance of fathers and the majority (60 percent) thought the media portrayed fathers in a poor light. Our other consultations with fathers have indicated that this perception is related to the focus on mothers of some child-focused organisations; the portrayal of fathers in TV sitcoms as neglectful, irresponsible or missing; occasional negative imagery of fathers in advertisements; and the beliefs of some individuals, and the rules imposed by some organisations, that suggest that all men pose a risk of paedophilia or of violence towards their partners and children.

1.8 STEPFATHERS, SINGLE FATHERS AND SEPARATED FATHERS

> All three groups were heavily engaged with their children. The number of hours that separated fathers spent on average with their children was naturally lower, but sufficiently high to dispel the myth that children in separated households are typically raised by only one parent.

> These three groups of fathers have more need for support than fathers generally – more than two-thirds of each group indicated that some sort of support service would be of assistance to them.

> A much smaller percentage of separated fathers and stepfathers than of other fathers had attended a course on fathering.

> Fewer single fathers asked for more courses on fathering, perhaps because they would have more difficulty than other fathers in attending them because of childcare commitments and other calls on their time.

> These three subgroups were almost as satisfied as other fathers with their performance as fathers.

> Only 18 percent of separated fathers listed their separation as a barrier to their fathering, including some who were dissatisfied with their access arrangements or who had a difficult relationship with their former partner.

> Only two stepfathers listed being a stepfather as a barrier to their fathering; this is consistent with previous research showing that stepfathering can be a rewarding experience.

1.9 PĀKEHĀ, MĀORI, PASIFIKA AND ASIAN FATHERS

> These different ethnic groups gave similar responses to most of the survey questions.

> Pākehā fathers were the biggest consumers of information about fathering, the most likely to have attended a fathering course and the most likely to cite work pressures as a barrier to being better fathers.

> Māori fathers were the most likely to say they did not have sufficient information on fathering.

> Few fathers in any of the ethnic groups used fathering support services, but Pasifika fathers used them more than other ethnicities, especially church-based services. Pasifika fathers were also more likely to say that additional courses on fathering would be a good idea.

> Few Asian fathers had attended courses, including antenatal courses, and they were more likely than other ethnic groups to say that there were no barriers to their fathering. They were also the least likely to state that the media portrayed them negatively.

1.10 YOUNGER AND OLDER FATHERS AND CHILDREN

> The teenage fathers appeared to be particularly isolated from support and advice about fathering. This is consistent with previous research which indicates that they are a particularly vulnerable group who have been neglected by policies and services.

> Apart from their isolation from support and advice, the responses of teenage fathers were similar to other fathers. For example, teenage fathers were satisfied with their performance as fathers and their desire to spend time with their children.

> Older fathers and fathers of younger children were more likely to have attended a fathering course. With regard to older fathers, this did not appear to be related to the length of time they had been fathers – rather, it seems to be because they were more motivated to attend fathering courses, or more able to easily access these courses.

> Fathers of younger children were attending antenatal classes in higher numbers than was formerly the case.

1.11 CONCLUSIONS

The survey presents fathers in a good light: they are generally very engaged with their children and families, more so than were their own fathers; they are heavily involved in chores and childcare around the home; and they want to spend more time with their children. There are a number of implications for policies and services from the survey and the literature review.

> Despite half of fathers requesting more fathering training courses, fathers might have difficulty attending them, given their time pressures. Also, given their already high levels of satisfaction with their performance, they might not be motivated to make attendance a priority. Analysis of these results and others suggests that support for fathers should be provided in a targeted way to those most in need, rather than provided universally to all fathers. Those most in need are teenage fathers, separated fathers, single fathers and stepfathers.

> Previous research suggests that some organisations providing training (including antenatal training) and support services for parents need to adapt so that they are welcoming and relevant to fathers.

> Support groups should be established by fathers for fathers. Government and other agencies could assist with funding.

> New Zealand needs a strategy for teenage parents, similar to the one in the United Kingdom, which includes a focus on teenage fathers.

> Negative portrayals of men and fathers have deeply affected fathers and influenced their interaction with their children; any organisation developing policies or portraying images of men and fathers should be careful that they are justified and targeted, rather than exaggerated or unnecessarily broadly applied.

> Parental-leave provisions should be improved so as to further encourage and enable fathers to spend time with their babies.

2. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a telephone survey of 1,721 fathers carried out in 2009.

This research progresses in a natural way from our earlier work relating to families. Shortly after the Families Commission was established in 2005, we consulted with around 4,000 family members to find out what were the most important issues for them. They told us that we should prioritise work on parenting, which we did with consultations, workshops and polls, mostly from 2005 to 2008, and advocacy, which continues.[2] The consultations and workshops were attended mostly by women – men were few in number. We decided, therefore, to make consulting directly with fathers a priority.

When we were planning to consult with fathers in 2008, we were approached by Barnardos with much the same idea. We soon found ourselves involved in a joint exercise with a number of Non Government Organisations (NGOs), setting up consultations with fathers in Wellington and Auckland (called Fathering Conversations). We also conducted two polls for fathers, one each in 2007 and 2008. These exercises helped us understand the issues concerning the fathers who gave up their time to come to our consultations or who answered our online polls. We found that fathers held various views about fathering issues – there was no one concern that the majority of these fathers shared. There were, however, a number of issues that concerned a significant minority of fathers. These issues are briefly outlined here.

A number of these issues related to the birth of their children, particularly the first child. Some fathers found themselves unprepared for fatherhood and would have appreciated more pre-birth and post-birth training that included information on the implications for them. They wanted the processes surrounding the birth of the baby to be more inclusive and welcoming of them. They wanted to help their partners following the birth, but felt peripheral and excluded. Some of them felt bewildered by their loss of freedom at the birth of their first child, and wished they could have been better prepared.

More generally, some fathers felt that family support services were exclusively geared towards women and children. Again they felt peripheral to these services, which in their opinion were not welcoming to their presence, nor well able to cope with fathers.

The fathers said that they wanted to spend more time with their families, but had difficulty balancing this with being the main family income earner. Sometimes this was because their low rates of pay compelled them to work long hours, or because the nature of their jobs required long hours. They asked for better rates of remuneration, flexible work arrangements, fewer working hours and better paternity-leave provisions.

These fathers were generally happy with the level of support they received for their fathering role, although some separated fathers wanted more support. Most often fathers' support came from their partners or friends. Beyond that, they sometimes turned to their parents, religious advisers, other relatives, the internet, work colleagues or courses on parenting. Some of them would have preferred parenting courses in the workplace, while others preferred courses in the community, and close to home. Some asked for parenting courses that they could attend with their partners, while others asked for courses provided by fathers for fathers. Some stepfathers wanted training specific to their circumstances. Some other fathers were not much interested in more written or internet information, and did not support the idea of a fathering helpline.

[2] Families Commission publications 2005a, 2005b, and 2006, and poll results at www.thecouch.org.nz/member/results

Many of them would have liked to join face-to-face or internet support groups, had they been available, although it was noted that some attempts to establish such groups have failed for lack of interest.

Some of the fathers saw traditional attitudes towards men's roles in families as the main barrier to fathering. This included attitudes that fathers had about themselves, and the attitudes of their parents, their partners and society generally. They thought that society needed to value fathers more.

We were aware that the fathers who had attended the Fathering Conversations and who had responded to our polls might not be representative of fathers generally. The fathers at the Conversations had been contacted through various organisations' networks, and the fathers who completed our poll questionnaires had registered on *The Couch,* the Families Commission on-line poll website. Further, we knew of no other New Zealand source of comprehensive information on fathers. In particular, we were not aware of any significant survey on fathering issues in New Zealand that used random sampling techniques (random sampling is necessary if the sample is to be representative of all fathers). Consequently, before advocating in support of fathering, we considered it advisable to check on the extent to which the views expressed by the fathers with whom we consulted were also held by other fathers. The most practical way to do this was to carry out a survey, which is the subject of this report.

2.1 THE FATHERING CONTEXT

The earlier work we had done with fathers, discussed in the introduction to this report, helped us to decide on a number of themes on which to structure this research, but this previous work also convinced us that a detailed review of the literature on fathers' support needs would be useful. As a result, this research began with a systematic review of the relevant national and overseas literature. The review assisted in the design of the survey, and provides context for the chapters that follow. The review was not comprehensive, since it was carried out as a precursor for the survey over a limited period of time. The most significant literature was found through database searches, and augmented by following up on the references it contained, and other literature already known to us. The focus was primarily on the last two decades, and a greater effort was made to canvass New Zealand material, including magazine articles which illustrated some points made in the research literature.

The material in this chapter is organised to closely follow the order of the subsequent chapters, with some minor exceptions. First, we give some information about how we approached the literature review. This is followed by a brief discussion on fatherhood in New Zealand, mostly based on statistics supplied to us by Statistics New Zealand. The review then looks at the changes to fathers and fatherhood, showing that men are now more physically and emotionally involved with their children than they were in the past. In a section on what fathers do, we find, as expected, that fathers provide for the family, often working long hours; they also have fun with their children, and are often responsible for maintenance and work on the property. The literature on the impact of fathers documents significant developmental benefits for children with engaged and supportive fathers. The next section of the review was originally intended to examine what helps and hinders fathers, but the literature we accessed only covered the hindrances. The hindrances to fatherhood are mostly said to be work and time pressures, and traditional attitudes to fathering held by fathers, their partners, their parents and society generally. In a section on vulnerable fathers we take a brief look at particular groups of fathers who often have higher support needs – those with mental health problems, imprisoned fathers, teenage fathers, stepfathers and separating and separated fathers. In a section on fathers' support needs, we find that there is limited literature on this topic, and most of it has pointed out the need for a greater acceptance and focus on fathers in family services. There would be significant benefits for society from having the right mixture of policies and services in support of fathering, but to get it right, fathers must be involved in research on fathering and the development of the policies that affect them.

2.2 REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

A systematic review is a structured method of conducting literature reviews, and involves the development of a review protocol to map the review process; set out the key review questions; and specify how data-sources and research reports will be located, appraised, selected and synthesised.[i]

In practice, this meant the following steps were followed by the research team:

> **Scoping phase:** The scoping phase involved investigating what information sources relevant to our needs existed (including both national and overseas sources, and published and unpublished sources). This was done through a mixture of face-to-face, telephone and email consultation with key stakeholders, opinion leaders and

local experts; and a search of relevant databases and catalogues. The scoping phase enabled the research team to assess what information was available, how accessible that information was and how it needed to be accessed.

> **Search phase:** The search phase involved accessing the documents and sources identified in the scoping phase. This phase also made use of what researchers call 'reference mining', where qualifying retrieved documents or web pages were themselves inspected for relevant references or links.

> **Review phase:** The review phase began with the development of a broad classification scheme for the uncovered information (including the development of a matrix for classifying themes by stakeholder groups). It then involved the development of a review protocol to be used with the individual documents (also known as a 'coding schema'). The review protocol ensured the documents collected were analysed in a consistent and robust manner. Finally, the review phase involved reviewing the documents using the classification scheme and review protocol.

> **Analysis phase:** The final phase involved collating the summaries of the individual documents to create a clear summary of key themes and issues across the review set.

2.3 FATHERS IN NEW ZEALAND TODAY

According to the latest data available from Statistics New Zealand (2008, 2009), the average age of fathers of new babies in New Zealand is 33 years.[3] This means that today's newborn babies have fathers who are, on average, five years older than their own fathers were when they were born. In 2006, eight percent of all fathers living with their children were less than 30 years, compared with 14 percent in 1986. Sixteen percent of all fathers living with their children in 2006 were aged 50 years or more, compared with 11 percent in 1986.

Not only are New Zealand fathers getting older, they are also increasingly likely to have been born overseas: in 2007, 28 percent of babies born in New Zealand had fathers who were not themselves born in New Zealand. This compares with 22 percent of overseas-born fathers a decade ago. Census data from 2006 also show that fathers are more likely than other men to do unpaid work in the home, such as household chores, cooking and maintenance (Statistics New Zealand, 2008). According to these data, 91 percent of men live in a 'parent and dependent child' family, a term which is used to describe one or two parents living with one or more children as a family.

Men still tend to marry women younger than themselves, although the gap has narrowed. In 1967, the average age of a man at first marriage was 2.5 years higher than the woman, and in 2007 this gap was still 1.8 years on average. In 1986, there were approximately 430,000 couples with children in New Zealand, compared with 450,000 in 2006, an increase of five percent. Meanwhile, the number of sole-parent households increased from 104,000 to 194,000, an increase of 87 percent. The number of sole-parent households with children aged 17 years or under headed by fathers increased

[3] Unless otherwise specified, the statistics presented in this section come from Statistics New Zealand (2009). These statistics were compiled for the Families Commission and relate to families where the father lived with their children.

over the same period by 100 percent, from 12,500 to 25,000.[4] The proportion of fathers involved in parenting in one-parent households was three percent in 1986 and six percent in 2006.[5]

Ethnic comparisons between the years are problematic because of changes in the way ethnic groups are classified. The number of fathers identifying themselves as Māori rose by one percentage point between 1986 and 2006 (from 11 percent to 12 percent), and fathers identifying as Pacific by three percentage points (from four percent to seven percent). The greatest increase was for those fathers identifying themselves as Asian, with an increase in 2006 to 10 percent from two percent in 1986.

Compared with 1986, in 2006 a higher proportion of families were one-child families and a lower proportion were three-child families. Thirty-eight percent were one-child families in 2006, compared with 32 percent in 1986; and 16 percent were three-child families in 2006, compared with 20 percent in 1986. The number of two-child families and families with four or more children remained similar.

In 2006, 13 percent of fathers in two-parent households and 29 percent of fathers in one-parent households were never married, compared with three percent and nine percent respectively in 1986.

2.4 THE CHANGING NATURE OF FATHERS AND FATHERHOOD

The statistics presented above show that fathers, on average, are getting older. They also show fathers are considerably more likely to be involved in housework than men who are not fathers. At the same time, fathering itself is changing. For many fathers, the once stereotypical authoritarian and often remote father ('just you wait until your father gets home!') has been replaced by one who wants to play a larger, and more active, part in raising his children.[6] For some fathers, this means reducing working hours, juggling shifts or simply leaving their paid jobs to take on full-time childcare. It is now seen as part of everyday life for fathers to be present at antenatal classes and at their child's birth, to push buggies, drop off and pick up children at school and childcare and participate in school events. The changing nature of fathers and fatherhood is one aspect of broader social changes to families and to gender roles, and while some fathers find the death of the old certainties a source of discomfort, other fathers are welcoming the flexibility the new role and its expectations bring.

Awareness of these changes is not new. Ritchie and Ritchie (1997) researched the changing roles of fathers as part of their study of bringing up children in New Zealand. Interestingly, they found that male roles changed less than female roles between 1977 and 1997. A year later, also in New Zealand, Smith and Taylor (1998) reported research that showed how, for many families, separation, divorce and remarriage were part of their way of life, instead of viewed as an unusual experience. Smith and Taylor argued that this was due to economic changes as well as changing social and cultural values.

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[4] These figures are derived from census figures. The figures for the households headed by fathers are not comparable with the other figures because the father-headed household figures are restricted to those with children aged 17 years or under, while no age restriction on the ages of the children applies to the other figures. Some of these figures were supplied by Statistics New Zealand to the Families Commission, and some were extracted from Statistics New Zealand's website presentation of census information.

[5] Of families with a father living in the household, the proportion where the father was the only parent in the household. In some of these families, the father was partnered to someone who was not classified in the census as a parent to the children. In 2006, of those families where there was a father living in the household, the proportion where the father was the only parent, and was not partnered, was five percent. A comparison figure for 1986 is not available.

[6] This sentence and the rest of this paragraph are the view of the authors, and are not referenced to the literature. The picture of fathers being now more involved with their children does, however, come from *The Kiwi Nest* (Families Commission, 2008b), and the view about families being less hierarchical, including the role of fathers, is consistent with Pryor (2006).

Rex McCann, the founder of New Zealand trust Essentially Men and author of *Fatherless Sons* (1999), was reported in the 'Fathering the Future' Winter 2005 issue of *Te Karaka* magazine as saying we have entered an era of men's liberation, where the liberation is about fathers acknowledging and accepting their role in bringing up their children, especially their sons. Clearly, McCann believed that New Zealand fathers still had some way to go:

> *Men are the most significant factor missing in their boys' lives today* [and] *with the absence of involved male role models; there is no one to guide boys through the all-important rites of passage which initiate them into manhood. Instead, they look to their peers, the media, sports and music to find their heroes and role models and ways to express their manhood.* (McCann's views as reported in an article by Tumataroa, 2005 p.19)

Earlier, we presented figures showing that the number of sole-parent households with children had increased by 87 percent between the 1986 and 2006 censuses. Most of the parents in these households are mothers. Generally, the fathers will have remained engaged with their children, but there will be others who have not, endorsing McCann's concern about the missing male role models in boys' lives. The daughters are also missing a father figure in their lives. From another point of view, this means that there is well in excess of 100,000 fathers who, because of separation, cannot have their children living with them full-time.

In the United Kingdom, Fisher, McCulloch and Gershuny (1999) found British fathers' care of their children increased 800 percent between 1975 and 1997, from 15 minutes to two hours on an average working day. In the USA, Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie (2006) noted that fathering time increased from 2.6 hours per week in 1965 to 6.5 hours in 2000. A similar picture was found in Australia (Russell et al, 1999) and in the USA, the Netherlands and Canada (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

Along with changes in behaviour, the attitudes of fathers also appear to be changing. One study of newlyweds in the USA looked at the values these couples hoped to instil into their marriages. In 1981, the newlyweds surveyed ranked "sharing responsibilities, decision-making and physical and emotional care of infants and young children" eleventh out of 15 values (Markman, 1981). In 1997, this value was ranked second (Stanley & Markman, 1997). This difference in value-ranking reflects a distinct pro-fathering attitudinal change. In the United Kingdom, a survey of social attitudes by Park, Curtice, Thomson, Phillips and Johnson (2007) found that 70 percent of full-time working men wished they could spend more time with their families. Sixty-nine percent of these working fathers said the demands of their jobs interfered with family life. In Australia, a 2004 survey of younger working fathers by Pocock and Clarke found these fathers expressed less satisfaction with their work-family balance when they spent less time caring for their children, as well as when they faced workplace disapproval of their participation in family-related activities.

Paul Callister's study released in 2005 reported that New Zealand fathers make up a significant proportion of those who work long hours (Callister, 2005a). In 2001, he found that 39 percent of fathers aged 25 to 34 years living with partners and their pre-school-aged children worked at least 50 hours in paid employment each week. Ten percent of mothers in this age group worked 50+ hours each week. Fathers older than this age group tended to work even longer hours.

In 2003 in New Zealand, the EEO Trust surveyed 1,200 fathers and found that 80 percent wished they could spend more time with their children (EEO, 2003). Eighty-two percent stated that their paid work had a negative effect on the quantity of time they could spend with their children and 52 percent stated that their paid work had a negative effect on the quality of the time they spent with their children. A 2004 survey also showed that a high proportion of fathers wanted to spend more time with their children (Robertson, 2007).[7]

Finding Time: Parents' long working hours and the impact on family life (Families Commission 2009), summarised previous work on the impact of long hours on families, interviewed a number of families and analysed census data. It referred to previous Australian research (Baxter, 2007) which concluded that the hours that fathers work have little impact on the time they devote to their children, as fathers prioritise time with their children, reducing the time they spend on themselves instead. Contrary to this finding, the families interviewed for Families Commission (2009) research indicated that there were negative effects on children, mothers and family life in general from fathers working long hours. The families spoke poignantly about children missing their fathers, and fathers wanting to spend more time with their children.

A common theme in these studies and in other literature exploring this issue is the pressure on partnered fathers to be both good providers and good fathers. This pressure is evident in the comments made by some of the fathers interviewed for Families Commission (2009) research, who simultaneously had a desire to be a good provider, necessitating working long hours, and to spend more time with the children.

A 2004 review of research by the New Zealand Ministry of Women's Affairs found that fathers who were taking up flexible work options were more involved with their families, or were decreasing their working hours because of their partners' careers, tended to be paid and promoted less than other fathers. In a Norwegian survey (Statistics Norway, 2005) partnered fathers with children up to five years of age completed more hours of paid and unpaid work each week than did partnered mothers. This was thought to be only possible because fathers were spending less time on themselves. An earlier study by Bond et al. (2002) found that in 1977 fathers spent on average 2.1 hours on leisure activities each day; by 2001 this had decreased to 1.3 hours.

2.5 THE ROLE OF FATHERS

In previous generations, fathers were expected to provide for their family and be the disciplinarian of last resort. It can be reasonably assumed, however, that despite social ideas controlling their expression of affection, fathers have always loved their children and have always wanted to be involved in their lives. Today, as Rouch (2005) has noted, the role of fathers is not only about providing for a family but also about the emotional connection between a father and his child.

An Australian survey in 2005 found that 90 percent of males and 91 percent of females agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "a father should be as heavily involved in the care of his children as the mother" (Wilson, Meagher, Gibson, Denemarrk, & We, 2005). In a 2002 study, 96 percent of New Zealanders said that both parents played equally important yet different roles in their children's wellbeing (Gendall, 2002).

[7] It is impossible to determine the exact percentage. The sample included men who were not fathers. Sixty-six percent of the sample said they wanted to spend more time with their children, and almost 70 percent said they were or had been parents, giving a percentage of approximately 90 percent.

Children also believe fathers play an important role in their lives. A study completed by Kerslake Hendricks (1999) looked at New Zealand children's views of the roles their fathers played. One hundred children aged between four and 18 years of age were asked what they thought a father did. While views differed according to developmental awareness of fathering roles and responsibilities, all together, all children in the study viewed fathers in an encouraging light.

A similar study undertaken at the same time (Smith, Ballard, & Barham, 1999) surveyed pre-schoolers' perceptions of parents' and teachers' roles. The researchers found the young participants described their fathers as doing playful or stimulating things with them, whereas the same children described their mothers as engaging with them in everyday childcare activities. Franz, McClelland, and Weinberger (1991) also noted fathers' interactions with their children tend to take different forms from mothers' involvement, while Feldman (2003) documented how fathers' interactions with young children are characteristically less regulated than mothers' interactions – for example, unexpected peaks of excitement such as in rough-and-tumble play. Paquette (2004) noted this type of less-structured interaction has been found to be beneficial for child development throughout many cultures.

Some years earlier, Smith and Ratcliff (1991) had looked at 98 seven- to nine-year-old New Zealand children's perceptions of parents' roles. While this research focused on both parents, some findings were specifically linked to the roles fathers play in their children's lives. In particular, Smith and Ratcliff noted fathers were more likely than mothers to be viewed by the children as taking them on outings and providing entertaining activities. Smith and Ratcliff also found children believed the most common domestic roles at home for fathers were building and repairing items, followed by outdoor tasks such as lawn-mowing. In addition, they found fathers were more likely to be described as doing paid work than mothers. Smith et al (1999) also discovered these same things in their study of pre-schoolers.

Callister (2005a) stated that fathers' work, both unpaid and paid employment, is undervalued in New Zealand and needs to be given more credit. He argued there needs to be more recognition of the double burden for fathers of fulfilling paid and unpaid work. In another 2005 report, he points out that partnered men with young children work on average roughly the same number of combined hours of paid and unpaid work as their partners (Callister, 2005b).

A 2005 study from the United Kingdom by Thompson, Vinter and Young suggests socio-economic circumstances play an important role in perceptions of what fathers do. They found that fathers and mothers in low-income families were more likely than middle- or high-income earners to support traditional gender roles. This was the group, however, who reported the most dissatisfaction with the division of labour in their families. Coltrane and Adams (2001) stated that despite working-class men expressing conservative gender roles, they do more housework and childcare than middle-class men, who are more likely to express support for gender equity.

2.6 THE IMPACT OF FATHERS

Much of this section discusses the impact of fathers on the development of children. Children brought up by a single parent (where the other parent is not involved in their lives) are often successfully raised, but on average there are benefits from having both the father and the mother involved in raising a child. Fathers can, of course, be part of an intact family or a separated family; they can be a biological father or a stepfather. Much has been written about the impact of being raised in a sole-parent household, and some ground-breaking work has been done in New Zealand by Professor David Fergusson using data from the Christchurch Health and Development Study. He stated in 2007 that being brought up in a single-parent household, per se, is not the key predictor of outcomes for children. Research suggests the important factors are the ways in which a family functions, both socially and economically, rather than sole-parenthood. (Fergusson, 2007). This is also the view of the Families Commission.

Callister and Birks (2006) point out that international evidence suggests that few 'sole-parent families' are truly sole-parent. Most children whose parents have separated have some form of ongoing contact with the parent they no longer live with full-time. There are strong indications that a notable proportion of separated parents are involved, authoritative parents. Callister and Birks argue, therefore, that the term 'sole-parent family' should be replaced by 'sole-parent household', and this usage is adopted in this report.

Callister (2005a) argues that children can be very successfully raised in various family types. Callister also acknowledges, however, that caring and involved fathers can and do make an important and positive contribution to the lives of their children and that the absence of a father in their lives has caused many children (and adults affected as children by absent fathers) much sadness. Robertson (2008) concluded that unless there are issues of abuse or mental illness, regular and involved contact with non-resident parents is in the interests of children's wellbeing. And Bzostek (2008) adds that in stepfather families, the continued engagement of the biological father with their children, and the engagement of the stepfather with the children, are equally and simultaneously beneficial to the children's development.

A number of studies, such as those by Grey and Francis (2007), Parent, Saint-Jacques, Beaudry, and Robitaille (2007), Corcoran (2003), Kan et al (2007) and Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, and Doan-Holbein (2005) produce strong evidence that parental

involvement is important in determining child outcomes. While the majority of evidence relates to the involvement of mothers, as the most frequent carers of children, there is, however, an increasing recognition of the role that a father's involvement has to play in a child's upbringing. For instance, a 2004 study from the United Kingdom (Flouri & Buchanan) found both the father's and mother's involvement with a child at seven years of age independently predicted the child's educational attainment at 20 years. But it is not just involvement that counts, as there is also evidence that parenting style is a determinant of conduct or behavioural problems in children. Edwards, Céilleachair, Bywater, Hughes and Hutchings (2007), for example, show parents who promote pro-social behaviours have children with fewer behavioural problems. Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) found children of present and engaged fathers have fewer behavioural problems, better peer relationships, more empathy and the ability to have non-traditional attitudes to earning and childcare. In a similar vein, a 2003 article by Hofferth and Anderson in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* found girls who named their biological father as their primary father figure reported fewer mental health problems than did girls whose primary father figure was a stepfather or an absent father. O'Neill (2002) found absent fathers were linked to substance misuse, school difficulties and various risky behaviours. McLanahan and Teitler noted in 1999 that the absence of a father has been found to affect children directly by contributing to their difficulties with peer relationships, and indirectly through increased maternal stress and reduced income. A recent Australian Government report (Berlyn, Wise, & Soriano, 2008) reviewed this subject and concluded that there are considerable benefits for children if their fathers are engaged, and the benefits continue into adolescence, providing small but measurable additional protection against delinquency and emotional and psychological distress, above that which would have been afforded had the fathers not been engaged.

Another more recent study from the USA (cited in Fletcher, 2008) compared the influence of fathers and mothers on their children's cognitive development. This study videotaped parents interacting with their children, and then assessed the videotapes for positive and negative qualities. Three years later the children had their mathematics and language abilities tested. The study found that children with supportive parents outperformed children with unsupportive parents on these standardised tests. Significantly for this review, the researchers also concluded that the positive effect of having one supportive parent did not depend on that parent's gender; that is, elevated cognitive abilities were just as likely to be found among children with a supportive father as they were among children with a supportive mother. The effect of father-influenced wellbeing was found to continue throughout childhood in a number of studies, such as the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, where the quality of father-adolescent relationships, as judged by the adolescent, was as equally predictive of mental health status as the mother-adolescent relationship (Videon, 2005).

In a 1988 USA study, Gelles found children were at a greater risk of all forms of child abuse if they were raised without the presence of biological fathers. In a later study, also in the USA, Harper and McLanahan (2004) looked at the life circumstances of 6,000 young men. They found that boys growing up with absent biological fathers were twice as likely to spend time in prison as those who lived with both biological parents. Boys who grew up without their biological father and with a stepfather in the family home were three times as likely to spend time in prison. It should be noted, however, that the absence of biological fathers in the lives of these children would often be associated with a range of other risk factors not necessarily caused by the absence of the father. In a 2007 study, Burgess argued that findings of this type are more than enough of a reason to address active participation in fathering in policy and practice.

These findings are affirmed by a systematic review carried out in New Zealand of research on the contributions that fathers make to their children (Lees, 2007). For his review, Lees selected only research studies that fulfilled a number of requirements – most notably that they were quantitative studies, published from 1990 onwards, which had been peer-reviewed, and separately measured both mothers' and fathers' contributions to children's wellbeing. Lees concluded that involved, responsive and supportive fathers make a unique contribution to their children's wellbeing, which is best described as a modest contribution that adds to the base formed by the mothers' contributions. Where this occurs, the children are more likely to exhibit pro-social behaviours, and less likely to have emotional or self-esteem problems. The same benefits were found for stepfathers and non-resident fathers, providing they were supportive and engaged with their children.

It is not just the relationship between father and child that is important. Lloyd, O'Brien and Lewis (2003) report that the relationship between the parents has an equally important impact on the development of the children. And, if parents do separate, it is important that children retain a positive relationship with both parents (Williams & Kelly, 2005). Similar studies have shown that when this does not happen, children suffer because two important factors – paternal involvement and security of paternal attachment – are compromised.

The research summarised above investigates the benefits of a supportive and engaged father, and the risks associated with an absent father. Another type of investigation casts light on this issue; this is where researchers examine the life histories of people who have not done well, and, in particular, record how many of these people had absent fathers. We present the findings of some of this research here, but with this caveat: they do not tell us how likely it is that absent fathers would lead to these poor outcomes. In 2002, Pudney reported that 80 to 95 percent of school stand-downs, expulsions, anti-social behaviour referrals from schools, referrals to drug and alcohol agencies, youth offenders and offenders sentenced to prison sentences were males. Most of these males either reported little or no relationship with their father, or else an abusive relationship. Statistics from an American longitudinal study (Franz et al, 1991) show 70 percent of juvenile offenders in state institutions come from fatherless homes, as do 71 percent of school dropouts, 85 percent of young exhibiters of behavioural disorders and 90 percent of young runaways. On the other hand, people in their forties who reported being happily married, and having good mental health and good peer relationships, also reported having warm, loving relationships with their fathers during childhood.

Almeida, Wellington, and McDonald found in 2001 that when fathers spend more time in childcare activities, they are more likely to engage in supportive interactions with their children. A 2003 study by Burchell reported links between increased involvement by fathers and greater paternal sensitivity. Greater paternal sensitivity was found to be associated with a warmer parenting style.

In her study of fathers' roles discussed earlier in this review, Kerslake Hendricks (1999) looked at secondary-school pupils' views of what was 'not okay' in a father. The study found that the pupils most disliked fathers who were not physically or emotionally available for their children. Fathers who spent more time at work or with a new partner than with their families; those who were not open with their thoughts or feelings; those who were hypocritical, had few personal values and little self-esteem; those who were poor disciplinarians, or involved the children in their disputes with their mother; those who did not consider the children's feelings toward a new partner and any children she might have; and those who broke promises without a valid reason were rated most poorly by the pupils. In a 1993 study with similar findings, Greenfield, a North

American researcher, asked focus groups of teenagers "Just how important are dads?" The teenagers felt ambivalence towards fathers who had little contact or involvement with them and huge satisfaction where fathers were physically and emotionally involved with them. It was interesting to note that the teenagers felt closer to stepparents who spent more time with them than with biological parents who did not. This ties in with the concept of social fathering, where children choose which male figure in their lives they regard as filling the fathering role.[8]

This body of research shows the full extent of the role that fathers play in socialising their children. Their parenting style matters a great deal and is a powerful influence on children's development. A 1993 study by Farrington, for example, showed that bullying can be passed on to the next generation. This study found that if the father had been a bully at school it was more likely that the son would also be a school bully.

Few studies have been undertaken on the impact of fathers' employment on their children's outcomes. An Australian study by Pocock and Clarke (2004) found, however, that many young people wanted to spend more time with their fathers. A combined United Kingdom and New Zealand study in 2001, by Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Taylor and Dickson, found a father's involvement had a positive effect on his child's outcomes only when the father contributed to the child's wellbeing directly through a secure and responsive relationship with the child and indirectly through his monetary and emotional support of the child's mother. Rather than merely accepting that encouraging fathers to live with their child would always be most beneficial for the child, Jaffee et al argued it was very important to consider also the type of interaction the father would have with his children. Young fathers who have a history of attachment difficulties and behavioural problems require much support to enable them to be supportive of their partners and children.

Given the impact fathers have, it is perhaps no surprise that researchers have noted the need to consider the influence that the changing nature of fatherhood is having on children (Julian, 1999). The increased number of mothers returning to the workforce after having children, and the increased number of sole-parent households, means there is a clear need to understand the changing role of fathers in order to establish how best to help them benefit their children.

2.7 WHAT HELPS OR HINDERS FATHERS?

The starting-point for this examination of what helps or hinders fathers is Rae Julian's 1999 New Zealand report, *Fathers who Care: partners in parenting*. Her report includes the results of a literature review and a survey question on the barriers to men assuming more active parenting roles. The literature review showed that barriers included fathers' attitudes to parenting, women's attitudes to sharing the parental role, disapproving attitudes from the fathers' own parents, societal disapproval, discouragement by professionals who work with children, the influence of the fathers' own fathers, work and time pressures and lack of parenting skills. The survey question presented over 2,000 men and women with a list of statements with which they could agree or disagree. The majority of people agreed that men are not taught how to father. Julian also conducted a focus group, and the participants commented on the lack of parenting programmes for fathers. A substantial minority of people agreed with the statement that women are better childcarers. Nearly 40 percent of respondents agreed that fathers did not have enough time for childrearing because of work commitments, but a much smaller

[8] This terminology is now in widespread use – see, for example, Pudney (2003).

percentage thought that fathers did not have time for childrearing because of other time commitments. Very few people agreed with the statement that looking after children is not manly.[9]

Research carried out for the Families Commission reinforces the view that traditional attitudes to fathering are still important in shaping fathers' roles. McPherson (2006), interviewed 40 mothers and found that while they wanted their partners to take an equal role in caring for the children, this did not extend to the father working part-time. The mothers wanted the fathers to be the main provider for the family, but to be flexible in their employment so that they could provide back-up to the mother for childcare when needed, and so some of the mothers could work part-time.

A 1997 study by Lamb and Laumann-Billings found pressure for fathers of children with special needs to adhere to traditional and stereotypical gender roles. This had a negative effect on the self-esteem of fathers who wanted to parent in more non-traditional ways. This finding was reflected in other research (Betcher & Pollock in 1993; and by Jordan in 1995), where fathers reported feeling discouraged from active involvement in the home and felt pressured to take on a more stereotypical and uninvolved father role. These researchers and others (such as Vandeskog, 2008) state that some mothers encourage fathers (consciously and unconsciously) to be less involved in domestic routines which involve children, and also noted fathers' tendency to defer to mothers in issues relating to their children.

There has been much written about this behaviour in the academic literature, where it is termed gatekeeping. Allen and Hawkins (1999) reviewed this literature and defined maternal gatekeeping as a collection of beliefs and behaviours that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men's opportunities for caring for home and children. They carried out a postal survey of mothers, which provided weak support for the concept, but they could not state which came first, gatekeeping or fathers' lack of involvement. In other words, the mothers' behaviour might be a reflection of the fathers' lack of involvement with the home and the children, rather than the other way around. In 2008, Cannon, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown and Sokolowksi reported on a longitudinal study in which families' interactions were periodically observed. They found stronger support for gatekeeping, but once again they could not tell whether it caused low levels of involvement by fathers, or was caused by it. They also described two types of gatekeeping: gatekeeping that encourages fathers' participation with their children, and gatekeeping that inhibits fathers' participation with their children. Both of these articles agree that there is little conclusive research on gatekeeping.

Another area where attitudes and stereotypes can be a barrier to fathering relates to the exaggerated concerns about men as a danger to children. In 2005, media attention was given in New Zealand to a ban imposed by two major airlines on men sitting next to unaccompanied children (Thomson, 2005). In response to this, one father commented that he was reluctant to change his children's nappies lest he be accused of molesting them (Bridges, 2005). The men who were consulted by the Families Commission in 2008 made similar comments, and Chapman, Mitchell and McIntosh, after interviewing 164 fathers in 2000, concluded that one of the most important ways of supporting fathers would be to reduce the negative stereotypes about them.[10] It is clear that negative stereotypes can prevent fathers from engaging fully with their children in some circumstances.

[9] The survey also included a question about the Family Court, reported in this paper in the section on vulnerable fathers.

[10] This research is discussed in more detail in the following section on supporting fathers.

When fathers need support to achieve their potential, they may not find support services helpful. In 2008, Australian researcher Richard Fletcher looked at incorporating fathers into family-related services and found it was not a straightforward issue. Changing wording in parenting-programme advertising material from 'mothers' to 'parents' was not sufficient to encourage fathers to participate. Fletcher also noted that most health, early education and welfare services intended to assist families are staffed by women and accessed by mothers. In an earlier paper in 2004, Fletcher concluded that practitioners need to learn to form productive relationships with fathers who approach family services. This argument was backed up by an evaluation of the *Men and Family Relationships* initiative by O'Brien and Rich (2002), which highlighted the necessity of training staff in effective engagement of fathers. They stated that employing more male staff in health, welfare and early education is widely supported in the literature, but being male or a father was not sufficient to obviate the need for extensive training in effective engagement with fathers.

Another barrier to seeking support lies with fathers themselves. Broadhurst (2003) concluded that methods for engagement used by service providers are more tailored to clients with a sense of self-awareness and problem-awareness as well as the ability to openly discuss personal problems. These are all traits more commonly found in females than males. As a result, males brought up with traditional gender-role stereotypical behaviours would have difficulty engaging with female-oriented services. Fletcher (2004) believed that if practitioners are well informed about gender differences and their related stereotypes, and committed to using effective practices and strategies best suited to males, this would help with the engagement of fathers in family-oriented services.

Berlyn et al (2008) evaluated the engagement of fathers in the child and family services that were part of the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities strategy. From their literature review they concluded that the benefits for fathers of being involved in such services include becoming more confident and more engaged with their children. They also concluded, however, that the fathers who do get involved with family services are unlikely to be the fathers who would most benefit from it. They found that fathers' participation was far lower than mothers'. The best results were achieved where services were specifically tailored to fathers. In addition, service providers thought that fathers could be engaged best through flexible hours of operation; male facilitators; marketing directly at fathers; and father-friendly venues, language and advertisements. Family professionals emphasised the need to develop trust between fathers and male professionals, while fathers said they were alienated by professionals, and preferred informal approaches, peer discussions and hands-on activities.

Another difficulty for fathers accessing these services is service providers holding stereotypical beliefs about fathers lacking the competence to meet their children's emotional needs and their likelihood of abusing their children. Hand (2006) found that mothers believed fathers were not competent at managing the emotional tasks involved in parenting small children. Russell et al (1999) examined the beliefs of service providers and professionals about barriers to engagement with fathers. They found that although there was universal agreement that mothers and fathers should share parenting responsibilities, over half of female staff and one-third of male staff also believed that almost a quarter of fathers physically abuse their children. They concluded that to ensure successful engagement with fathers, it is essential that practitioners are aware of their own potential biases relating to fathers and their competence.

Fathers' work commitments (already discussed in earlier in this report) can create a barrier to their fathering. McNaughton and O'Brien (1999) looked at workplace issues in New Zealand for two groups of fathers: those in management positions and those in low-paid jobs. They found that fathers in two-parent households with pre-school-aged children were more likely to work full-time than any other group, reflecting greater financial pressure with increased family size. Most fathers parenting alone (84 percent) were also found to work full-time, and 44 percent of all fathers worked 50 or more hours each week, creating conflict between work and family commitments. A study by Yeung and Glauber (2007) found that two-parent children of low-income-earning fathers have less fathering time than two-parent children in higher-income-earning families.

Shift-workers experience particular difficulties. In 1996, Saville-Smith found that 57 percent of New Zealand fathers on rotating shifts felt their family life was disrupted by their work. Williams and Kelly (2005) found that fathers employed in shift-work knew less about their teens' daily activities than did fathers who worked standard hours. They stated that this is a significant issue, as low levels of parent-teen communication are linked with at-risk behaviours in adolescence. An added issue for some low-paid workers, reported by McNaughton and O'Brien (1999), was the need to hold more than one job, therefore increasing the pressure on fathers by requiring them to manage two or more workplaces as well as family obligations.

Alongside working hours, workplace stresses can also be a barrier to fathering. Fuligini et al (1995), (reported in NcNaughton and O'Brien, 1999) found that work conditions can increase psychological distress in fathers, which affects their ability to parent effectively. McNaughton and O'Brien found that fathers in management positions tend to fare better than those in low-paid work when seeking flexible working conditions

compatible with their fathering role. They were more able to speak out, whereas traditional attitudes to a father's role within a family among lower-income fathers made it more difficult for them to do likewise.

Flexible work arrangements can help fathers to be involved with their families while still devoting the required amount of time to the workplace. Flexible employers typically allow employees to vary their work-day start and finish times, allow time off during the day for family events or leave to be taken when other family members are ill. The Families Commission recently conducted research into the availability and benefits of flexible work with a survey of 1,000 family members, augmented with 11 focus groups and 15 in-depth interviews (Families Commission, 2008). The sample mainly consisted of fathers or mothers, but also included some people caring for other family members or relatives. The employers of most of the men in the sample offered flexible work arrangements, and the majority of the men availed themselves of these arrangements. While not differentiated by gender, the results show that employees have more trouble balancing work and family time, and feel that their family time is more pressured, where they do not have flexible work arrangements available to them.

We also published a report on parental leave (Families Commission, 2007). Parental leave allows fathers to become more involved with their children while they are babies. It needs to be of reasonable duration and adequately funded so that there is no significant loss of family income. As discussed elsewhere in this report, fathers spending time with their babies is associated with better bonding and more involvement with the children at later ages, leading to various child-development benefits. Other benefits include less family stress and less likelihood of maternal depression. At present, eligible employed fathers are entitled to two weeks' partner's leave around the time of the birth, and up to 52 weeks extended parental leave, less any maternity leave taken. Fathers taking either of these two types of leave are not entitled to payment, unless payment is part of their employment contract. Mothers are entitled to 14 weeks' paid parental leave, to a maximum of $407 per week, and any or all of their entitlement can be transferred to their partner. Financial considerations often prevent fathers from taking up unpaid parental leave, reducing their opportunities for spending time with their babies. The report referenced above called for progressive increases to the duration of paid parental leave and the levels of payment.

2.8 VULNERABLE FATHERS

This section summarises literature on groups of fathers who might be more in need of support than others. For convenience, we have used the term 'vulnerable'. While the groups we discuss are more likely to contain fathers in need of support, we do not wish to imply that this is true of all fathers in these groups. Like any group of people, they will vary widely in circumstances and reaction to these circumstances. The groups we cover in this section are fathers affected by mental health illnesses, fathers in prison, teenage fathers, separated or separating fathers and stepfathers.

Scott and Crooks (2004) and Ashley, Featherstone, Roskill, Ryan and White (2006) note that when mothers are vulnerable, service providers work intensively with them to improve mother-child relationships. When fathers are vulnerable, however, practitioners and policymakers tend to ignore father-child relationships or approach them with some level of hostility. DeBaryshe, Patterson and Capaldi (1993) looked at factors leading to some fathers being more vulnerable than others and concluded that a combination of factors that place fathers at a social disadvantage, such as employment, education and intelligence, affect paternal vulnerability.

Brown, Newland, Anderson and Chevannes (1997) have pointed out that fathers affected by mental illnesses tend to have their parenting role ignored by service providers focused on addressing their mental health needs. As a result, they have tended to become isolated from their families and lose contact with their children. Similarly, this effect also occurs for fathers who are incarcerated. While some service providers offer self-help courses for prisoners, they tend to target re-offending and not specifically parenting. Attention is seldom given to the specific needs of this group of fathers regarding reconnecting with their children once they are released back into the community (Jefferies, Menghjah & Hairston, 2001).

A review of literature by Bunting and McAuley in 2004 on young fathers in the USA and the United Kingdom found their circumstances strikingly similar to those of teenage mothers. The life-paths of these young men and women were found to be more negative than those of young people who do not become teen parents. On a more positive note, studies have discovered that young fathers are now more willing to become involved in their child's care than previously found. Florsheim and Ngu (2003) found that for some men, the birth of their child proved to be 'a wake-up call' which gradually led to them making positive changes in their lives.

Studies such as those by Breiding-Buss et al (2003), Pollock (2002), Ferguson and Hogan (2004) and Coleman (2005) show how teenage fathers are especially invisible to service providers. Pollock, for example, discovered that antenatal health-providers talked only to the teenage expectant mother and when asked why, stated they felt they did not have the skills to engage with teenage boys. In 2002, Quinton, Pollock and Anderson stated that young fathers felt "mostly ignored, marginalised or made uncomfortable" by services, despite their desire for information, inclusion and advice. They reported on a study where 50 percent of health-home visitors did not know expectant teen fathers' names. They also found that while there are services in place to assist young mothers, young fathers tend to be invisible. Young expectant mothers, however expressed a desire for the fathers of their unborn babies to be involved in their pregnancy care.

Breiding-Buss et al (2003) interviewed 24 young New Zealand fathers, most of whom had been teenagers at the time of the birth of their first child. Most of these fathers said that society had responded negatively to them as a young father and that they had received little or no support. Family services did not regard them as having a role. They wanted to be involved with their children and believed they would have made good fathers, yet their involvement decreased over time. The authors speculate that this is related to the young fathers lack of support, and feeling that they were not wanted. Many of the young fathers had attempted or contemplated suicide.

Birks (1999) explored the way that attitudes to fathers and fathering affect the policies and practices relating to separated fathers' access to their children. He argued that the traditional attitudes – that parenting is best left to the mother, and fathers are not as necessary nor as proficient at parenting – have been institutionalised in policies that present substantial barriers to many separated fathers who wish to play a greater part in fathering their children.

Some men in New Zealand feel that the Family Court is biased against them, and that as a result fathers have difficulty in some cases obtaining custody of their children or access to them (Carnachan, 2002; Legat, 2001). Some of these fathers link this perceived bias with their feeling that fathering is inadequately valued by New Zealand society. Julian (1999), as part of a survey of over 2,000 men and women, found that 41 percent agreed with the statement 'Family Court decisions discriminate against men'. Kruk (2005) looked at the psychological responses of fathers to the threatened or actual loss of their children following divorce proceedings and found that non-custodial fathers

suffer a loss of a role or identity. This, Kruk reported, leads to a number of fathers disengaging from their children despite wanting to do the opposite. Fathers can also be rejected by a child following separation, because of the reaction of the children to the separation itself, because of past or ongoing actions by the father which alienate the child or because the mother has influenced the child's rejection.[11]
This is called parental alienation, and is a behaviour that has been recognised by the New Zealand Family Court (Atkin, 2005). There is considerable literature on the subject, recently summarised by Bow et al (2009).

We located comparatively few references to issues affecting stepfathers and their support needs. Lees (2007) mentioned a number of studies showing that stepfathers' contribution to their stepchildren is similar to that of biological fathers when they are engaged with the children and supportive. Robertson (2008) reviewed previous research and reported on a new study of stepfathers in the United Kingdom. On the whole, this research suggests that stepfathering is generally a very rewarding experience. There are, however, a number of difficulties and areas where stepfathers could potentially need specific support or training. The research shows that there is a higher rate of depression among stepfathers than biological fathers, but the reason for this is unclear. Stepfathers can be affected by negative perceptions of their role, and often avoid describing themselves as stepfathers, depending on the circumstances. It can be particularly difficult to know what is appropriate for a stepfather to do or not do in terms of parenting the stepchildren, particularly when it comes to washing, dressing or disciplining.
Some of the literature discussed by Robertson suggests that gatekeeping by mothers is a significant factor limiting stepfathers' involvement with their stepchildren, but the United Kingdom study found it was the stepfathers themselves who were deciding what level and type of involvement was appropriate for them.[12] Generally, stepfathers were happy with the involvement of the biological fathers in the lives of the stepchildren, but in a significant minority of cases, there was tension between the birth father and the stepfather, or the contact disturbed the children, and sometimes created stepfather-stepchildren difficulties. An additional issue, not covered by Robertson's paper, is what happens when a relationship involving a stepfather breaks up. In these circumstances, the stepfather can have difficulty retaining connections with the stepchildren he has been fathering.

Another vulnerable group contains those who Pudney (2003) described as resistant to asking for parenting support. Pudney noted this group contains the fathers who are at most risk and tend to avoid services that could support them because they are uncomfortable dealing with them, feel discriminated against or are seen by the service providers as emotionally illiterate.

[11] Either parent can act to have the child reject the other parent. The focus in this report is on the vulnerabilities of fathers, and so we only discuss here parental alienation of the father.

[12] Gatekeeping was discussed earlier on page 25.

2.9 THE SUPPORT FATHERS NEED

Assessing the support needs of fathers can be complicated by a reluctance on the part of fathers, and men in general, to acknowledge or recognise that they need help in the first instance, or seek help when they need it. Addis and Mahalik, in *Men, Masculinity, and the Contexts of Help Seeking* (2003), reviewed the literature relating to this subject. Although their review focuses on physical and mental health, their findings are generally relevant. They found that men are often characterised as unwilling to ask for help across a broad range of issues, from asking for directions when lost, to asking for help from professionals. Despite men experiencing more problems in some areas of life, they are less likely than women to seek assistance. Some of the attributes stereotypically linked with masculinity in the past – physical toughness, emotional control and self-reliance – are thought to be related to this. Where these things were once viewed as strengths, these attributes are now considered problematic if they are preventing some men from seeking help when they need it. Regardless of whether men need to change – for example, by becoming more open to seeking help – the immediate issue is how services can reach and support men. Addis and Mahalik (2003) asked this question: Should men be changed to fit services, or should services be changed to fit men?

Mitchell and Chapman have carried out a number of projects in the Nelson-Marlborough area focusing on providing men and fathers the services they need.[13] This body of work (one part of which is discussed below) shows that there are certainly some men who recognise that they need help and look for it, but find that support services are not compatible with their needs. This does not negate Addis and Mahalik's views: they observed that there is wide variation among men in their willingness or ability to seek help.

According to Bricknell (1998), parenting service providers believe that education is the most productive way to support fathers and promote positive fathering. They believe that fathers need to learn parenting skills, emotional literacy and relationship and interpersonal skills. In contrast to this, Chapman et al (2000) concluded that there should be a focus on developing services to support fathers according to their individual needs, and on reducing the myths and negative stereotypes about fathers and fathering. They had studied 164 fathers' experiences of the child and family services available in the Nelson-Tasman area.

Among the studies undertaken in the area of family services, a common finding has been that service providers often unintentionally overlook the needs of the father and tend to support only the mother (Fletcher, 2004; Green, 2003; Singh, 2000 & Newburn, 2004). Singh and Newburn concluded that service providers need to take into account the differences between fathers' and mothers' parenting when writing their policies and procedures, and during their daily interactions with fathers.

In 2007, Burgess found that service providers' attitudes to men and fathers appear to be generally negative. Burgess reported negative generalisations such as "men are unwilling or unable to change", "a man cannot cope with children without a woman to help him" and "fathers don't love their children as much as mothers".

A number of studies, including those by Ferguson and Hogan (2004) and Ashley et al (2006), found that services for adults and youth ask females if they are mothers but seldom enquire as to whether men are fathers, much less offer them support as parents. Lloyd et al (2003) and Edwards (1998) reported service providers talking about supporting fathers with father-inclusive practices, yet failing to supply any evidence

[13] Assisted in one project by Carol McIntosh. See Mitchell and Chapman (2001), Chapman, McIntosh, and Mitchell (2000), and Mitchell and Chapman (2009).

of actually doing so. This was found to be even more so with services provided to low-income families. Burgess (2007) found that if a father does not present at an appointment with the child's mother, it is automatically assumed he does not exist, and he is treated accordingly.

In 2003, Pudney noted the lack of specific services tailored towards fathers in New Zealand. Pudney stated that a cause of this was that fathers have in the past been reluctant to step forward to ask for help. Since men are now being less bound by stereotypes, Pudney believes the time is right for specific services for fathers to be designed and provided by fathers themselves. He reported on the Man Alive service in West Auckland, which was designed and run by men to cater for men's specific needs.

There are also ethnic differences in fathering patterns that need to be taken into account when designing programmes to support fathers. Pudney noted that European families place a stronger emphasis on the nuclear family, while other ethnicities such as Māori, Asian and Pasifika peoples place a stronger emphasis on the extended family. Complicating the issue, very many families are made up of members whose ethnicities differ from one another. This can make targeting programmes for families by ethnicity problematic. It is important that fathers from particular ethnic groups be able to contribute to fathering polices affecting them, rather than assuming that 'one size fits all'.

A number of researchers have found that pregnancy is a key moment for father intervention. This is due to several factors. Expectant fathers have been found to be particularly open to information, advice and support. These men are likely to be closely involved with their partners during this period, and almost all women are involved with health services. A study by Lupton and Barclay in 1997 found that expectant fathers tend to look at their own health and risk-taking behaviour far more than similarly aged non-fathers. This positive effect on expectant fathers continues after the birth of their baby. Fathers who engage in prenatal services tend to be more involved in caring for their infant, which, in turn, has been linked by Lupton and Barclay (1999) to better father-infant bonding, and to fathers enjoying the fathering role. In 2006, Fisher, McCulloch and Gershuny found that more involvement by fathers in infant care and other household tasks was linked to less parenting stress and less depression in mothers.

Dwyer (2009) reviewed research on the involvement of fathers in antenatal classes and its impact. Fathers who are involved with the pregnancy and birth tend to be more involved with their child's development. Fathers can feel anxious and helpless during labour, and antenatal classes can play an important role in preparing fathers for the birth and afterwards. Fathers, however, are frequently dissatisfied with their experience of antenatal classes, with the lack of recognition of their role and with the way the information is presented. Nevertheless, attending antenatal classes can bring benefits for fathers in the form of increased social network support. There was also some evidence that antenatal classes involving a father-focused discussion group resulted in more positive partner relationships when compared with standard antenatal classes. Dwyer concluded that "childbirth educators should strive to understand fathers' needs and ensure their classes are conducive to involvement by fathers".

Earlier findings about the impact of antenatal classes on expectant fathers had been mixed (Fatherhood Institute, 2007). For example, Singh and Newburn (2000) found that fathers' information needs are often not satisfied. In contrast, Nickel and Kocher (1987) found that fathers were more likely to report feeling closer to their infant once they were born if they had attended antenatal classes where they were taught the skills involved in caring for a newborn.

Encouraging attitudes by doctors can lead to greater participation by fathers in their children's health care (Moore & Kotelchuck, 2004). The same researchers also found that fathers were more likely to be involved when they believe attending doctor visits was responsible father behaviour. Turya and Webster found in 1986 that medical-clinic opening hours that fit in with fathers' work hours allowed fathers to be involved in their children's medical care. Their study showed fathers are twice as likely to bring their children to clinics in the evenings (45 percent) as during the day (20 percent).

Fathers who possessed assertiveness and negotiating and organisational skills reported feeling more confident and comfortable interacting with professionals involved in their children's health and education in a 2007 study by Towers and Swift. In a study by Lamb and Laumann-Billings in 1997, fathers reported that when they were provided with information directly from these professionals, they felt more knowledgeable and capable of providing support to their children's mother.

A 2006 American study by Parra-Cardona, Wampler and Sharp found that young fathers' involvement with their children and their commitment as fathers markedly increased following participation in a therapeutic psycho-education programme. These findings supported those made by Saleh, Buzi, Weinman, and Smith (2005) where teen fathers moved from 'positive emotionality' to 'engagement' with their child following participation in an intensive-parenting programme. Earlier in 1993, a study by Anderson found that acceptance and support from a young father's mother, of both his parenthood and of the mother of his child, was a positive factor affecting the engagement of the young father with his child.

In his 2005 book, *Boys Raising Babies*, Rouch looked at adolescent fatherhood in New Zealand. He reported that a key cause for disapproval of teenage fathers is that they are developmentally unprepared for fatherhood. Mike Coleman, writing in Rouch's book, questioned the good judgement of New Zealand's parental support system, which all too frequently excluded the teenage fathers of children born to teenage mothers. He queried whether all was being done to help these young men to be the best fathers they possibly could be. He recommended that government and non-government departments review their policies and services relating to young parents and make necessary changes to ensure they do not focus solely on the needs of young mothers, but place equal focus on the diverse needs of young mothers and young fathers. He also quoted the Ministry of Education's 2004–2008 Statement of Intent, which states that "education gives people the skills they need to participate fully in society", and asked whether the school curriculum saw all students as future parents and provided them with the skills they needed to participate fully as prospective mothers or fathers. Coleman questioned why the introduction of parenting education was left until young men and women were expectant or actual parents. In his view, young people would be encouraged to take responsible action to avoid pregnancy if they fully understood the extent of what is involved in parenting. He did not think this education would trigger an increase in teenage pregnancy and parenting.

It might, however, be difficult to engage boys' interest in this. Kerslake Hendrick's (1997) research of secondary-school students' views of fathering roles, asked Year 12 boys if they would like to participate in a fathering programme. They were unanimously uninterested, and said that you could only learn how to parent from real life, or that it was too soon to be thinking about fatherhood.

2.10 DEVELOPING POLICIES

Developing policies to support fathers is a significant challenge. We have already noted, following the work of McNaughton and O'Brien (1999), that as well as fathers, men can also be stepfathers, guardians, grandfathers, partners and sons, and policymakers need to take these obligations into consideration when developing workplace policy. Equally, within these roles, fathers, like mothers, are not a homogeneous group. Fathers range from heterosexual married men living with their biological children to gay men who provide lesbian couples with sperm. Pudney (2002) stated that policy needed to be inclusive of every aspect of fathers' relationships with their children and family life.

Pudney's (2006) report *Fathering Our City,* reported on fathering initiatives in Auckland's Waitakere City. It extensively detailed not only what fathers wanted in order to feel heard, valued and respected in their role, but also what needed to be changed in order for fathers to feel included in services providing support for them, their partners and their children. The main findings are that fathers need to be openly promoted by social services to have an equal yet different stake in parenthood. In order for this to be successful, social and government agencies need to look at their own cultures and training to ensure they have strategies to work with fathers in a manner that acknowledges both the equality and the differences. These agencies need to establish interactions with fathers in a way that helps them to overcome lifelong 'don't-ask-for-help' conditioning. Pudney found that working directly with fathers in the workplace and at home was more popular with fathers as it reduces obstacles found with making formal approaches to organisations.

Pudney has pointed out that communication with fathers needs to be in a manner that suits male modes of learning. He considers that fathers like visual and action communication as opposed to verbal communication, and that public advertising campaigns in places frequented by fathers, such as workplaces and auto industries, would be effective. TV would be very powerful because it has a wide presence. Pudney noted overseas successes with short, powerful catchphrases such as "fathering – the one thing you will be remembered for" and "you never stop being a dad". This advertising portrays fathering as an activity rather than a label and links in with fathers' preference for 'action' communication. Pudney considered it important for mothers to acknowledge that men parent differently, and therefore allow fathers space to 'get on with the job' of parenting.

In the United Kingdom, the Government's child-welfare policies have promoted the value of fathers' involvement in family-oriented services, and more generally in family life, as an important component of its Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. The intention is to increase the participation of young fathers in meeting their children's health and education needs. The strategy aims to give each young parent support, including organising access to specialist services where necessary. The strategy incorporates a range of services, including midwifery, health visiting, children's centres and targeted youth-support services, and aims to ensure that these services provide integrated, tailored support for young parents. The strategy also intends to ensure that services work together better to address the challenges facing young parents (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007).

In 2007 Lewis and Lamb produced a review of 700 studies *(Understanding Fatherhood)*. This review is discussed in some detail here because of its relevance to the development of service strategies for supporting fathers. They concluded that society's attitude towards fathering is multifaceted, vibrant and at times in two minds. Many studies showed that women's increasing role in the workplace has resulted in some men doing more in the home. However, men's hours of work have also increased, and Lewis and Lamb reported that in such cases family life could become more stressful. It was also found that there are huge differences in the roles that fathers play because of the diversity of paternal involvement.

In the last 30 years in the United Kingdom, however, there has been an overall trend towards men wanting to play an increasing role in their children's lives. Lewis and Lamb concluded that fathering is a complex set of inter-related relational and economic roles. Some of these are hidden and not always recognised by professionals. Lewis and Lamb reported on the often-misplaced assumption that groups of fathers, such as fathers in prison or teenage fathers, play a minimal role in their children's lives. The studies reviewed by Lewis and Lamb showed, however, that men tend to remain involved with their children even when not living in the family home. The exception to this was in cases of violence by men against the mothers of the children.

Across the studies reviewed, Lewis and Lamb found a tendency for polarised stereotypes of fathers between (in a phrase taken from the American literature) "super dads and deadbeat dads". It was noted there can also be a tendency by service providers to look to fathers to compensate for deficits in parenting by mothers. However, Lewis and Lamb found a close correlation between the role of mothers and the engagement with fathers. When fathers did not live in the family home, in most cases mothers mediated the relationships between the fathers and their children. Positive child-father relations were normally closely paralleled by the strength of a father's relationship with the mother.

Finally, in relation to services for families, Lewis and Lamb's review reported that many were very gendered and made assumptions about the roles of fathers. One example was the study of Sure Start and other early-years projects, which found that 40 percent of the fathers of the children (although often briefly) had contact with the service, while only between one and two percent of the staff were male. Recognition that changes needed to be made has resulted in some extensive makeovers of family-oriented service providers.

Fletcher (2008) also reported on the Sure Start early intervention initiative in the United Kingdom, which began in 1998, as well as the Head Start child-development programme begun in 1965 in the USA. The aim of both programmes was to promote the social, intellectual and physical development of babies and young children from low-income families. Provisions for the inclusion of fathers were set up in both initiatives; however, subsequent evaluations of both programmes still found patchy participation. A number of recommendations common to both programmes were made, one of which was that all staff receive specific training in working with fathers. Another was that fathers' views, wishes and needs were required to be included in the writing of overhauled policies and procedures. A strengths-based approach was also put into practice to accommodate the inclusion of fathers' attitudes and behaviours.

In 1983, the Swedish Government appointed an initiative – the Working Party on the Role of Men – to undertake research on masculinity and organise projects, seminars and publications on men's issues. In 1989, the Government launched a programme called Daddy Come Home to encourage fathers to become more involved in the unpaid care of their children. This initiative was replaced in 1992 with a project called Fathers, Children and Working Life, which focused on men's use of parental-leave benefits with special recognition placed on the factors preventing the uptake of this leave. Sweden has also been proactive in developing programmes to educate young fathers-to-be about childbirth and childcare, including their right to parental leave and the way their role will change in the family with the birth of their child (Callister, 1999). A study of the effects of this programme by Olah (2001) found a high uptake of parental leave following the birth of a child was linked to lower rates of separation and divorce and higher rates of equitable sharing of earning and caring roles. This finding was shared by an Australian study by Lupton and Barclay (1997), which reported positive links between fathers' involvement in the care of their infant, and family-life satisfaction and adjustment to fatherhood.

A survey of 213 early-childhood services in the USA by Green (2003) uncovered three simple ways to encourage participation by fathers. It was found that participation could be improved by including the father's name on the enrolment form, sending written correspondence to the child's father even if he lived apart from his child and inviting fathers into the service to participate in education activities with their children. Ferguson and Hogan (2004) found that to be effective in working with fathers, those working with family services should see the father as more than a support for the mothers and a resource for the children, but also view the man as valuable in himself.

Craig and Mullan (2008) looked at gender division in daily care time across a range of countries. They found that there was more father-mother equality in time spent on routine caring tasks in Denmark than in other countries. They linked this to Danish governmental policies that explicitly supported approaches to work and family that promoted fathers' involvement in the care of their children.

Callister (1999) has discussed approaches to research and policy development on fathering issues, including examining a number of international initiatives. He concluded that if fathers are to be effectively supported in new parenting roles within their families, they need to be included in the research and the policy development on parenting matters that affect them. In particular, he argued for the need to debate research methods used when investigating male behaviour, as he stated that to bring about the greatest chance for success, men and fathers needed to be involved in the research process.

2.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter has reported on a brief review of the literature on fathering, the results of which were summarised in the opening section. The overall impression given by the literature is that, although there are tremendous benefits if fathers are fully engaged with their families, little is known about their support needs, and there are few support services that include a specific focus on fathers. Do New Zealand fathers desire more support, or are they happy and confident in their fathering role? The survey that is described in the following section was designed to address this question.

3. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of the research reported here was to provide us with information on which we could base our advocacy for fathering. In particular, we wanted to better understand:

> the roles that fathers play

> the way these roles may have changed in recent years

> what helps or hinders fathers

> where fathers turn to for role models, advice and support

> fathers' support needs.

If we understand the kinds of support that fathers may need, we will be in a position to advocate more effectively for fathers. To do this, we needed to consider all forms of support, from informal (friends and neighbours) to that provided by organisations providing family support services; and also the support requirements of fathers of all kinds, including new fathers, separated fathers and stepfathers.

To answer these questions, we first carried out the literature review presented in the previous chapter. This helped us determine the issues. Secondly, we commissioned a large telephone survey with fathers from across New Zealand. The results of this survey are presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 of this report. The rest of this chapter outlines the methodology for the survey in more detail.

3.2 SURVEYING FATHERS

The second part of this research involved a large telephone survey with fathers from across New Zealand. A telephone survey was chosen because it provided the most cost-effective means of collecting data from large and geographically dispersed populations quickly. The researchers surveyed a total of 1,721 fathers, with the sample structured to ensure representation of fathers of all different kinds and life-stages. The composition of the respondents is outlined in Tables 3.1 to 3.6.

TABLE 3.1: FATHERS

TYPE OF FATHER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
Birth father	96%	1,596
Stepfather	5%	85
Foster father	1%	17
Other	1%	16

TABLE 3.2: CHILDREN'S LIVING ARRANGEMENTS[14] (* INDICATES LESS THAN 1 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS)		
CHILD/CHILDREN LIVING WITH FATHER	**PERCENTAGE**	**NUMBER**
Birth father to all children	90%	1,542
Birth father and stepfather	3%	49
Birth father and foster-father	*%	4
Birth father, stepfather and foster-father	*%	1
Stepfather only	2%	35
Foster-father only	1%	12
Other	1%	16
No children living with father	4%	62

TABLE 3.3: ETHNICITY OF FATHERS		
ETHNICITY	**PERCENTAGE**	**NUMBER**
Pākehā	67%	1,146
Māori	14%	235
Pasifika	9%	151
Asian	5%	79
Other[ii]	12%	198

TABLE 3.4: AGE OF FATHERS[iii]		
AGE	**PERCENTAGE**	**NUMBER**
20–29	7%	129
30–39	36%	618
40–49	41%	700
50–59	14%	239
60+	2%	35

TABLE 3.5: FATHERS' LIVING ARRANGEMENTS		
ARRANGEMENT	**PERCENTAGE**	**NUMBER**
Single/without current partner	8%	135
Live with wife/partner	92%	1,579
Declined	*%	7

TABLE 3.6: AGE OF YOUNGEST AND OLDEST CHILD		
AGE OF YOUNGEST CHILD	**PERCENTAGE**	**NUMBER**
0–4 years	46%	786
5–9 years	24%	406
10–14 years	20%	346
15–19 years	11%	183

[14] The figures presented in this table suggest that the proportion of fathers in the groups shown above would differ from a similar breakdown for the whole population. For example, the figures for stepfathers appear to be low compared with what we would expect. See the limitations section later in this chapter.

TABLE 3.6: AGE OF YOUNGEST AND OLDEST CHILD (cont)		
AGE OF OLDEST CHILD	**PERCENTAGE**	**NUMBER**
0–4 years	22%	380
5–9 years	23%	390
10–14 years	27%	466
15–19 years	28%	485

A survey of this size provides very accurate results. When discussing results for the entire group of respondent fathers, the survey results are accurate to at least +/-3 percent of the population of fathers in New Zealand as a whole.[iv] The results for the subgroups above are not as precise as this because precision is a function of the size of the subgroup.[v] However, the results are still more than accurate enough to 'zoom in' on particular subgroups. For instance, the results for fathers aged 30 to 39 are accurate to at least +/-4 percent of that population as a whole; and the results for Māori fathers are accurate to at least +/-6.5 percent of that population as a whole. Appendix Two gives more detail.

The size of the sample enables researchers to address problems with a survey's results that arise from sampling errors.[vi] Researchers call these errors 'unsystematic' because they arise from probability ('chance') factors. However, errors can also enter any research because of the way the research is conducted. Researchers call these errors 'systematic' (because they are not the product of chance). The most common source of systematic error in any survey research is called 'non-response bias'. This error occurs when survey participants differ in important ways from the population as a whole. An obvious example is the 0900 polls sometimes seen on television, where only those sufficiently motivated to call in, and spend the price of the 0900 call, take part in the poll. To understand how much non-response bias there may be in a survey, it is important to know not just how many people took part in a survey but also how many people were approached to take part. The lower a survey's response rate (that is, the percentage of those approached who actually took part in the survey), the greater the potential for non-response bias to be present. For this survey, the researchers contacted 5,631 qualifying households to complete 1,721 surveys (for a participation rate of 31 percent).[vii] The survey addressed the potential problem of non-response bias in three ways:

1. The survey team made every effort to contact the people identified in the original sample (that is, the telephone numbers originally selected or generated were not substituted for new numbers until they had been exhausted). The researchers used up to six call-backs for each originally selected number (with these call-backs scheduled to cover daytime weekdays, evening weekdays and daytime weekends). In general, higher response rates are achieved with more calls back to each non-answering number.

2. The research design provided respondents with the option of completing the survey questionnaire online. This was done because one way to increase response rates in survey-based research projects is by increasing the number of ways that participants can complete the survey questionnaire. The researchers did this by offering potential participants the option of completing the survey online or sending them a mail version when making the first phone contact.

3. The research design included a short survey with a number of non-participants. This technique is known as a non-response survey, and involves systematically following

up with some of those who refused to participate in the main survey. These follow-ups simply involve contacting a small number of the residents who refused to participate in the original survey to understand the basis of their refusal, and to assess their attitudes towards the key issues in the original questionnaire. Refusal surveys need to be very short to be effective, and can be combined with the survey-auditing process to make the task less onerous for the participants.[viii]

What did the non-response survey find?

The researchers surveyed 302 fathers who declined to participate in the original survey. Among these 302 fathers, the most common reason for not participating was that someone else in the house had answered the phone and refused on the father's behalf (or the father could not remember the call). The second-most common reason was that they had no time to participate or were otherwise busy. Just 20 percent of the fathers in the non-response survey said they were 'not interested' in the survey. To assess the attitudes of the non-responding fathers, participants in the non-response survey were asked if they thought New Zealand 'as a whole recognises the importance of families' (Q4.3). In the main survey, 58 percent of respondents said they did not think New Zealand recognised the importance of fathers, and in the refusal survey 60 percent of respondents answered the same way. Even allowing for the greater sampling error present in the refusal survey,[ix] we can see that there is no evidence for significant difference in opinions between the survey participants and non-participants.

All of the telephone interviews were conducted by a call centre. The survey participants were recruited randomly to fill the target quotas of fathers. This selection involved randomly selecting telephone numbers from national landline telephone databases, and randomly generating telephone numbers to provide an uplift of mobile phone numbers (to ensure coverage of those fathers who do not have access to, or do not regularly use, their landline).

3.3 ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research design was approved by the Families Commission Ethics Committee, as well as the Families Commission's Kaihono and Board. This process ensured the researchers paid attention to the way informed consent was gathered from participants[x] and to the way the collected data were handled to ensure confidentiality.[15]

3.4 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND CAVEATS

While a telephone survey design provided the most appropriate research method for the kind of insight we sought, this does not mean we should accept the survey's findings uncritically. All social research methods are flawed and incomplete to some extent, and telephone surveys are no exception. Equally, all real-world research projects involve some degree of compromise and concession. It is important to keep these limitations in mind when reading the results of this survey research.

The most obvious limitation of telephone surveys is that you can only survey those people who have telephones. Although the number of households in New Zealand with telephones (the 'telephone penetration rate') is high by international standards (with 98 percent of households having a telephone),[xi] what matters is that the homes without telephones are likely to introduce a measure of systematic bias into the sample because they are likely to be predominantly poorer homes, those in rural areas and those with elderly inhabitants.

In addition, the very ubiquity of telephone surveying creates barriers to completing perfectly representative samples. In line with overseas trends, response rates to local and national surveys are declining steadily. Three main factors have been implicated in this decline:

1. Excessive interviewing. There are claims that over 300,000 interviews are conducted in New Zealand each year.

2. Competing demands on respondents' time and attention. The most commonly cited reason for not responding to a survey request is that the person is simply 'too busy'.

3. Increasingly negative views towards survey research. Potential respondents may feel they have very little to gain from participation in a survey. Moreover, an increase in the prevalence of telemarketing coupled with the inability of many potential respondents to distinguish genuine research from telemarketing may be contributing to the negative perceptions of research.[xii]

For all of these reasons and more, telephone surveys rarely involve truly random samples. The time and resource constraints involved with most research, along with the incomplete information that is available about the population of interest, all contribute to an acceptance amongst researchers of using 'near-representative samples' on a regular basis.

This survey, with a number of mechanisms in place to maximise response rates, achieved a response rate of 31 percent, reflecting this general trend. We have discussed how the survey addressed potential sampling and non-response biases above. What the research cannot do, clearly, is tell us about the perceptions and attitudes of the fathers who did not participate in the survey. The non-response survey, discussed above, gave

[15] In addition, the research company, Research First, is a corporate member of the Market Research Society of New Zealand (MRSNZ) and, as such, is bound by its ethical guidelines and professional standards. See http://www.mrsnz.org.nz/Resources/Code-of-Practice.asp for the MRSNZ's Code of Practice.

us greater confidence that the survey is representing the views of all New Zealand fathers. Nevertheless, we cannot have total confidence that this is the case. There could be a systematic difference between those who responded to the survey and those who did not. For example, those who did not respond might, on average, be busier than those who did respond, and this might correlate with other differences in experiences and attitudes.

A check against census data can provide a partial check of the representativeness of the survey respondents. In this case, however, the way that fathers were identified precludes a close check. Census data identify fathers living with children in the same households, whereas the fathers for this survey did not have to be living with their children. The age categories for the census do not match our age categories perfectly: the closest match with census data was for fathers whose children living with them were 17 years of age or under, whereas the survey fathers' children were 19 years old or under. When we looked at the age breakdown for these two groups, we found that there was a good match – no more than two percentage points in any 10-year age bracket. We did not get such a close match on ethnicity. The percentages for Māori and Pasifika cannot be compared between the survey and the census because we deliberately over-sampled these two ethnic groups. Nor can a comparison be made for our Pākehā group, because of differences between this category and categories used for the census. We could, however, check the proportion of Asian fathers in the survey with that of the census. We found that Asian fathers were substantially under-represented in the survey: five percent for the survey, compared with 10 percent for the census. The over-sampling of Māori and Pasifika would tend to depress the numbers sampled for other ethnic groups, but not to this extent. We do not know what has caused this difference.

We are fairly certain that stepfathers are not represented among the survey participants in the same proportions as they would be found in the general population. We know of no figures for the proportion of stepfathers among the general population. There is, however, a somewhat out-of-date indication of the number of blended families in *New Zealand Families Today* (Ministry of Social Development, 2004), where it is stated, apparently on the basis of a 1995 survey, that one in five women have at some stage lived in a blended family. At any particular time, the proportion of blended families would be lower than this. Also, many stepfathers' families would include both stepchildren and their birth children, from their current or former relationships. These stepfathers had the opportunity to identify themselves as both birth fathers and stepfathers. It may be that some of them identified themselves only as birth fathers. Nevertheless, the portion of survey fathers who are stepfathers (five percent) seems low.

Lastly, caution needs to be used when extrapolating from small subgroups within the survey results. As discussed above, random errors associated with small sampling numbers increase the chance that the smaller groups are not representative of all fathers belonging to that subgroup. To assist in this regard, the report presents the number (N) of responses in each category, so that the reader can see the size of the group being reported for each question.

4. WHAT FATHERS DO

4.1 WHAT FATHERS DO

We saw in the results from the literature review (Chapter 2) that the role of fathers has changed, and is changing, in significant ways. For instance, we saw how New Zealand researchers talk about the role of fathers being not only about providing for a family but also about the emotional connection between a father and his child (Rouch, 2005). Similarly, we saw how Australian researchers found that 90 percent of males and 91 percent of females agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "a father should be as heavily involved in the care of his children as the mother" (Wilson et al, 2005). The first part of our survey addressed the role of fathers. It asked fathers what they do with their children; how much time they spend with them; how parenting and household chores are divided between fathers and mothers; their desire to spend more or less time parenting; and what prevents them from spending this amount of time with their children.

The results from this part of the research show that most fathers are busy people. On average, fathers spend about 40 waking hours a week with their children – more for Māori and Pasifika fathers. Fathers not only eat and play with their children but they change their nappies; read them stories; put them to bed; are involved with their homework, sporting activities and hobbies; and transport them to school or friends' places, to name just the most common things. In addition, the majority of fathers considered that they were 'very' or 'totally' involved in family chores, to the extent that it took up most of their spare time, or was their major activity. The fathers were split on whether chores around the house or childcare were mainly their wife or partner's responsibility, or a shared responsibility. Most fathers were primarily responsible for chores around the property. The survey also showed that:

> the time fathers spend with their children diminishes when their children become teenagers. When the father's oldest child was 15 to 19 years, the hours the father spent with the children dropped from around 39 hours to 33 hours per week

> two-thirds of fathers (68 percent) said that they would like to spend more time parenting their children, and very few fathers wanted to spend less time parenting their children

> seventy-seven percent of the fathers who did not live with their children wanted to spend more time parenting

> seventy-four percent of fathers who worked full-time wanted to spend more time parenting

> Pasifika and Asian fathers were particularly likely to want to spend more time with their children

> by far the most common barrier to fathers spending more time with their children was the competing demand of paid work.

The rest of this chapter presents the results from this first part of the survey in detail.

4.2 TIME SPENT WITH CHILDREN

Asking fathers how much time they spend with their children is fraught with difficulty. Surveys that have asked how much time fathers spend alone with their children produce low estimates because most fathers are partnered, and when they are with their children they are also in the company of their partners. After careful consideration, this survey asked how much time fathers spend in the company of their children 'in a normal week', and they were asked (Q.1.2) to calculate this in terms of waking hours.[xiii] The responses from fathers show that they spent an average of 37.2 hours a week with their children (with responses varying from zero hours a week to over 100 hours a week). This large range of answers is reflected in the fact the 'standard deviation' for the average (mean) score was 16.3 hours. The standard deviation provides a measure of how well the mean score represents everyone who responded to the survey, and a large standard deviation like this shows that the number of hours fathers spend with their children varies considerably across the survey. By using this mean and standard deviation, we can see that two-thirds of the fathers in the survey spend somewhere between 20.9 and 53.5 hours a week with their children.[xiv]

Māori and Pasifika fathers spent 40.8 and 39.4 waking hours with their children respectively (see Table 4.1). Fathers whose oldest child was 15 or older spent fewer hours a week with them than did fathers with younger children (Table 4.2). Unsurprisingly, fathers who had the children living with them spent considerably more time with their children on average (38 hours) than those fathers whose children did not live with them (24 hours) (Table 4.3).

TABLE 4.1: WEEKLY WAKING HOURS SPENT WITH CHILDREN, BY ETHNICITY[xv]

	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,128)	MĀORI (N=233)	PASIFIKA (N=149)	ASIAN (N=79)
Mean	36.3	40.8	39.4	35.0
Std dev	16.4	17.2	15.4	13.7

TABLE 4.2: WEEKLY WAKING HOURS SPENT WITH CHILDREN, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD[xvi]

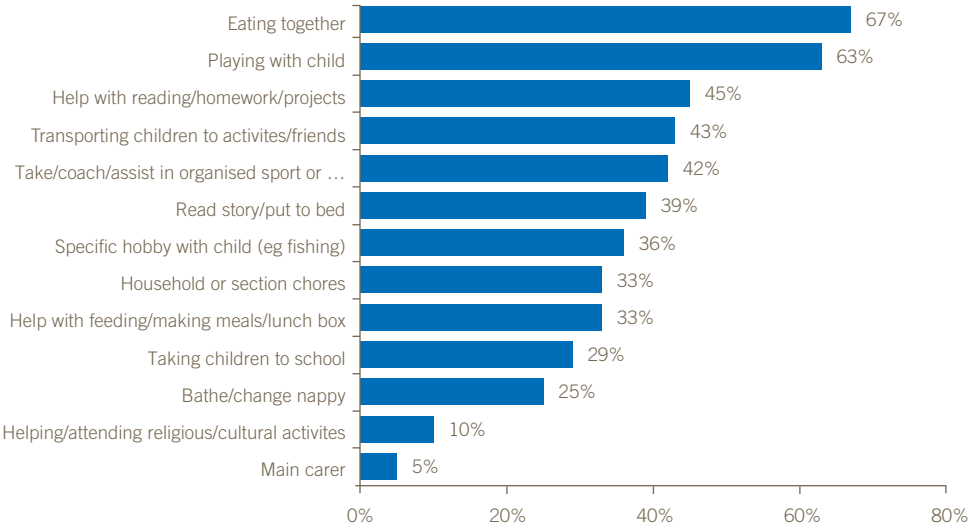
	0–4 (N=375)*	5–9 (N=387)*	10–14 (N=463)*	15–19 (N=473)*
Mean	39.3	37.9	38.9	33.2
Std dev	16.1	14.5	17.0	16.6

TABLE 4.3: WEEKLY WAKING HOURS SPENT WITH CHILDREN, BY LIVE WITH CHILDREN [xvii]

	LIVE WITH CHILDREN (N=1,641)	DO NOT LIVE WITH CHILDREN (N=57)
Mean	37.6	24.1
Std dev	16.1	18.2

As well as how much time they spent with their children, the fathers were also asked what kinds of activities they did with their children (Q.1.1). This included activities both with and without their partner present. Many of the activities listed are age-dependent, so while one father might mention changing nappies, another father might mention coaching his child's sports team. The responses to this question are shown in Figure 4.1.

FIGURE 4.1: ACTIVITIES FATHERS DO WITH THEIR CHILDREN



Five percent of the fathers answered this question by saying that they were the main carer, which means that they are involved in most or possibly all of the children's activities. The most common activities mentioned by the fathers were eating and playing together, which reflects the fact that these activities are universal to children of all ages. All of the other activities listed in Figure 4.1 are age-specific to a greater or lesser extent. In addition, a range of other (specific) activities were each mentioned by up to 30 fathers. These activities included going for walks, talking, shopping, going to the beach, camping, watching TV, picnics, holidays, days out, going to the zoo, going to the museum, going to restaurants, cooking, gardening and visiting family members.

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 show the most frequently mentioned activities that fathers do with their children for different ethnic and age groups. The results show that the top three activities are the same for the ethnic groups shown: eating together, playing with the children and helping with reading, homework or projects. There are some variations in the next two activities, with taking children to school being fourth in the list only for Asian fathers (38 percent).

Table 4.5 gives a breakdown by the age of the oldest child. Obviously, families with more than one child will cover a greater age range, and therefore activities that were appropriate for younger children might still have been mentioned by these fathers. Nevertheless, this age breakdown does show a different pattern from the previous table. Eating together and playing with the child still predominate, although playing with the child declined with the age of the child. Involvement with sports events was more predominant among the two oldest age groups, and reading stories or putting to bed and changing nappies were higher among the youngest age groups.

TABLE 4.4: TOP FIVE ACTIVITIES THAT FATHERS DO WITH CHILDREN, BY ETHNICITY

	PĀKEHĀ (N=1146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
Eating together	67%	71%	70%	63%
Playing with child	64%	67%	62%	57%
Help with reading/homework/project	44%	46%	44%	43%
Transporting children to activities/friends	44%	46%	43%	30%
Take/coach/assist in organised sport or other similar activity	43%	46%	38%	28%

TABLE 4.5: TOP ACTIVITIES THAT FATHERS DO WITH CHILDREN, BY OLDEST CHILD'S AGE				
	0–4 (N=380)	5–9 (N=390)	10–14 (N=466)	15–19 (N=485)
Eating together	52%	71%	71%	73%
Playing with child	85%	77%	57%	40%
Help with reading /homework/project	9%	57%	63%	45%
Transporting children to activities/friends	20%	44%	51%	51%
Take/coach/assist in organised sport or other similar activity	12%	41%	53%	57%
Read story/put to bed	71%	54%	28%	13%
Bathe/change nappy	69%	23%	10%	5%

4.3 FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT WITH FAMILY CHORES

When asked to describe the extent of their involvement in family chores (Q.1.3), most of the fathers in the survey said they were heavily involved (63 percent of the fathers surveyed said they were either 'totally' or 'very' involved in these chores, and a further 26 percent stated that they were 'quite' involved). Just 11 percent stated they were just 'somewhat' or 'not very' involved (Table 4.6).

Table 4.7 shows this information for fathers according to ethnicity. A high proportion of Māori and Pasifika fathers stated that they were totally or very involved in household chores – 69 percent and 67 percent respectively. Fathers whose oldest child was aged 10 to 14 recorded the highest proportion who were 'very involved' or 'totally involved', and fathers of those aged zero to four recorded the lowest proportion (Table 4.8).

TABLE 4.6: EXTENT OF INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILY CHORES	
	PERCENTAGE
Totally involved – is my major activity	32%
Very involved – takes up most of my spare time	31%
Quite involved – often involved in chores	26%
Somewhat involved – occasionally do chores	9%
Not very involved – do very little	2%

TABLE 4.7: EXTENT OF INVOLVEMENT, BY ETHNICITY				
ETHNICITY	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
Totally or very involved	61%	69%	67%	58%

TABLE 4.8: EXTENT OF INVOLVEMENT, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD				
	0–4 (N=380)	5–9 (N=390)	10–14 (N=466)	15–19 (N=485)
Totally or very involved	60%	61%	67%	63%

Fathers were also asked about who took primary responsibility for specific chores and tasks around the house and property (Q.1.4). This part of the survey showed that:

> day-to-day childcare (including tasks such as dressing, feeding and bathing) were mostly likely to be done by the fathers' wives and partners (44 percent) or shared (43 percent). Only 12 percent of fathers said they took primary responsibility for these tasks

> caring for a child who was sick, or during school holidays, was also often a primary responsibility of wives and partners (45 percent), with a number of families sharing this responsibility (39 percent). Fifteen percent of fathers said they took primary responsibility for these tasks

> fathers were more likely to say that helping children with homework, and housework and household chores, were tasks that were shared 50/50 with wives and partners (46 percent and 47 percent respectively). About a quarter of fathers said that they took primary responsibility for helping children with homework

> most fathers (71 percent) said they were the ones who took primary responsibility for chores outside of the house (Table 4.9).

TABLE 4.9: WHO TAKES THE MAIN RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHORES?

	NUMBER[XVIII]	SELF	WIFE/ PARTNER	OTHER	50/50
Day-to-day childcare such as dressing, feeding, bathing, putting to bed	1,273	12%	44%	1%	43%
Caring for child when sick or during school holidays	1,593	15%	45%	1%	39%
Housework and chores around the house	1,705	16%	36%	2%	46%
Helping child with homework	1,241	26%	26%	1%	47%
Chores around the section/yard	1,684	71%	4%	1%	24%

4.4 FATHERS' DESIRE TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH THEIR CHILDREN

The first part of the survey ended by asking fathers if they would like to spend more time or less time parenting (Q.1.5a to Q.1.6b). This question was aimed at asking fathers about the amount of time they spent actively involved with their children (for example, reading them a story), rather than passively involved (watching a television programme while the child played in the same room). It was felt that these concepts were too complex to explain satisfactorily in a time-limited survey, and as a compromise, the expression 'parenting your children' was used. The researchers acknowledge that there would likely have been some ambiguity about this term.

The majority of fathers (68 percent) stated they would like to spend more time parenting their children, and just two percent of the total respondents stated they would like to spend less time parenting. The remaining 30 percent did not wish to change the amount of time they were spending parenting their children. Fathers with children who did not live with them were particularly likely to want to spend more time with their children (77 percent of these fathers wanted to spend more time, compared to 68 percent of fathers whose children lived with them). In addition, fathers in full-time work were much more likely to say they wanted to spend more time with their children (Table 4.10).

High proportions of Pasifika and Asian fathers said that they wanted to spend more time with their children (Table 4.11).[xix] The desire of fathers to spend more time parenting also shows a distinct downward trend as the age of the father's oldest child increased (Table 4.12).

TABLE 4.10: WOULD LIKE TO SPEND MORE TIME PARENTING, BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

	FULL-TIME (N=1,314)	SELF-EMPLOYED (N=163)	PART-TIME (N=74)	FULL-TIME CARER (N=48)	NOT WORKING (ILL HEALTH/ JOB-SEEKER) (N=74)
More time	74%	50%	41%	23%	58%

TABLE 4.11: WOULD LIKE TO SPEND MORE TIME PARENTING, BY ETHNICITY

ETHNICITY	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
More time	66%	69%	78%	81%

TABLE 4.12: WOULD LIKE TO SPEND MORE TIME PARENTING, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD

	0–4 (N=380)	5–9 (N=390)	10–14 (N=466)	15–19 (N=485)
More time	76%	72%	67%	59%

Those fathers who said they would like to spend more time parenting were then asked what prevented them from doing so. By far the most common response was 'work commitments and pressures' (89 percent). Other responses were that they 'live away from their child or children' (four percent), the pressure of chores (two percent), community commitments (two percent) and sporting commitments (two percent). For fathers of teenage children the main barriers, apart from work commitments, were their child's growing independence and need for study time. The point about the demands of paid work being the main barrier to fathers spending more time with their children, or doing different things with their children, emerges throughout the survey, and is addressed in the following chapters.

5. APPROACHES TO FATHERING

5.1 APPROACHES TO FATHERING

The previous chapter has shown that most fathers are busy people, with many of them attempting to juggle fatherhood with paid employment and various household chores. This reinforces the point made in the literature review about the need for more recognition of the 'double burden' fathers experience in fulfilling paid and unpaid work (Callister, 2005). The literature review also noted that this 'burden' seems likely to increase as fathers' involvement in the care of their children becomes more of a social norm (O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003).

However, we also saw in the literature review that as well as becoming busier (and juggling more tasks), the way fathers parent has changed in important ways. The traditional stereotypical, authoritarian and remote father has been replaced by one who often wants to play a larger, and more active, part in raising his children. The second part of this survey addressed questions of how fathers parent. It asked fathers about their style of fathering; where they learnt how to be a father; and how this differs from the approach of their own father.

The results from this part of the survey show that fathers play a number of roles in their families. While being the 'income-earner and provider' is seen by many fathers as their primary role, they characterise themselves as being a 'friend' or 'playmate' to their children and as being a 'supportive husband, partner or boyfriend'. In addition:

> fathers were likely to say that their approach to fathering was different from their own fathers'. In particular, the fathers were likely to say they were more likely to be involved in their children's upbringing and less likely to be disciplinarian

> at the same time, a significant proportion of the fathers in this survey said they based their own fathering style on what they learnt from their father

> others said that being a father was something they had 'just picked up' or that 'it was instinct', and they could not attribute their approach to anyone.

The rest of this chapter presents the results from this part of the survey in detail.

5.2 FATHERING 'STYLE'

The first question (Q.2.1) in this part of the survey asked fathers to describe their fathering style.[xx] Earlier in the survey, fathers were asked to describe their role. The two concepts are not completely distinct[xxi] – there is overlap, and yet there are differences too. This is perhaps best illustrated through example. Two fathers might describe their main role in the family as provider, but their fathering style might differ. The first might emphasise that they are a friend or playmate to their children, while the second might be more of a disciplinarian. As can be seen from the answers given to this question compared with the question about fathers' roles, the distinction between these two concepts has not come through successfully in many of the fathers' responses. Nevertheless, there are some important differences in some of the fathers' responses, as will be shown below.

The most common answer was the role of 'income-earner and provider' (58 percent of all respondents). However, 'friend or playmate' (48 percent), 'supportive partner, husband or boyfriend' (47 percent), 'coach' (43 percent) and 'carer or nurturer' (41 percent) were all mentioned by a significant number of fathers (Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1: FATHERING STYLE	
N=1,721	PERCENTAGE
Income-earner and provider	58%
Friend/playmate	48%
Supportive partner/husband/boyfriend	47%
Coach	43%
Carer/nurturer	41%
Rule/boundary/limit-maker	34%
Disciplinarian	32%
Confidant/adviser	30%
Other	3%

The responses varied by the age of the oldest child, and also by the ethnicity of the fathers. For instance:

> 'income-earner and provider' was the top descriptor for fathers of children of all ages except for those whose children were aged zero to four, where 'friend or playmate' was most often mentioned; and 'coach' was the second most popular descriptor for fathers of children aged 10 or older (Table 5.2)

> 'income-earner and provider' was the most popular descriptor for fathers of all ethnic groups, and 'friend or playmate' was the second most popular descriptor among Pākehā and 'other' ethnic group, while 'supportive partner, husband or boyfriend' held this spot for Māori, Pasifika and Asian fathers (Table 5.3).

TABLE 5.2: TOP THREE DESCRIPTIONS OF FATHERING STYLE, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD				
	0–4 (N=380)	5–9 (N=390)	10–14 (N=466)	15–19 (N=485)
Friend/playmate	63%	62%	55%	58%
Income-earner and provider	60%	54%	50%	49%
Supportive partner/husband/boyfriend	52%	48%	48%	43%

TABLE 5.3: TOP THREE DESCRIPTIONS OF FATHERING STYLE, BY ETHNICITY				
	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
Income-earner and provider	59%	56%	62%	58%
Friend/playmate	48%	51%	54%	44%
Coach	46%	48%	51%	43%

Having reflected on their own fathering style, the survey participants were later asked how that style differed from that of their own fathers (Q.2.3). The key difference the survey participants noted was that they were more involved in their children's lives and upbringing. As one father put it:

[It's] completely different… I get involved in their lives and I've got to know them as the people they are.

While 31 percent of fathers said they were more involved ('more hands-on') with raising their children than their fathers, this did not stop 26 percent of fathers saying that their own father was their role model. They said that their fathers had shown them the right way to be a father, and that they aimed to be the same as their father. One respondent explained:

[It's] similar – my father was caring about me all the time, guiding me, telling me what to do. I look after my kids the same way.

Another said:

[It's] similar, my father was really active and a good role model for us as kids.

Some fathers (eight percent of those answering this question) volunteered that there was no father present during their childhood and thus they were unable to learn how to be a father on the basis of this experience (Table 5.4).

TABLE 5.4: INTERGENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN FATHERING APPROACH

COMMENT	% OF RESPONSES (N=1,686)
More involved/hands-on/spend more time with children/more active in upbringing	31%
Try to be the same as/similar to father	26%
Less of a disciplinarian/not as strict	11%
Dad not around when I was young/left when I was young/didn't see father much	8%
Better connection with children/talk more/more communication/emotion shown	6%
Different discipline approach/less violence	4%
Different (no comment)	3%
Times have changed, hard to compare/different times	2%
Better than father/learnt from his mistakes	2%
Alcoholic father	1%
Gentler/laid-back/more tolerant/relaxed	1%
Different culture	1%
Don't know	1%
Other	4%

In general, Māori fathers, Pasifika fathers and Asian fathers were less likely to say they were 'more involved' and 'more hands-on' than Pākehā fathers; and Māori and Pasifika fathers were less likely to say they were trying to be the same as their own father. Māori fathers were also more likely to say their father was absent when they were young. One Māori father said:

[My] dad was never there.

The absence of their own fathers suggests that these men did not have a role model for their own fathering approach (Table 5.5).

Pasifika fathers were also more likely to say they were less disciplinarian than their own fathers. One of these fathers said:

I grew up getting [a] bashing, [I'm] bringing my children up with totally different discipline.

Pasifika fathers and Asian fathers were also most likely to note the different cultures where the comparative fathering styles were developed (that is, their fathers' and their own):

Different cultures, I was brought up in Sri Lanka and my children brought up in New Zealand society and culture.

Intergenerational differences varied less by the age of the oldest child. Interestingly, fathers with older children were less likely to say that their approach to discipline was different from that of their own their fathers. One of these fathers said:

My dad was English Victorian and I used to get beaten as a child. I don't do that. I'm not soft but not hard – in the middle.

TABLE 5.5: INTERGENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN FATHERING APPROACH, BY ETHNICITY

COMMENT	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,119)	MĀORI (N=232)	PASIFIKA (N=147)	ASIAN (N=78)
More involved/hands-on/spend more time with children/more active in upbringing	33%	26%	23%	24%
Try to be the same as/similar to father	27%	21%	24%	27%
Less of a disciplinarian/not as strict	10%	10%	12%	11%
Dad not around when I was young/left when I was young/didn't see father much	7%	16%	10%	4%
Better connection with children/talk more/more communication/emotion shown	5%	6%	4%	5%

TABLE 5.6: INTERGENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN FATHERING APPROACH, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD

COMMENT	0–4 (N=371)	5–9 (N=385)	10–14 (N=454)	15–19 (N=474)
More involved/hands-on/spend more time with children/more active in upbringing	32%	32%	28%	31%
Try to be the same as/similar to father	28%	30%	25%	21%
Less of a disciplinarian/not as strict	9%	11%	9%	2%
Dad not around when I was young/left when I was young/didn't see father much	10%	7%	8%	8%
Better connection with children/talk more/more communication/emotion shown	3%	5%	6%	6%

6. ROLE MODELS, ADVICE AND SUPPORT

6.1 WHERE FATHERS TURN FOR ROLE MODELS, ADVICE AND SUPPORT

In the previous chapter, we learnt that many fathers have adopted a significantly different approach from that of their own fathers, with many being more hands-on or less strict, while other fathers have tried to emulate their own fathers. This range of responses raises an interesting and important question: Where do fathers find their role models, and where do they look for advice and support? These issues are explored in this chapter, while the next chapter follows up by exploring how fathers could be better supported.

The fathers surveyed most commonly said that fathering was instinctive, or they had 'just picked it up'. About half of the fathers stated that they had learnt how to be a father from their own father or other male relative. The majority of fathers had discussed fathering with someone, but not usually their own father or their partner. No one type of acquaintance predominated, but it was a little more likely that they would have discussed fathering with a friend who was a father. This chapter also shows that:

> a little more than a half of fathers had never read about how to be a father

> two-thirds of fathers had never attended a course on fathering or parenting, and only 20 percent had attended an antenatal course

> nearly 90 percent of fathers had never accessed any type of support service to help them with their fathering

> almost all of the fathers had never belonged to a fathers' support group, but 70 percent said they would be comfortable talking about parenting in a social setting

> a substantial minority of fathers said they were unable to take parental leave at the time of the birth of their children. Fathers, regardless of employment type, were more likely to be able to take parental leave following the birth of their child than access special leave when that child was sick. Fathers in full-time employment were more likely than fathers in part-time employment to be able to access either type of leave.

6.2 WHERE FATHERS LEARN ABOUT HOW TO BE A FATHER

When asked where they learnt how to be a father (Q.2.2), 60 percent said that they had just picked it up, it was instinct or they could not attribute it to anyone; 51 percent said they had learnt how to be a father from their own father, grandfather or other male relation.

The proportion who stated they had solely picked it up or followed their instincts was 35 percent, and those who had learnt solely from their father, grandfather or other male relation made up 25 percent. All other fathers nominated more than one source of learning.

These trends were fairly consistent across fathers of different ages, with the exception of those who had become fathers under the age of 20, who were far more likely to say they had just picked it up, and less likely to say they learnt from a male relation (Table 6.1). Less commonly, the fathers in the survey said they learnt it from friends or neighbours; books, reading or the internet; their partner; parenting classes or fathers' groups; female relations; learning as they went; and church groups.

TABLE 6.1: WHERE FATHERS LEARN ABOUT HOW TO BE A FATHER, BY AGE THEY BECAME A FATHER					
	OVERALL (N=1,721)	UNDER 20 (N=84)	20–29 (N=792)	30–39 (N=759)	40+ (N=86)
Nowhere/just instinct/picked it up	60%	67%	59%	60%	59%
Father/grandfather/other male relation	51%	31%	52%	51%	52%
Friends/neighbours	6%	2%	5%	7%	6%
Books/reading/internet	5%	0%	4%	6%	6%
From partner	4%	4%	3%	5%	3%
Parenting classes/fathers' groups	3%	0%	3%	4%	2%

Sixty percent of Pasifika fathers said they had learnt fathering from their own father, grandfather or other male relation, compared with 45 to 51 percent in other groups. Pasifika fathers were also the least likely to say they had just picked it up. The highest proportion mentioning books, reading and the internet was fathers from Asia, at 11 percent. (Table 6.2).

TABLE 6.2: WHERE FATHERS LEARN HOW TO BE A FATHER, BY ETHNICITY				
	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
Nowhere/just instinct/picked it up	60%	59%	50%	56%
Father/grandfather/other male relation	51%	45%	60%	48%
From friends/neighbours	6%	5%	3%	5%
Books/reading/internet	5%	1%	2%	11%
From partner	4%	3%	4%	1%
Parenting classes/fathers' groups	4%	2%	1%	4%

6.3 WHO FATHERS TALK TO ABOUT HOW TO BE A FATHER

Fathers were asked whether they talked to anyone, or had talked to anyone, about how to father, or how to father more effectively (Q.2.4a). More than half of fathers said they did, or had talked to someone about fathering (57 percent), leaving a substantial minority of fathers (43 percent) who had not (Table 6.3).

It might be surprising that only 21 percent of fathers had discussed fathering with their wife or partner, and only one in 10 had talked to their own father, grandfather or other male relation. In fact, the most common person spoken to was a friend who was a father (28 percent). Small proportions (three percent or less) talked to professionals, female friends or relations, a church group or a fathers' group.

Among those who had talked to someone about fathering, virtually all thought it was helpful (70 percent stated it was 'very helpful' and 27 percent 'some help'). Just three percent found it little help or were neutral about its value.

TABLE 6.3: WHO FATHERS TALK TO ABOUT HOW TO BE A FATHER, BY AGE THEY BECAME A FATHER					
	OVERALL (N=1,721)	UNDER 20 (N=84)	20–29 (N=792)	30–39 (N=759)	40+ (N=86)
No-one	43%	56%	43%	42%	42%
Friend who is a father	29%	12%	29%	30%	20%
Wife/partner	20%	12%	20%	22%	26%
Father/grandfather/other male relation	11%	12%	11%	11%	13%

The general patterns were consistent across the range of ages when the men first became fathers (Table 6.4).

TABLE 6.4: WHO FATHERS TALK TO ABOUT HOW TO BE A FATHER, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD

	0–4 (N=380)	5–9 (N=390)	10–14 (N=466)	15–19 (N=485)
No-one	43%	40%	42%	47%
Friend who is a father	31%	27%	28%	27%
Wife/partner	22%	23%	22%	17%
Father/grandfather/other male relation	12%	14%	11%	7%

A majority of Asian fathers said that they had talked to no-one about how to be a father (59 percent), while a few (eight percent) had spoken about it with their wife or partner. Almost half of the Pasifika fathers had not spoken to anyone about how to be a father, and 17 percent had talked with their father, grandfather or other male relation (Table 6.5).

TABLE 6.5: OTHERS SPOKEN TO ABOUT EFFECTIVE FATHERING, BY ETHNICITY

	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
No-one	41%	43%	48%	59%
Friend who is a father	30%	27%	23%	23%
Wife/partner	22%	17%	15%	8%
Father/grandfather/other male relation	11%	13%	17%	6%

6.4 READING ABOUT HOW TO BE A FATHER

Fathers were then asked whether they had read anything about how to be a father (Q.2.5a). Over half of the fathers had not read anything at any time (54 percent). A quarter (24 percent) said they had read something immediately after a child was born, and almost as many (22 percent) had read something before the child was born. Fewer had read anything during the pre-teen and teenage years of the child (13 percent and five percent respectively) (Table 6.6).

Of those who had read about how to be a father, the great majority had found it helpful. Forty-five percent of the readers described it as 'very' helpful, with another 46 percent describing it as 'some' help.

TABLE 6.6: READING ABOUT HOW TO BE A FATHER, BY AGE THEY BECAME A FATHER

	OVERALL (N=1,721)	UNDER 20 (N=84)	20–29 (N=792)	30–39 (N=759)	40+ (N=86)
Read something	44%	26%	43%	49%	62%

In general, the age when a man first became a father had the most bearing on their likelihood to read about fatherhood, with older fathers more likely than younger fathers to read (Table 6.7).

TABLE 6.7: READING ABOUT HOW TO BE A FATHER, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD

	0–4 (N=380)	5–9 (N=390)	10–14 (N=466)	15–19 (N=485)
Read something	52%	42%	45%	44%

A little more than a third of Pasifika, Māori and Asian fathers had read something about fathering (Table 6.8).

TABLE 6.8: READING ABOUT HOW TO BE A FATHER, BY ETHNICITY

	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
Read something	50%	37%	34%	34%

6.5 ATTENDING COURSES

The fathers were asked whether they had ever attended a seminar or course about fathering (Q.2.6a). Just over two-thirds (67 percent) of the fathers in this survey had never attended any such course or seminar. Of the 33 percent who had, the most common seminars and courses were:

> antenatal class (20 percent of all fathers)

> fathering for under fives (five percent)

> fathering for teens (percent)

> fathering for five- to nine-year-olds (three percent)

> fathering for 10 to 12s (two percent)

> Ian Grant courses (two percent)[16]

> general parenting courses (two percent)

> parenting specifically for either boys or girls (two percent)

> Parenting with Confidence or Positive Parenting (one percent)

> church groups (one percent).

Those who had attended some form of seminar or training said they had found it helpful (61 percent very helpful, 31 percent some help). We have information on the proportion of mothers who attend antenatal courses. A survey carried out by the Ministry of Health in 2007 (published in 2008) shows that 43 percent had attended antenatal classes, and when this was restricted to first-time mothers only, the figure rose to 78 percent. Care is needed comparing this with the 20 percent of fathers who had attended antenatal classes, because the question asked of fathers was "Have you attended a seminar or any training on specifically how to be a father?" Some fathers may have attended antenatal classes which did not have any fathering content. Ninety-one percent of the mothers had found their antenatal class useful.

As with reading about fathering, the age when a man first became a father had the most bearing on their likelihood to have attended a seminar or course (with those who became fathers older more likely to attend) (Table 6.9).

[16] Provided by Parents Inc.

TABLE 6.9: COURSE OR SEMINAR ATTENDANCE, BY AGE THEY BECAME A FATHER					
	OVERALL (N=1,721)	UNDER 20 (N=84)	20–29 (N=792)	30–39 (N=759)	40+ (N=86)
Never attended	67%	81%	70%	63%	52%
Antenatal	20%	10%	17%	23%	30%
For under 5s	5%	0%	4%	6%	8%
For 5 to 9s	3%	1%	2%	3%	6%
For teens	4%	1%	5%	3%	2%

There were some differences in seminar and course attendance by the age of the oldest child (with far more parents of children aged zero to four having attended antenatal classes than other kinds of fathers). Course attendance was low for all ethnic groups. Among Māori, Pasifika and Asian fathers, 15 percent or fewer had attended antenatal classes (Tables 6.10 and 6.11).

TABLE 6.10: COURSE OR SEMINAR ATTENDANCE, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD				
	0–4 (N=380)	5–9 (N=390)	10–14 (N=466)	15–19 (N=485)
Never attended	59%	68%	67%	72%
Antenatal	34%	18%	18%	12%
For under 5s	3%	5%	6%	5%
For 5 to 9s	0%	3%	4%	3%
For teens	0%	1%	4%	9%

TABLE 6.11: COURSE OR SEMINAR ATTENDANCE, BY ETHNICITY				
	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
Never attended	63%	74%	70%	84%
Antenatal	23%	14%	15%	11%
For under 5s	5%	3%	2%	3%
For 5 to 9s	2%	3%	2%	0%
For teens	4%	3%	5%	0%

6.6 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR FATHERS

Fathers were asked whether they were using any type of support service to help them (Q.3.5a[xxii]). The question did not specify what was meant by support service, as it was felt that fathers should not be constrained in their answers by someone else's view of what constituted 'support'. Fathers who answered 'yes' were then asked to specify what sort of support service they were using. The great majority of fathers were not using any support service (89 percent). Various services were mentioned by those using a support service, including a church group (five percent of all fathers), a government department (two percent), a social service (one percent), a helpline (one percent) and friends and family (one percent) (Table 6.12).

Pasifika fathers were considerably more likely than other fathers to be using a support service, with church groups being the most common, followed by government agencies.

TABLE 6.12: USES OF SUPPORT SERVICES, BY ETHNICITY				
	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
Using a support service	9%	16%	26%	6%

6.7 FATHERS' SUPPORT GROUPS

The fathers were also asked if they had ever been to or were currently a member of a fathers' support group (Q.2.7a). Some of the fathers we consulted earlier were enthusiastic members of fathers' support groups, so it was of interest to gather more systematic information about their support through this survey. The results show that at present only a small proportion of fathers have been involved in them: 96 percent of these fathers had never been a member of such a group. Among those fathers who were involved or had been involved in a support group, 72 percent said they found it 'very helpful' and another 18 percent found it 'some help'.

There was little difference between responses according to the age of the oldest child. Small proportions of each ethnic group had been a member of a fathers' support group (Table 6.13).

TABLE 6.13: MEMBERSHIP OF SUPPORT GROUP, BY ETHNICITY				
	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
Never been a member	97%	93%	93%	96%
Currently a member	2%	5%	6%	1%
Been a member	1%	2%	1%	3%

6.8 TALKING ABOUT FATHERING

The fathers were asked whether they felt they could talk honestly about parenting with other males in a social setting (such as a workplace, club, pub or café situation) (Q.2.8a). Over two-thirds (70 percent) said they could talk about parenting in these settings; 26 percent said they could but 'only in some of these situations or with some people'; and four percent said they did not feel comfortable talking about parenting in these circumstances. There was little difference in response among fathers according to the age of the oldest child. Small proportions of Pākehā, Māori and Pasifika fathers stated that they were not comfortable talking about parenting in social situations. For Asian fathers, the figure was 18 percent (Table 6.14).

TABLE 6.14: COMFORTABLE TALKING WITH MEN ABOUT PARENTING IN SOCIAL SETTINGS, BY ETHNICITY				
	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
In all situations	70%	67%	74%	53%
In some situations	26%	28%	21%	29%
No	3%	5%	5%	18%

Those fathers who said they did not feel comfortable talking about parenting in these settings were asked why not. The most common response was that men did not talk about these kinds of things. One said:

I work in a very male-dominated area [and] it's not something we talk about.

The other key reasons why fathers did not talk about such things is that they had never really thought about discussing such issues, or the opportunity never arose (Table 6.15). In the words of two respondents:

It's just not something I've engaged in conversation.

[I] work at a mine … [the] topic doesn't come up.

TABLE 6.15: REASONS FOR NOT TALKING ABOUT PARENTING IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS

COMMENT	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES (N=49)
Don't talk about this/not comfortable talking about this	37%
No opportunity to ask or talk/subject doesn't come up	22%
People don't have children/children not the same age	10%
Don't think to ask/people too busy	8%
Other	22%

In the next chapter we examine what can be done to make information about fathering and support services for fathers more attractive to fathers.

6.9 PARENTAL AND SPECIAL LEAVE FOR FATHERS

We have seen both in the literature review and the results from our consultations (discussed in the introduction) that paid work commitments create the most commonly cited barrier to spending more time with children. In addition, they can also prevent fathers from being present following a child's birth or from being available when the child is sick. The Department of Labour (2007) conducted an evaluation of parental leave, including a survey of 150 fathers. It is not known whether these fathers worked full-time or part-time. Eighty-two percent of them took some sort of leave around the time of their child's birth, most commonly annual leave. Few of them took some form of parental leave, except where it was an arrangement with their employer, rather than using the provisions of the parental-leave legislation.

In this survey (Q.3.8a and Q.3.8b) 58 percent of fathers working full-time stated they could take parental leave from work following the birth of their child, and 84 percent could take special leave when their child was sick; 46 percent of the fathers working part-time stated they could take parental leave from work following the birth of their child, and 68 percent could take special leave when their child was sick. To put this another way, 42 percent of the fathers working full-time in this survey, and 54 percent of the fathers working part-time, said they could not take parental leave following the birth of their children (Table 6.16).

TABLE 6.16: ACCESS TO PARENTAL AND SPECIAL LEAVE, BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS		
	FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT (N=1,314)	PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT (N=74)
Have access to parental leave	58%	46%
Have access to special leave	84%	68%

TABLE 6.17: ACCESS TO LEAVE, BY ETHNICITY OF FATHER				
	PĀKEHĀ (N=925)	MĀORI (N=181)	PASIFIKA (N=125)	ASIAN (N=61)
Have access to parental leave	54%	64%	72%	54%
Have access to special leave	83%	84%	82%	89%

No comparison between the Department of Labour figures and this survey is possible because we asked fathers if they *could* take parental leave, rather than if they *did* take it. The fact that the majority of them said they could take parental leave does not imply they did so, because, as we see from the Department of Labour data, fathers usually take some form of short-term paid leave rather than unpaid parental leave, unless they have a paid parental-leave arrangement with their employer.[17] As shown above, many of the fathers said they could not take parental leave. We do not know whether that was because they did not know of their entitlements, or because financial or other circumstances prevented them from taking this form of leave.

[17] Paid partner or paternity leave can be transferred from the mothers, but this appears to be uncommon. See Chapter 2 for more details about parental-leave provisions.


I WANT
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7. FATHERS' SUPPORT NEEDS

7.1 ACCESSING SUPPORT FOR FATHERS

We saw in the results from the literature review (Chapter 2) that what research there is on how to support fathers suggests that the best places to start are timely education, and support services that are sympathetic to fathers' needs and expectations. The question of education is interesting in the light of this survey's findings about how many New Zealand fathers think that being a father is something they 'just picked up' or that 'was instinct'. The previous chapter has shown how this is also reflected in the way that fathers continued to learn about fathering. The majority of fathers in this survey had not read anything about fathering; they had never attended a seminar or course about fathering or parenting; and very few were members of a fathers' support group. In the third part of our survey, questions were asked about how sufficient the available information about fathering was; how fathers would best like to access that information; how courses about fathering could be made more appealing to fathers; and how child-focused support or professional services could be made more father-friendly.

The key results from this part of the survey show that a quarter of fathers think there is not enough information readily available about how to be a good father, with more saying there is sufficient information, and the rest being unsure. If this information were made available, most fathers would prefer to access it online. Similarly, most fathers thought that having more courses on how to be a good father would be a good idea, especially if these courses could be run close to their homes. In addition:

> Most fathers in the survey had accompanied their children to a health and education service provider, and the great majority reported being comfortable with the experience. Few had suggestions about how to improve these services to make them more comfortable for fathers.

> A number of fathers said that being comfortable with these services was a matter of familiarity. A small number thought these services were female-dominated, and there needed to be more sensitivity towards putting fathers at ease.

> When asked what type of support services would assist them in fathering, a quarter of fathers said no more support services were required, and about the same proportion were not clear what services would help. Among those who could suggest additional services, most suggested men's groups or peer groups.

> Most fathers were comfortable in dealing with children's health and education professionals, and suggestions for improvement would be equally relevant to mothers, such as the need for the service professionals to communicate better.

The rest of this chapter presents the results from this part of the survey in detail.

7.2 INFORMATION NEEDS

The first question in this part of the survey asked the fathers if they thought there was sufficient information available about how to be a good father (Q.3.1). Most commonly, they thought there was sufficient information, or they were not sure. Less than a quarter said that they did not have sufficient information. The large proportion stating that they were not sure suggests that many fathers are unfamiliar with the information that is available, which in turn could mean that they had not looked for it. If they had looked for information, and had been unable to locate it, presumably they would have stated that the information available was not sufficient. Young fathers (those aged 20 to 29) and Māori fathers were more likely to feel there was insufficient information available (Tables 7.1 and 7.2).

TABLE 7.1: SUFFICIENCY OF INFORMATION, BY AGE OF FATHER				
	20–29 (N=129)	30–39 (N=618)	40–49 (N=700)	50+ (N=274)
Sufficient information	37%	45%	48%	44%
Not sufficient	27%	22%	23%	21%
Not sure	36%	34%	29%	35%

TABLE 7.2: SUFFICIENCY OF INFORMATION, BY ETHNICITY				
	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
Sufficient information	46%	36%	51%	48%
Not sufficient	22%	30%	18%	19%
Not sure	32%	34%	31%	33%

The fathers were then asked how they would most like to access information about fathering.[xxiii] The internet was the most preferred method, nominated by 61 percent. Books were the second most popular, nominated by 22 percent of fathers. Newspapers were the least preferred method.

7.3 TRAINING NEEDS

When asked if they thought more courses on how to be a father would be a good idea (Q.3.3), 71 percent of the fathers in this survey thought they would. Support for more courses declined slightly with the age of the oldest child (Table 7.3), and Pasifika fathers showed the most support for more courses (Table 7.4). This support for more courses contrasts strongly with the information presented in the previous chapter on how many fathers had attended courses.

TABLE 7.3: SUPPORT FOR MORE COURSES ON FATHERING, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD				
	0–4 (N=380)	5–9 (N=390)	10–14 (N=466)	15–19 (N=485)
A good idea	74%	72%	70%	68%

TABLE 7.4: SUPPORT FOR MORE COURSES ON FATHERING, BY ETHNICITY				
	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=79)
A good idea	69%	75%	82%	68%

Those who thought there should be more courses were asked where they would prefer the courses to be located (Q.3.4). The most popular location was a 'in a community group' (53 percent of respondents), followed by 'at school' (26 percent) and 'close to home' (22 percent). Holding the courses at work was the least popular option, with just 11 percent choosing this. Pasifika fathers showed a stronger preference for the courses to be in a community group compared to fathers of other ethnicities, and Asian fathers expressed a stronger preference for courses to be close to home than other groups (Table 7.5).

TABLE 7.5: PREFERENCE FOR LOCATION OF COURSES, BY ETHNICITY				
	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,023)	MĀORI (N=214)	PASIFIKA (N=144)	ASIAN (N=64)
Community group	52%	46%	64%	44%
At school	27%	25%	20%	25%
Close to home	23%	22%	15%	30%
At work	9%	16%	13%	5%

7.4 OTHER SUPPORT NEEDS

When asked what type of support service or services would assist them (Q.3.5b), around a quarter of the fathers in the survey said that no support was required (24 percent), and about another quarter were unsure what would assist them (22 percent).

Of those who did name a support service that would help them, nine percent named a support group, peer group, men's group or fathers' group; eight percent expressed a preference for a church-based group; six percent talked about more help from family or friends; five percent wanted courses, seminars or workshops; and five percent suggested a helpline. Among the 'other' services each mentioned by one percent or less were buddies or mentors, professional counselling, school-based groups, community-based groups, work-based groups, GPs, TV programmes and articles in newspapers.

Asian fathers were more likely to say they were not interested in any form of assistance, and Pasifika fathers least likely. A much higher proportion of Pasifika fathers mentioned a church-based group (22 percent) than other ethnicities (five to seven percent). A higher proportion of Māori fathers mentioned family and friends (nine percent) compared with other ethnicities (two to five percent) (Table 7.6).

TABLE 7.6: OTHER SUPPORT NEEDS, BY ETHNICITY[1]					
	PĀKEHĀ (N=920)	MĀORI (N=193)	PASIFIKA (N=126)	ASIAN (N=63)	TOTAL (N=1,381)
Not interested/not needed at present	23%	21%	17%	32%	24%
Don't know what type/unsure	22%	19%	26%	21%	22%
Support group/peer group/ men's group/fathers' group	10%	8%	6%	3%	9%
Church-based group	7%	7%	22%	5%	8%
Family/friends	5%	9%	2%	3%	6%
Courses/seminars/workshops	5%	5%	6%	3%	5%
Helpline	5%	5%	2%	6%	3%
Government service/agency	2%	3%	4%	5%	2%
Financial support	2%	4%	3%	2%	2%
Plunket groups	2%	2%	–	–	2%
Website online	1%	2%	–	–	1%
Other	12%	13%	7%	14%	11%

[18] Percentages do not add up to 100% because of one-off responses which could not be grouped with other responses.

7.5 FATHERS' EXPERIENCES OF CHILD-FOCUSED SERVICES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The next question (Q.3.6a) was designed to ask fathers if they had accompanied their children to any form of service or situation that focused on their child. This question follows up on comments made in our consultations by some fathers who felt that services such as early childhood education centres, formal childcare services or medical services were oriented towards mother and child, and fathers did not fit in well. Fathers could feel uncomfortable, or even unwelcome. These services are all quite different from one another, but in this survey there was not enough time to deal with them in detail, or individually. Consequently, we were only able to ask one question about fathers' experiences of services in general. In response to the question, 90 percent said they had accompanied their children to a service like this, with results varying little when broken down by the age of the oldest child or by the ethnicity of the fathers.

Those fathers who had accompanied a child visiting these services were asked how comfortable they were dealing with the service providers. Almost all (96 percent) felt comfortable with the experience (85 percent were 'very comfortable' and 11 percent 'comfortable'). A small proportion (two percent) stated that they felt uncomfortable, and two percent were neutral. Responses were similar for fathers of different ethnicities and ages, and with children of different ages.

Fathers were asked (Q.3.6c) if there was anything that could have been done differently to make them feel more comfortable. This question led to varied responses, some about the father developing familiarity, rather than the service provider doing anything differently. Many of the comments made it clear that the father's discomfort in these circumstances had little or nothing to do with their role as a father. These comments could equally have been made by a mother, or a non-parent – comments such as "I have a fear of needles", or "I don't like hospitals". Other comments were more relevant to the questions.

The services could be daunting initially:

The more often you go the more comfortable you will feel.

A number of fathers described the common support services available to their children as being 'mother-oriented':

[The services are] not as friendly towards dads as they are to mothers.

Others talked about the lack of information available about how the services operate (both formally and informally):

Not knowing what the process was before you get there.

A small proportion of fathers provided suggestions about how these experiences could be made more father-friendly (Table 7.7). The three most common comments related to how the services were female-dominated environments, the need for more information about what was happening and the need for more effort to put fathers at ease.

TABLE 7.7: MAKING SUPPORT SERVICES MORE COMFORTABLE FOR FATHERS	
COMMENT	PERCENTAGE (N=70)
More males/difficulties being a male in a female-dominated environment	19%
Need more information/need to know what is happening	17%
Make it more relaxing/be more understanding	14%
It will improve with time	7%
Dealing with 'daughter stuff' can be hard	5%
Other[19]	378%

Fathers were also asked how confident they were when dealing with professionals involved in their children's health and education (Q.3.7b). The great majority of fathers (93 percent) said they felt confident (only one percent of fathers said they were not confident; four percent offered neutral answers; and one percent said they did not get involved in this part of their children's lives). These patterns were consistent across the different types of fathers in the survey.

Most respondents could not think of anything that would make them feel more confident in these situations. Those who did comment made observations that could equally have been made by mothers, such as:

It's a matter of how much confidence to put in them – I don't know them on a personal level.

I want to know a bit more about the person that you are dealing with [and] need referrals or checks to find out whether they were any good.

The professionals don't always explain things to you clearly.

A breakdown of these responses is provided in Table 7.8.

TABLE 7.8: HELPING FATHERS TO BE MORE CONFIDENT WITH PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH CHILDREN	
COMMENT	PERCENTAGE (N=258)
Better professionals/better relationship with professionals	16%
Better communication	12%
More knowledge/understanding of what happens/is happening	12%
Be more involved	13%
Don't know	9%
More confidence	5%
Professionals to be more understanding/approachable	5%
More information	5%
Other[20]	23%

[19] The remaining comments were very general in nature, and often referred to non-gender-specific issues such as a fear of needles, a dislike of hospitals or the child being distressed.

[20] Many of these responses were general in nature, and could equally have been made by mothers.

8. REFLECTING ON FATHERHOOD

8.1 REFLECTING ON FATHERHOOD

We saw from the literature review the acknowledged importance of the role that a father plays in a child's upbringing. These studies show that the involvement of fathers positively influences the educational and social development of the children. These positive effects continue throughout childhood and into adulthood. At the same time, we have also seen how the roles of fathers have changed; how fathers are among the most 'time-poor' groups in society; and that fathers increasingly experience stress from attempting to juggle their roles at work and home. The final part of the survey asked fathers to reflect on their fatherhood experiences. It asked fathers about their overall satisfaction with their performance as fathers; what could be done to increase their satisfaction; barriers to fulfilling their roles as fathers; how they thought fathers were viewed by society; and how they were portrayed by the media. Fathers were also asked whether there was anything that they wished they had known before they became fathers.

The results from this part of the research show that fathers believe they are doing a satisfactory (or better than satisfactory) job of being fathers. The majority of fathers reported that their work commitments were a barrier to fulfilling their roles as fathers. In addition:

> While many fathers in this survey could not think of anything they had learnt about being a father that they wished they had known at the outset, a number of fathers talked about not being fully prepared for the time and energy fatherhood demanded.

> Just under half (49 percent) felt that New Zealand society did not recognise the importance of fathers. A number of these fathers said explicitly that the role of fathers in their children's lives was undervalued in general.

> The majority of fathers in the survey (60 percent) thought the media portrayed fathers in a poor light. Many of these fathers believed the media were hostile to fathers, showing fathers to be 'incompetent, stupid and second-best'. Other fathers noted that the roles fathers played on TV poorly matched their own experiences of fatherhood.

The rest of this chapter presents the results from this final part of the survey in detail.

8.2 SATISFACTION WITH PERFORMANCE

This part of the survey asked fathers simply to rate their 'overall satisfaction' with their performance as a father (Q.4.5). Most (93 percent) thought they were doing a satisfactory (or better than satisfactory) job. Over half (56 percent) were 'satisfied' with their performance and 37 percent were 'very satisfied'. Interestingly, fathers who had no children living permanently with them were just as likely to be satisfied with their performance as those who had children living with them.

Pasifika and Māori fathers were a little more likely to be 'very satisfied' than fathers of other ethnicities (Table 8.1).

TABLE 8.1: OVERALL SATISFACTION, BY ETHNICITY OF FATHER

	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,146)	MĀORI (N=235)	PASIFIKA (N=151)	ASIAN (N=78)
Very satisfied	36%	40%	42%	33%
Satisfied	56%	51%	48%	59%
Neutral	5%	7%	6%	5%

Those who became a father before the age of 20 were more likely to be 'very satisfied' than other fathers (Table 8.2), as were fathers whose oldest child was under the age of five (Table 8.3).

TABLE 8.2: OVERALL SATISFACTION, BY AGE THEY BECAME A FATHER

	UNDER 20 (N=84)	20–29 (N=792)	30–39 (N=759)	40+ (N=86)
Very satisfied	42%	37%	37%	33%
Satisfied	51%	55%	56%	64%
Neutral	7%	5%	5%	0%

TABLE 8.3: OVERALL SATISFACTION, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD

	0–4 (N=380)	5–9 (N=390)	10–14 (N=466)	15–19 (N=485)
Very satisfied	44%	37%	31%	36%
Satisfied	50%	56%	61%	54%
Neutral	3%	4%	6%	7%

When asked what could be done to increase their satisfaction with their performance as fathers, the most common answer was to be able to spend more time with their children. (Table 8.4) One father summed this up when he talked about wishing he could:

[Spend] more time with the kids and [make] the time that I do have with them a bit more memorable.

Fathers whose oldest child was under nine were a little more likely to make this kind of comment than other fathers (Table 8.5).

Nine percent of the fathers thought there was nothing that could be done to improve their fathering skills:

Don't think so – the kids have turned out pretty well.

Eight percent of the fathers thought that being more patient and tolerant would improve their fathering. As one of these fathers put it:

Being better at getting them to do what I want and not getting quite as frustrated as I do when they don't … so more patience [would improve my performance].

Fathers of older children felt that having a better relationship with their children would improve their fathering (Table 8.5). This is possibly due to the difficulties that arise with communicating with older children. One of these fathers talked about his wish to:

Be able to communicate with them better … especially [the] teenagers.

Some fathers felt that fathering was 'a continual learning process', which meant there was always room to improve their performance. One father said:

[It's] a learning process [with] new things happening all the time.

A small proportion of fathers (four percent) stated that they should switch off from work, work less or be at home more:

If I didn't have to work I could spend better quality time with the kids.

Earlier in the survey, fathers were asked whether they wanted to spend more time parenting their children and what got in the way of doing that. The majority of fathers in full-time work said that they wanted to spend more time parenting their children, and they commonly said that work was what got in the way. This was a different question from the one asked here, which was about the fathers' satisfaction with their performance as a father.[xxiv]

TABLE 8.4: IMPROVING OVERALL SATISFACTION

COMMENT	PERCENTAGE (N=1,441)
Spend more time with children	38%
Nothing/doing a good job/happy	9%
More patience/tolerance/less stress	8%
Always learning/learn from experience	5%
Better financial situation	4%
Better relationship with child/better communication/confidence	4%
Switch off from work/work less/be at home more	4%
Be more informed/have more knowledge/education	3%
Other	15%
Don't know	5%

TABLE 8.5: IMPROVING OVERALL SATISFACTION, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD

COMMENT	ALL (N=1,441)	0–4 (N=317)	5–9 (N=331)	10–14 (N=395)	15–19 (N=390)
Spend more time with children	38%	46%	43%	33%	31%
Nothing/doing a good job/happy	9%	6 %	8%	12%	12%
More patience/tolerance/less stress	8%	9%	9%	6%	6%
Always learning/learn from experience	5%	4%	6%	5%	5%
Better financial situation	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%
Better relationship with child/better communication/confidence	4%	2%	3%	8%	8%
Switch off from work/work less/be at home more	4%	5%	3%	3%	3%
Be more informed/have more knowledge/education	3%	3%	3%	2%	3%
Other	15%	14%	12%	16%	16%
Don't know	5%	3%	5%	5%	5%

TABLE 8.6: IMPROVING OVERALL SATISFACTION, BY ETHNICITY OF FATHER				
COMMENT	PĀKEHĀ	MĀORI	PASIFIKA	ASIAN
Spend more time with children	38%	36%	39%	36%
Nothing/doing a good job/happy	9%	8%	9%	12%
More patience/tolerance/less stress	9%	6%	4%	3%
Always learning/learn from experience	5%	8%	3%	0%
Better financial situation	4%	7%	6%	6%
Better relationship with child/better communication/confidence	5%	7%	2%	4%
Switch off from work/work less/be at home more	4%	2%	3%	4%
Be more informed/have more knowledge/education	3%	3%	%	6%
Other	14%	14%	20%	16%
Don't know	5%	4%	6%	6%

8.3 WHAT FATHERS WISHED THEY HAD KNOWN

Fathers were asked what they had learnt about being a father that they wished they had known when they first became a father. The most common answer was 'nothing' (15 percent of all fathers) (Table 8.7). Pākehā fathers were more likely to report this than other fathers. The second most common lesson related to the amount of time and energy required to be a father. Māori fathers were less likely to comment on this than other fathers (Table 8.8). A number of fathers talked about wishing they had been better prepared for this, and one said:

What you are getting yourself in to … it doesn't go away.

A small number of fathers made a related comment – they wished they had better understood the lack of sleep involved in parenting very young children. Perhaps not surprising is the finding that those fathers whose oldest child was under five were more likely to wish they had known about such things (Table 8.9):

Sleepless nights, not having own time, lack of free time to enjoy hobbies.

Twelve percent of the fathers also wished that they had known earlier how to take a more laid-back, patient, tolerant or relaxed approach to fathering (Table 8.8):

Chill out more, be more relaxed, more flexible.

A number of fathers indicated that fathering is an ongoing learning experience, suggesting that rather than knowing about it beforehand, you learn as you go:

Still learning as I go. A lot of different things I'm picking up now that I didn't know before.

TABLE 8.7: WHAT FATHERS WISHED THEY HAD KNOWN ABOUT FATHERING

COMMENT	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES (N=1,625)
Nothing	15%
It is a full-time job/time involved/it is hard work	13%
Be laid-back/patient/tolerant/relaxed	12%
It is a continual learning curve/learning process/learn as you go	11%
No one is perfect/do the best you can/have fun/be confident	5%
Everything	4%
Don't know	4%
Financial implications	3%
Discipline	3%
Lack of sleep that is involved	2%
How children change as they grow and how to deal with changes	2%
Need to adapt to different sexes/ages of children	2%
Importance of partner/helping partner	2%
Basic stuff such as changing nappies, day-to-day things that need doing	1%
All children are different	1%
Where you can obtain information/ask for help when you need it	1%
How to be a good role model/father/husband	1%
Other	18%

TABLE 8.8: WHAT FATHERS WISHED THEY HAD KNOWN ABOUT FATHERING, BY ETHNICITY

COMMENT	PĀKEHĀ (N=979)	MĀORI (N=228)	PACIFIC ISLANDER (N=139)	ASIAN (N=75)
Nothing	18%	12%	8%	12%
It is a full-time job/time involved/it is hard work	16%	7%	17%	15%
Be laid-back/patient/tolerant/relaxed	14%	9%	6%	12%
It is a continual learning curve/learning process/learn as you go	12%	11%	14%	9%
No one is perfect/do the best you can/have fun/be confident	6%	7%	2%	4%
Everything	5%	4%	1%	4%
Don't know	4%	5%	4%	8%
Financial implications	3%	4%	6%	1%
Discipline	3%	1%	1%	3%
Lack of sleep that is involved	3%	2%	0%	3%
How children change as they grow and how to deal with changes	2%	0.5%	4%	3%
Need to adapt to different sexes/ages of children	1%	4%	1%	3%
Importance of partner/helping partner	2%	3%	1%	1%
Basic stuff such as changing nappies, day-to-day things that need doing	2%	2%	3%	3%
All children are different	1%	3%	1%	1%
Where you can obtain information/ask for help when you need it	1%	1%	1%	1%
How to be a good role model/father/husband	1%	1%	2%	3%
Other	7%	24%	25%	15%

TABLE 8.9: WHAT FATHERS WISHED THEY HAD KNOWN, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD				
COMMENT	0–4 (N=361)	5–9 (N=363)	10–14 (N=444)	15–19 (N=453)
Nothing	14%	14%	16%	16%
It is a full-time job/time involved/it is hard work	19%	13%	11%	10%
Be laid-back/patient/tolerant/relaxed	10%	14%	10%	14%
It is a continual learning curve/learning process/learn as you go	11%	10%	12%	12%
No one is perfect/do the best you can/have fun/be confident	5%	5%	5%	5%
Everything	4%	4%	4%	4%
Don't know	4%	4%	6%	2%
Financial implications	2%	2%	3%	4%
Discipline	2%	3%	2%	3%
Lack of sleep that is involved	6%	3%	1%	1%
How children change as they grow and how to deal with changes	2%	1%	1%	2%
Need to adapt to different sexes/ages of children	1%	0.5%	2%	3%
Importance of partner/helping partner	2%	1%	2%	2%
Basic stuff such as changing nappies, day-to-day things that need doing	2%	2%	1%	1%
All children are different	0.5%	1%	2%	2%
Where you can obtain information/ask for help when you need it	1%	1%	2%	1%
How to be a good role model/father/husband	1%	2%	1%	0.5%
Other	15%	19%	19%	17%

8.4 BARRIERS TO BEING A BETTER FATHER

In Chapter 4 we saw that 'work commitments and pressures' created the most common barrier to fathers spending more time with their children. Later in the questionnaire (Q.3.9) we asked fathers what got in the way of them fulfilling their roles as fathers. Unsurprisingly, work commitments were the most common barrier reported here as well, listed by a little more than half. Pākehā fathers were more likely than other fathers to state that work commitments were a barrier to fathering, and fathers whose oldest child was under the age of five were more likely to say this than other fathers (Tables 8.11 and 8.12). One father summed up the problem thus:

When I'm busy at work, I'm unable to spend time with my kids.

In addition, a small proportion of fathers indicated that their family set-up (having to share children between households) constrained their ability to be the father they wanted to be (Table 8.10):

Because my daughter only comes at the weekends.

Access situation prevents me doing this [better].

A number of fathers (19 percent) stated that 'nothing' got in the way of them fulfilling their role. This was the case for a higher proportion of Asian fathers (30 percent) than other fathers:

Some fathers also commented that a lack of time or financial matters were barriers to them fulfilling their fathering role (eight and six percent respectively).

It's just a matter of creating enough time.

These comments may or may not be connected with comments about work getting in the way of fathering. For example, the hours a father works may be the cause of him not having enough time, and financial matters might result in him working longer hours than he would like:

Needing to make sure my family is financially secure.

Apart from the comments reported above, there were various other barriers stated by a comparatively small number of fathers, such as their relationship with the child, or tiredness. One father said:

My teen son wants to hang with his friends and is never home, and some more quality time would be wonderful.

TABLE 8.10: BARRIERS TO BEING A BETTER FATHER

COMMENT	PERCENTAGE (N=1,648)
Work	53%
Nothing	19%
Lack of time	8%
Financial problems/money	6%
Being separated/access difficulties	3%
Everyday life	2%
Relationship with child	1%
My personality/personal issues	1%
Tiredness	1%
Don't know	1%
Laws	0%
Other	5%

TABLE 8.11: BARRIERS TO BEING A BETTER FATHER, BY ETHNICITY

COMMENT	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,096)	MĀORI (N=226)	PASIFIKA (N=147)	ASIAN (N=73)
Work	55%	48%	42%	42%
Nothing	17%	20%	21%	30%
Lack of time	8%	8%	8%	8%
Financial problems/money	6%	6%	7%	5%
Access/visitation rights/ex-partner	3%	4%	3%	1%
Everyday life	2%	2%	4%	1%
Relationship with child	2%	2%	1%	1%
My personality/personal issues	1%	2%	1%	0%
Tiredness	1%	0%	1%	1%
Don't know	0%	1%	3%	1%
Laws	1%	0%	0%	0%
Other	4%	6%	8%	7%

TABLE 8.12: BARRIERS TO BEING A BETTER FATHER, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD				
COMMENT	0–4 (N=369)	5–9 (N=374)	10–14 (N=450)	15–19 (N=455)
Work	62%	53%	50%	48%
Nothing	15%	19%	20%	20%
Lack of time	5%	10%	8%	8%
Financial problems/money	5%	5%	8%	5%
Access/visitation rights/ex-partner	2%	4%	4%	3%
Everyday life	2%	1%	2%	3%
Relationship with child	0%	1%	1%	3%
My personality/personal issues	1%	1%	2%	1%
Tiredness	2%	1%	1%	0%
Don't know	1%	0%	0%	1%
Laws	0%	0%	0%	1%
Other	5%	5%	4%	6%

8.5 FATHERS IN NEW ZEALAND TODAY

Just under half (49 percent) of the fathers in this survey felt that New Zealand society did not recognise the importance of fathers (Q.4.3), and nine percent were unsure about this recognition (Table 8.13). Four percent of respondents clarified their 'yes' response, stating 'yes – sometimes', or 'yes – it is improving'. A number of fathers (five percent) did not wish to give a yes/no/not sure response, and offered a comment. A number of them said explicitly that the role of fathers in their children's lives was undervalued in general. As one father put it:

There are no centres for men with problems, it's all about women.

A significant minority of the fathers (37 percent) thought that New Zealand society did recognise the importance of fathers, or that the recognition of fathers was improving.

TABLE 8.13 : DOES NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF FATHERS?	
COMMENT	PERCENTAGE
Yes	33%
Sometimes/it is improving	4%
No	49%
Not sure	9%
Comment	5%

Fathers were also asked about how the media portrays fathers. There was no opportunity in a short telephone survey covering many topics to ask fathers separately about different types of media, so the responses can only be viewed as a generalised comment covering a range of media, but perhaps reflecting the media that they most commonly view, hear or read. Over 60 percent thought the media portrayed fathers in a poor light (Table 8.14). Many of them believed the media were hostile to fathers, showing them to be 'incompetent, stupid and second-best'. In the words of one father:

I look at the TV shows my children watch [and] the fathers are bumbling idiots but the women are clever and the calming influence.

Another said:

[Fathers are] portrayed as losers … they are not portrayed as positive role models.

Other fathers noted that the roles fathers played poorly matched their own experiences of fatherhood. One father put it like this:

[Fathers in the media] are bread-winners but they are not seen as good strong role models to their children.

Asian fathers had a very different view of fathers in the media from other ethnic groups. They were less likely to feel that fathers were portrayed negatively, and more likely to see them as being positive, or becoming more positive. One father said:

OK … [fathers are] sometimes portrayed as stupid, clueless, but good in general.

When the views on the media were looked at according to the age of the father's oldest child, there were only small differences among the age groups, and consequently, a table is not presented here giving this information.

TABLE 8.14: HOW FATHERS ARE PORTRAYED IN THE MEDIA

COMMENT	NUMBER (N=1,626)	PERCENTAGE (N=1,626)
Negative (including negative/bad/poor (non-specific): Idiots/stupid/second-best/ not doing their bit/incapable; abusive, violent; absent fathers/part-time fathers/ poor role model; could be better/unfair portrayal; more about the mother/bias towards mother)	1,024	63%
Neutral (including don't know/no opinion/don't pay attention; not enough shown of fathers)	195	12%
Positive (including positive/good (non-specific); ok/alright/average; becoming more positive)	210	13%
Other	130	8%

TABLE 8.15: HOW FATHERS ARE PORTRAYED IN THE MEDIA, BY ETHNICITY

COMMENT	ALL (N=1,626)	PĀKEHĀ (N=1,085)	MĀORI (N=223)	PASIFIKA (N=142)	ASIAN (N=72)
Negative/bad/poor (non-specific)	43%	43%	44%	51%	29%
Don't know/no opinion/don't pay attention	12%	11%	12%	11%	24%
Ok/alright/average	6%	6%	6%	4%	13%
Idiots/stupid/second-best/not doing their bit/incapable	6%	6%	7%	2%	6%
Positive/good (non-specific)	5%	5%	4%	6%	10%
More about the mother/bias towards mother	5%	5%	3%	1%	6%
Abusive/violent	4%	4%	5%	8%	0%
Absent fathers/part-time fathers/poor role models	2%	2%	4%	1%	4%
Positive and negative/balanced	2%	2%	1%	1%	3%
Neutral	2%	2%	1%	0%	1%
Becoming more positive	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%
As income-earners/providers	1%	1%	2%	1%	0%
Not enough shown of fathers	1%	1%	1%	3%	0%
Could be better/unfair portrayal	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Other	8%	8%	8%	10%	3%

9. STEPFATHERS, SINGLE FATHERS AND SEPARATED FATHERS

9.1 STEPFATHERS, SINGLE FATHERS AND SEPARATED FATHERS

The results presented in the preceding sections for all fathers who responded to this survey present a largely positive view of fathers who are very involved with their families, mostly content with their performance as fathers, do not talk much to others about the role, do not attend support groups and do not have difficulty interacting with child-focused services. While they did indicate that more courses on fathering would be useful, and many of them would have liked further support, few mentioned these things when they were asked what one thing would improve their fathering. This comparatively rosy picture may disguise problems and more urgent support needs for some subgroups of fathers, and we would do them a disservice if we failed to investigate this further. For that reason, we have separately analysed the response of three additional subgroups of fathers who may have particular needs compared with fathers in general:

> stepfathers – there were 83 in the survey

> fathers heading sole-parent households (sometimes abbreviated to 'single fathers' for the sake of convenience) – there were 91 of these

> separated fathers who were not living with at least some of their birth-children (sometimes abbreviated to 'separated fathers') – there were 71 of these.

We started the survey by asking if there was a father of a child under the age of 19 in the house. The child did not have to live in the house with the father. Some fathers would have had both birth-children and stepchildren living with them; some fathers would have had only stepchildren living with them, and some would have had no children living with them. We did not ask the fathers to answer the survey questions in respect of any particular child. They may have had a single child in mind, or they may have been answering in a general sense about their fathering of a number of children. In particular, we do not know whether stepfathers were thinking of their stepchildren or their birth-children (if they had any). We do know that of the 85 stepfathers in the survey, 50 of them were also birth-fathers. We could not unravel the complex family situations of these fathers during a short telephone survey.

Finding out which of the fathers who responded to the survey were stepfathers and fathers heading sole-parent families was relatively straightforward. Finding separated fathers who were not living with at least some of their birth-children was more difficult, and consequently, this group may not be entirely true to label. We had to isolate this group using a number of proxy questions, through which we identified fathers with birth-children who visited them and who were under the age of 15 years. We imposed this age restriction on the children for this group so that the group did not include fathers whose birth-children lived elsewhere because they lived independently. We then assumed that almost all of these fathers would be separated from the birth-mother, as that would be why their children were not living with them. While this is probably generally true, there could be other circumstances that led to the situation. For example, the father and the mother could still be living together, and the child living with someone else because of arrangements made by the Department of Child, Youth and Family, or other living arrangements could have been made informally. We suspect there could be a small number of fathers in this group whose children have such living arrangements.

There is overlap among these three subgroups of fathers. Some fathers would appear both in the stepfathers' and the separated fathers' groups. Other fathers would appear in both the single fathers' and the separated fathers' groups. It is not impossible that there may be a father or two in both the stepfathers' and single fathers' groups.

This section does not cover all of the survey questions asked of fathers – it focuses on those questions where there could be a difference because of the fathers' circumstances; namely, the time that fathers spend in the company of their children, questions related to where fathers turn for support or information on fathering, the fathers' unmet support needs, their experiences of child-focused services, their satisfaction with their performance as fathers and barriers to being a better father.

We said earlier that fathers on average spent 37 hours in the company of their children. Stepfathers' and separated fathers' time in the company of their children did not differ significantly from this figure, although the separated fathers' time was a little lower, at 35 hours, presumably because some of them did not live with any children, thereby reducing the overall average. Other separated fathers would have been living with stepchildren, which is the reason why the 35 hours is not significantly lower. We did not ask them how much time they spent with children they were living with, as distinct from children they were not living with. As expected, however, the single fathers said they spent a higher number of hours on average (47) in the company of their children. Some of these fathers could be full-time dads at home with their children.

This chapter shows that the pattern of responses to the survey questions by these three subgroups of fathers was similar to that of all the fathers who responded to the survey. There were, however, some small but important differences, which are summarised here:

> Separated fathers and single fathers were more likely than fathers in general to talk about fathering with their own fathers, grandfathers or other male relatives.

> Only a small percentage of separated fathers and stepfathers had attended a course on fathering, which is linked with their low attendance at antenatal classes.

> Fewer of the single fathers thought there should be more courses on fathering, possibly reflecting the difficulty they might have had in attending courses.

> For all three of these groups, higher proportions stated that they had support needs than for other fathers, ranging from 82 percent to 70 percent, compared with 54 percent of fathers generally.

> More separated fathers than fathers generally said they were uncomfortable when dealing with child-focused services, although the percentage was still small (eight percent).

> Although stepfathers were generally satisfied with their performance as fathers, their satisfaction was lower than fathers as a whole (83 percent were satisfied or very satisfied, compared with 93 percent of all fathers).

> Single fathers and separated fathers were less likely than other fathers to state that work was preventing them from fulfilling their role as fathers.

> Eighteen percent of separated fathers listed their separation or their custody arrangements as a barrier to fulfilling their role. Approximately half of this 18 percent appeared to be indicating that separation itself meant they could not spend as much time as they would have liked with their children, while for the other half of these fathers, the access arrangements caused difficulties, such as interacting with their ex-partners.

9.2 LEARNING HOW TO FATHER, AND SUPPORT FOR FATHERING

As with other fathers, a significant minority of these three groups of fathers did not talk to anyone about how to be a father or how to father more effectively (Table 9.1). Forty-three percent of fathers as a whole were in this category. Only separated fathers showed a meaningful difference from this, although caution should be exercised here, given the small numbers. For them, a smaller percentage (31 percent) talked to no-one. Instead, they were more likely to talk to their fathers, grandfathers or other male relations than fathers in general, but the numbers doing so were still not high (21 percent, compared with 11 percent for all fathers). Another difference can be seen in the figures for the single fathers. Few of these fathers spoke to their wives or ex-partners about fathering, and instead they also had a higher rate (also 21 percent) of speaking to their fathers, grandfathers or other male relations, or speaking to a friend who was a father (36 percent, compared with 29 percent for all fathers).

TABLE 9.1: WHO FATHERS TALK TO ABOUT HOW TO BE A FATHER

	STEPFATHERS	SINGLE FATHERS	SEPARATED FATHERS
	(N=85)	(N=91)	(N=71)
No-one	38%	41%	31%
Friend who is a father	26%	36%	28%
Wife/partner	22%	4%	21%
Father/grandfather/other male relation	12%	21%	21%

Note: These subgroups of fathers are defined on page 88.

These three groups of fathers were a little less likely to have read anything about how to be a father than fathers in general, particularly separated fathers (34 percent, compared with 44 percent for all fathers).

Table 9.2 shows an understandable difference in the pattern of attending courses on fathering compared with all fathers. The attendance of both stepfathers and separated fathers was well down on that of all fathers: six percent for each group, compared with 20 percent for all fathers. Some of these fathers would not have been in a relationship with the mother at the time of the birth, or, in the case of the separated fathers, not a close enough relationship to have attended antenatal classes with the mother. The lower attendance at antenatal courses for these two groups of fathers results in a higher proportion than other fathers of having never attended a course. Other differences in pattern in the table should be treated with caution because of the low numbers involved.

TABLE 9.2: COURSE OR SEMINAR ATTENDANCE

	STEPFATHERS	SINGLE FATHERS	SEPARATED FATHERS
	(N=85)	(N=91)	(N=71)
Never attended	79%	67%	76%
Antenatal	6%	14%	6%
For under 5s	5%	7%	4%
For 5 to 9s	8%	3%	3%
For teens	5%	4%	4%

Note: These subgroups of fathers are defined on page 88.

These fathers did not use support services to any greater or lesser extent than fathers generally. A slightly smaller proportion of separated fathers said they had used a support service (eight percent, compared with 11 percent for all fathers), but the numbers are too small to be reliable.

As with other fathers in the survey, very few of these fathers had ever belonged to a fathers' support group. In fact, not one of the separated fathers had done so.

9.3 THE NEED FOR MORE INFORMATION, TRAINING AND SUPPORT

These three groups of fathers expressed a slightly elevated need for more information on fathering compared with all fathers. Approximately 30 percent of each group said they did not have sufficient information, compared with less than 25 percent of all fathers. Seventy-one percent of all fathers thought more courses on fathering would be a good idea, little different from the stepfathers and separated fathers (75 percent and 72 percent, respectively). Fewer of the single fathers thought similarly (64 percent), which perhaps reflects more potential difficulty for them in getting to courses, given their childcare responsibilities.

When asked about other support needs, most of the fathers in these three groups indicated that they would like some additional support, but they did not often specify what sort of support – see Table 9.3. They expressed a much higher need for support than fathers generally – the percentages of stepfathers, single fathers and separated fathers who wanted additional support ranged from 82 to 70 percent, compared with 54 percent for all fathers in the survey.[21]

TABLE 9.3: OTHER SUPPORT NEEDS

	STEPFATHERS	SINGLE FATHERS	SEPARATED FATHERS
	(N=70)	(N=73)	(N=71)
Not interested/not needed at present	11%	7%	17%
Don't know what type/unsure	7%	18%	15%
Support group/peer group/men's group/ fathers' group	11%	12%	5%
Church-based group	7%	7%	0%
Family/friends	3%	2%	5%
Courses/seminars/workshops	0%	0%	2%
CYFS	0%	3%	0%
Social service	3%	0%	0%
Other miscellaneous comments	56%	52%	56%

Note: These subgroups of fathers are defined on page 88.

[21] Calculated by subtracting the percentages who said they did not need any support at the moment, or that they were unsure, from 100 percent.

9.4 EXPERIENCES OF CHILD-FOCUSED SERVICES AND PROFESSIONALS

Almost every stepfather and single father said that they were comfortable or very comfortable dealing with child-focused services (97 percent and 92 percent, respectively). This was similar to the results presented in Chapter 7 for all fathers. The separated fathers were a little more likely than other fathers to say that they felt uncomfortable with child-focused services (eight percent, compared with two percent of all fathers), but the numbers are too small to be reliable. This result could stem from this group's comparative unfamiliarity with these services, given that some of these fathers would not have had any children living with them.

Almost all of the fathers from these three groups were confident in dealing with professionals involved with their children's health or education. A few fathers from each group (two to three percent) stated that they were not confident in these circumstances.

9.5 SATISFACTION WITH THEIR PERFORMANCE AS FATHERS, AND BARRIERS TO BEING A BETTER FATHER

Earlier, we saw that 93 percent of fathers collectively had been either satisfied or very satisfied with their performance. This is comparable with the results (88 percent and 89 percent, respectively) for single fathers and separated fathers. Satisfaction was lower for stepfathers, 83 percent of whom were satisfied or very satisfied with their performance. In particular, only 22 percent were very satisfied, compared with 37 percent of all fathers.

In response to the question about what prevented them from fulfilling their role as a father, the most common response for each of these three groups of fathers was 'work commitments', although this response was not as common as when we looked at all fathers together. In particular, distinctly lower percentages of single fathers and separated fathers gave this response (34 percent and 35 percent, respectively, compared with 53 percent of all fathers). Possibly fewer single fathers worked full- or part-time, so work stood between them and their fathering role less often. If so, it would be expected that a higher proportion would have listed a lack of money as a barrier to their fathering. In fact, this percentage is only slightly higher than for all fathers (10 percent, compared with six percent). The separated fathers might have listed work less frequently as a barrier because some of them did not have full-time care of their children, and their work arrangements might not interfere with the time they did spend with their children.

As expected, some of the separated fathers (18 percent) recorded the lack of time they got to spend with their children as a difficulty for fathering. Some of their comments suggested that this was just a fact of life for separated fathers, and others made it clear that this was exacerbated by unsatisfactory access arrangements, or continuing relationship difficulties between them and the children's mother.

Lastly, only two stepfathers listed being a stepfather rather than a birth-father as a barrier to fathering. This low rate of problems specific to being a stepfather is consistent with the findings of research by Robertson (2008), discussed in the literature review. He found that stepfathering was generally a rewarding experiencing but that in a minority of cases, stepfathers are unsure of the boundaries of their role, or are self-limited in their role by what they perceive to be appropriate and inappropriate behaviours for stepfathers.

10. PĀKEHĀ, MĀORI, PACIFIC AND ASIAN FATHERS

Generally, there was not a lot of variation among the responses of the fathers from the different ethnic groups. The number of respondents in each ethnic group is shown earlier in the report in Table 3.3. For the most part, the differences in the results from one ethnic group to another are not sufficiently large to be meaningful, and could be merely the result of random error, particularly given the relatively small sample sizes for the Pasifika and Asian subgroups of fathers. A few findings, however, stand out, and they are summarised here.

Pākehā fathers

> were more likely than other groups to have read about fathering (50 percent) and more likely to have attended courses on fathering – even so, 63 percent had never attended a course on fathering. Fewer than one in four had attended an antenatal course

> were most likely to say that work is a barrier to being a better father (55 percent).

Māori fathers

> one in six Māori fathers said that their own fathers were not around when they were young

> nearly one-third of Māori fathers said they did not have sufficient information on fathering.

Pasifika fathers

> were very likely to say that they wanted to spend more time with their children (78 percent)

> the majority (60 percent) said that they had learnt how to be a father from their own father or another male relative

> were the biggest users of fathering support services (26 percent), mostly church support services, and one in five said they had need of a church-based support group

> had the greatest access to parental leave (72 percent)

> were very likely to say that more courses on fathering would be a good idea (82 percent), and most often wanted them to be provided by a community group (64 percent).

Asian fathers

> as with all ethnicities, they most commonly listed eating together, playing and helping with reading or homework as activities they did with their children. Comparatively low percentages of Asian fathers (about 30 percent), however, listed transporting children and going to their children's sporting events as activities that they did with their children

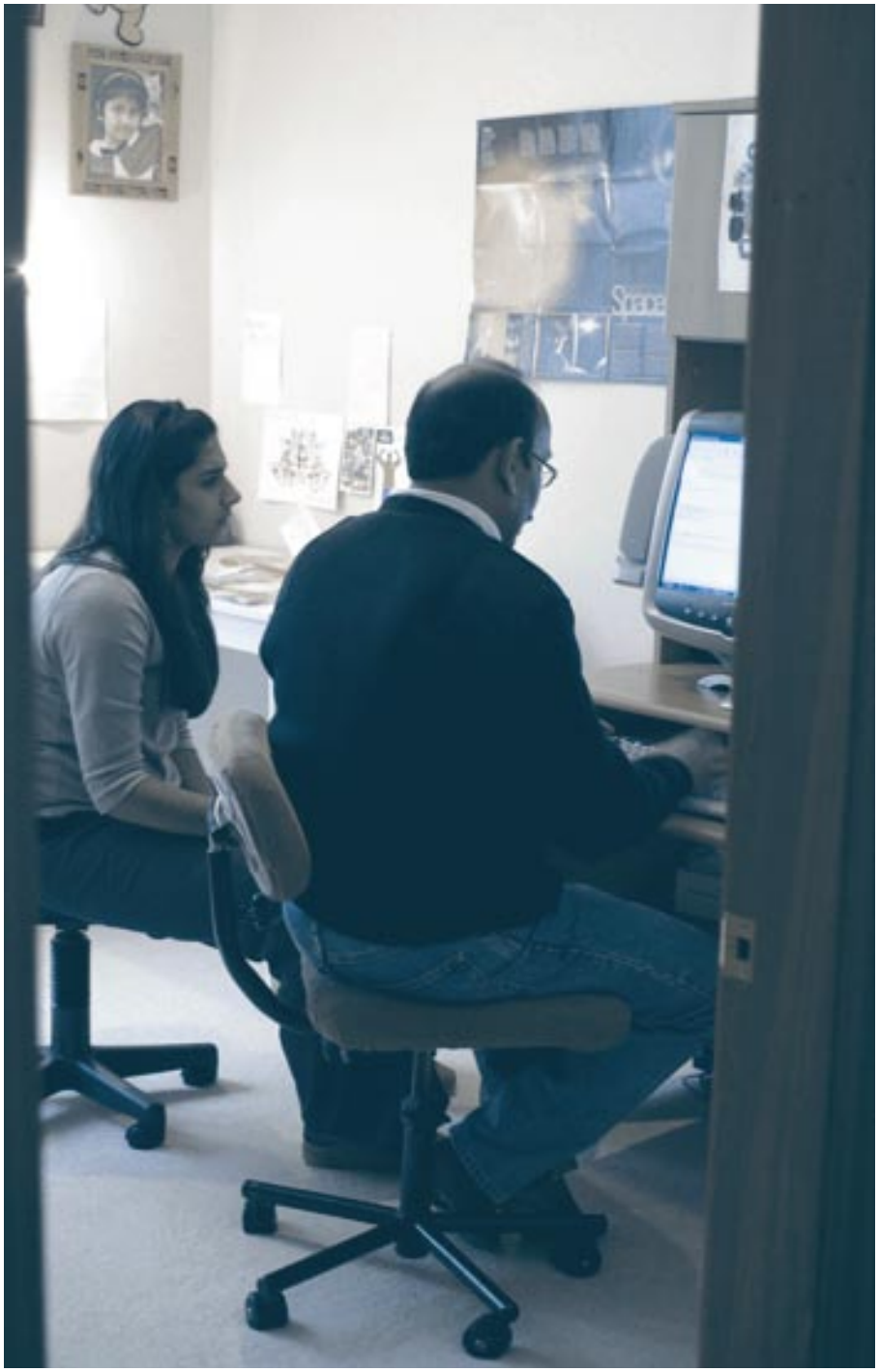
> the majority spoke to no-one about fathering (59 percent), and only a low percentage spoke to their wife or partner about it (eight percent)

> few had attended a course on fathering (84 percent) and only 11 percent had attended an antenatal course

> nearly one in five did not feel comfortable talking about fathering with other men in social situations

> were the most likely group to say that there were no barriers to them being better fathers (30 percent)

> were the least likely group to state that the media portrayed fathers negatively (45 percent).



11. YOUNGER AND OLDER FATHERS AND CHILDREN

The survey questioned fathers about their age, the age when they first became a father and the ages of their youngest and oldest child. The statistics on the fathers' and children's ages were presented in Chapter 3. Most men became fathers when they were between 20 and 40 years old, and were between the ages of 30 and 50 at the time of the survey. The majority of their youngest children were aged between zero and nine years, and their oldest children were almost evenly spread over the range from zero to 19 years. The fathers' responses to other questions were correlated with their responses on these age questions, and any patterns of interest were reported in the earlier chapters of this report. For many of the aspects of fathering examined in this report, there were no strong differences across ages. The strongest patterns were generally those associated with the age of the oldest child. This chapter briefly collates and discusses findings where there appeared to be meaningful correlations with the age of the father or their children.

The first age-based finding of significance was that the amount of time that fathers spent with their children dropped noticeably when the oldest child was in the 15- to 19-year-old group, down from around 38 and 39 waking hours per week for the other age groups, to 33 waking hours per week for this age group. There could be many reasons for this. This is quite a significant change, especially since many of these families would have had younger children as well as this older child. Children in this older age group are more independent, can more frequently transport themselves and often spend more time playing at friends' places. Further, the older children would be able to babysit younger children. The decline in the number of waking hours that fathers spend with their children was also mirrored by a decline in the percentage of fathers who wanted to spend more time with their children. This desire was strongest for fathers whose oldest child was between zero and four years old, with 76 percent of fathers wanting to spend more time with their children, and dropped steadily; 59 percent of fathers expressed this desire where the oldest child was 15 to 19 years old. Fathers of the zero to four-year-olds were also more likely to state that work was a barrier to being a better father (62 percent, dropping to 48 percent for fathers of 15- to 19-year-old children).

Fathers with oldest children of all ages described themselves most commonly as a friend and playmate to their children, but their other descriptions changed to some extent. Almost as commonly in the zero-to-four age group, fathers said they were income-earners or providers (60 percent), but this percentage dropped for later ages, while the reverse trend occurred for the descriptor 'coach'. Interestingly, fathers of the oldest age group of children described themselves less frequently as supportive partner, husband or boyfriend than did fathers of younger children. We do not proffer an explanation for this as it would be purely guesswork.

There was consistency across the ages of fathers in their responses to the question about where they had learnt how to be a father, except for those fathers who had their first child in their teens. There were only 84 such fathers in this survey, so the results must be treated with caution. Two-thirds of these fathers said they had not learnt fathering from anywhere, compared with about 60 percent of other fathers, and fewer who had been teenage fathers said that they had learnt fathering from their own father, grandfather or male relation (31 percent, compared with slightly more than half of other fathers). Fewer had learnt fathering from friends, neighbours, parenting classes or fathering groups. They were also by far the least likely group to have read anything about fathering, or to have ever attended a fathering course. Teenage fathers appear to be particularly isolated from advice about fathering, and particularly lacking in support.

We also asked fathers if they discussed fathering with other people (see Chapter 6). Fathers whose oldest child was 15 to 19 years old were distinctly less likely to talk to other people about fathering, including their wife or partner, or their father, grandfather or other male relative. Nearly half of these fathers talked with no-one about fathering, up from about 42 percent for other fathers.

As the age of fathers increased, so did the likelihood that they had read something about fathering or attended a course. For reading, this increased from 43 percent of fathers aged 20 to 29, to 62 percent of fathers aged 40 years or more; for courses, this increased from 30 percent of fathers aged 20 to 29, to 48 percent of fathers aged 40 years or more. We tested two possible explanations for this. First, this could be because the age of the fathers correlates with the length of time they have been fathers; and the longer they had been a father, the more opportunities they would have had to read something on fathering or attend a course. Second, it could indicate greater motivation on the part of older fathers to read material on fathering or attend courses, or that these fathers were more able to access information and courses. The first of these two possible explanations is not consistent with other results, while the second explanation is supported by them. When considering the age of the children, there was no tendency for fathers of older children to have read anything about fathering. Nor was there an increasing trend for fathers of older children to have attended courses; in fact, the trend was in the opposite direction, from 41 percent of fathers of zero to four-year-olds, to 28 percent of those with 15- to 19-year-old children. This demonstrates strongly that men who had been fathers longer did not read more about fathering, nor were they more likely to have attended courses. This leaves the other explanation as being more likely; that is, older fathers are more motivated than younger fathers to learn about fathering, or they are better able to access information and courses.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this information is that newer fathers are getting more education about fathering than was formerly the case. The fathers of the youngest children were more likely to have read something or have attended a course than the fathers of older children. Thirty-four percent of the fathers of children aged zero to four years had attended an antenatal class, compared with under 20 percent for the fathers of the older children. It is unlikely that the fathers of older children had simply forgotten that they had attended an antenatal class – most people would remember an antenatal class if they had gone to one. Despite this improvement, almost half of the fathers of the youngest children had never read anything about fathering, and almost two-thirds had not attended a course.

There were no substantial differences or trends in support needs among fathers of different ages or differently-aged children.

12. LESSONS LEARNT

12.1 LESSONS LEARNT

Following on from our earlier work on families and parenting, we decided that it was important to know more about the support needs of fathers. What assistance do they need to be the best possible fathers in this day and age? Before asking this question, however, it was necessary to find out what fathers see as their role, and how this has changed over time. We looked for existing research on this subject, and did not find any significant survey of fathers.[22] Our own consultations and polls of fathers were informative, but the views expressed may not have been those of fathers in general. We decided, therefore, to commission our own survey of fathers.

In the previous chapters we presented the results of the survey. In this chapter, we use the results of the literature review (Chapter 2) to explore these findings further.

Before proceeding with this discussion, it is necessary to repeat the limitations discussed earlier in this report. Most significant is the limitation associated with the response rate. The 1,721 fathers who were interviewed were only 30 percent of the fathers who were eligible for this survey. The rest did not wish to be interviewed, or another household member refused on their behalf. This raises the question of whether these 30 percent were different from the other 70 percent. To check this, the researchers contacted some of the fathers who had declined to be interviewed and asked them to answer just one question from the survey – Does New Zealand as a whole recognise the importance of fathers? Their answers were similar to those of the fathers who took part in the survey. If their answers had been quite different, we would have had a strong reason to doubt that our survey respondents were representative of New Zealand fathers. Nevertheless, it is likely that transient, low socio-economic status fathers were under-represented.

Another limitation is that this survey covered a lot of topics in a short space of time. It was not possible to go into detail. The answers give us a general idea of the roles of fathers and their support needs, but not their exact nature. For example, the question relating to the waking hours each week that fathers spend in the company of the children is ambiguous. Some fathers may have included time that they were awake and their children were asleep, while other fathers would not have included this time. There are many other possible ambiguities with this question, as with others, and there was simply not enough time in this short survey to replace each question with a number of more detailed ones. Despite these caveats, we believe that this survey provides some important information about New Zealand fathers. At the very least, interviewing in excess of 1,700 fathers means that, where a reasonable percentage of the respondents held particular views, we can be fairly certain that very many fathers throughout the country think the same.

12.2 MODERN FATHERHOOD

This survey has produced some encouragingly positive images of New Zealand fathers.

Fathers are generally very engaged with their children and their families

Fathers describe themselves more frequently as income-providers, friends, playmates and coaches to their children, supporters of their partners and carers and nurturers; and less frequently as rule-makers and disciplinarians. They spend time playing with their children, eating with them, helping them with homework and many other activities, depending on the children's ages. They are in the company of their children for about 37 waking hours on average each week. Far from resenting this time commitment, two-

[22] The survey carried out in the 1990s by the Children's Commission (Julian, 1999) was a survey of any persons (male or female) aged 15 or over.

thirds of the fathers we interviewed wanted to spend more time with their children. The survey did not cover the details of the time they spent with their children, but to assist the reader we have devised this possible scenario. For a working father, these 37 hours could be made up of an hour before work, three hours after work and most of the weekend. This would still leave time for some individual time out each week.

Fathers work around the home

Fathers were also likely to be heavily involved in family chores – more than 60 percent said that chores take up most or all of their spare time, and most of the rest said that they were quite involved in chores. Fathers usually either split responsibility for housework and childcare 50/50 with their partners, or take much less responsibility for these activities than their partners. Two-thirds of fathers take full responsibility for the work around their properties.

The extent to which fathers are involved in chores around the home and work co-operatively with their partners supports the findings of an earlier overseas study. In Chapter 2 we reported that an American study had reported a strong increase in the proportion of newlyweds who intended to share responsibilities, decision-making and care of children (Stanley & Markman, 1997). It would appear that many New Zealand fathers perceive themselves as having delivered on this intention.

The amount of housework done by men is a matter of some debate. On the one hand, there are reports indicating that men do not do their share around the home (*New Zealand Herald*, 2009). On the other hand, the last New Zealand Time Use Survey showed that when paid and unpaid work were combined, fathers and mothers with young children worked the same hours each day (Callister, 2005b). Our survey of fathers' perceptions of themselves is more consistent with the Time Use Survey data than the research reported in the *New Zealand Herald*, which was reported about men in couple relationships generally, while Callister's reporting of the Time Use data was only about fathers with young children. This may account for the different results.

Fathers are more involved with their children than their own fathers were

Many fathers think they raise children differently from their own fathers. Interpreting their responses, it seems that they have been influenced by their fathers, not by simply copying their father's style, but in reaction to it. They have adopted what they liked of their father's style and rejected the rest. Most commonly, they say they are more involved with their children than their own fathers were. Interestingly, most of the survey fathers had not talked with their own fathers about how to be a father.

Other comments on fathers' engagement with their families and fathers' roles

As discussed in Chapter 2, McCann (Tumataroa, 2005) has stated that New Zealand fathers need to recognise the importance of their role in the lives of their children. We did not ask the survey fathers whether they did recognise this, but the findings show that they act as though they do. They are at least there physically for their families and their children to the extent that this is possible given their working lives. Taking their survey responses collectively, it seems that they are emotionally involved with their children as well.

McCann was also concerned about boys growing up fatherless. As we noted earlier, well in excess of 100,000 fathers do not live with their children because of separation. Our results show that these men are generally engaged with their children despite the separation, which supports the views of Callister and Birks (2006) – that few sole-parent households are truly sole-parent. Where fathers had no child living them, they still estimated that they spent 24 waking hours per week in the company of their children. Later we reported that separated fathers, who might or might not have children living

with them, spent 35 waking hours in the company of their children. This figure would have been boosted by some fathers who have their children living with them full-time, and it would also include fathers living with stepchildren.

We reported in the literature review a number of studies that measured the time fathers spent caring for their children (Bianchi et al, 2006; Fisher et al, 1999; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Russell et al, 1999). These studies generally come up with very low figures, although there has been an increasing trend over time. We believe that these studies are based on the amount of time that fathers are 'in charge' of their children or have sole care of them, and that presents a distorted view of the fathers' time with their children. Often, when fathers are with their children, their partner is also present. Instead we chose to take all of the time fathers are with their children into account, and it provides a startlingly different picture from that presented by the earlier studies. We caution against viewing all this time spent with their children as time when the fathers were engaged with the children, in the sense of interacting in a warm and supportive way. Nevertheless, we view the high number of hours that fathers spend in their children's company as a positive result.

The literature review found that fathers play a role complementary to that of mothers (Franz et al, 1991; Gendall, 2002; Kerslake Hendricks, 1999; and others). Children see their fathers as doing enjoyable things with them, such as taking them on outings, or engaging them in exciting forms of play, whereas they often describe mothers engaging in everyday childcare activities.

The high levels of engagement between fathers and their children augur well for the future of our nation's children. We earlier summarised research on the impact of fathers on children, which showed that there are incremental benefits for children over the mothers' contribution if fathers were involved, responsive and supportive (Lees, 2007). Other research has shown that being involved led fathers to be more supportive of their children, more sensitive and warmer towards their children (Burchell, 2003). Various studies have found that children of supportive fathers have fewer behavioural and mental health problems (Edwards et al, 2007; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; and others). This is true regardless of whether the family is intact or separated, or the father is biological or a stepfather. Research shows that children raised without such a father can do well, but, on average, there is a modest benefit if the children have an engaged father figure. On the other hand, when we look at the children or adults who fare worst in life – for example, those convicted of youth or adult offending – we find that they predominantly did not have a supportive father (Pudney, 2002). They may also have had many other disadvantages that contributed to these outcomes.

12.3 LEARNING THE JOB

In this age of information, we were keen to find out where fathers learnt how to carry out the role of fatherhood. Most commonly, they said they had just picked it up, or it was instinctive, and many of these same fathers also said that they had learnt how to father from their own father or a male relative. Other sources of information did not feature highly in response to this question. Few fathers learnt about fathering from friends, books, the internet, their partners or courses on fathering. We also separately asked fathers whom they talked to about fathering. While there is some overlap between these two questions, the distinction is one of degree. You can have a chat with someone about fathering, and while you may pick up a tip or two, you would not necessarily describe that person as someone from whom you learnt how to be a father. Usually fathers said

they talked to no-one about fathering, but some talked to friends and partners. This contrasts with their response to a later question, where almost all said they would be comfortable talking about fathering. Presumably, then, the reason they do not generally do so is because they do not feel the need.

Fathers did not often list their own fathers or other male relatives as people they talked to about fathering. On the face of it, this could be seen to be inconsistent with their answers to the question about where they learnt how to be a father. Half had said in response to that question that they had learnt fathering from their fathers or male relatives. We are left with the conclusion that while they learnt fathering from them, they did it without talking with them much about it. This reinforces our interpretation, already stated above, that they learnt from their fathers by observation and in reaction to their fathers' styles. They knew what they liked and did not like about the way they themselves had been fathered, and adapted these practices when raising their own children.

Many fathers had read something about fathering. About a quarter thought that this information was not sufficient, while the rest were split between thinking it was sufficient or not knowing whether it was. One-third had attended a course on fathering, usually an antenatal class. The newer fathers and older fathers were more likely to have read about fathering or to have attended courses. In particular, more new fathers seem to be attending antenatal classes than less recent fathers appear to have done. After careful consideration of the data, we also deduced that older fathers were either more motivated to access information or courses on fathering, or they somehow had better access to them. The increased likelihood that they had done so did not appear to be related to their having been fathers for a longer period than other fathers, as fathers of older children were no more likely than other fathers to have attended courses.

Fathers generally do not get support from other sources. The little support that they do receive is usually provided by church groups. This was particularly true of Pasifika fathers. Very few fathers had ever been a member of a support group run by fathers for fathers.

Previous research has pinpointed the pregnancy of men's partners and the birth of their children as key times when fathers are more open to information, advice and support (Fisher et al, 2006; Lupton & Barclay, 1999); and while results are somewhat mixed, a number of studies have shown that greater involvement by fathers during prenatal services led to more involvement with their children later (Fatherhood Institute, 2007; Nickel & Kocher, 1987). Fathers are best satisfied with antenatal classes when some part of them is directly relevant to fathering (Dwyer, 2009).

Generally speaking, however, New Zealand fathers do not attend antenatal classes. Overall, 20 percent of the fathers in the survey had ever attended an antenatal class, and the attendance was much lower for teenage fathers, fathers of children who were now in their late teens, Māori, Pasifika and Asian fathers. Three-quarters said that they would like there to be more courses for fathers. In the next section, we express caution about whether fathers would attend additional courses if they were offered. Given other research suggesting that fathers are more open to courses around the time of pregnancy and birth, we are perhaps missing an opportunity in this country by not providing antenatal courses that are sufficiently specific to fathers to attract them. The Families Commission is aware that some individuals are developing antenatal course content for fathers. We support this development, and encourage health authorities to implement these courses and investigate other ways of making antenatal classes attractive to fathers and convenient for them to attend.

12.4 FATHERS' SUPPORT NEEDS

Asking fathers about support needs can be problematic. Research has shown that men can be reluctant to admit that they need support, creating challenges for support services (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

This survey presents something of a conundrum regarding what fathers are saying about their support needs. Fewer than a quarter stated that they had insufficient information on fathering, and yet 71 percent thought that there should be more courses on fathering. We do not know whether they would attend more courses if they were available, but we can surmise whether they would be likely to do so, using other information from the survey. The following paragraph collates this information.

As discussed in Chapter 7, we asked fathers what type of support service would assist them. Of those who answered the question, 54 percent made comments indicating that they would like some support, but they tended to be unspecific about what form this support should take. The range of answers was large, and comparatively few fathers gave the same answer. The most common specific response (nine percent of those who answered the question) were those who said that a fathers' support group would assist them. Only five percent said that a course or seminar would assist them, but that does not necessarily negate the response to the earlier question, where 71 percent thought there should be more courses on fathering. The two questions are about different issues – courses could be considered distinct from services. Another relevant piece of information is the high level of satisfaction the fathers had with their performance as a father. Almost all said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their performance. Lastly, when they were asked what would be one thing that would improve their overall satisfaction with their performance, the only frequent response was from fathers who stated that they wanted to spend more time with their children. This is consistent with their response to an earlier question, where 68 percent of fathers said they would like to spend more time with their children, and with the fact that more than half of fathers cited a lack of time as a barrier to fathering.

Considering all of these pieces of information together raises doubts about whether fathers would attend fathering courses in greater numbers if more of them were available. In summary, given that fathers are content with their fathering, and finding more time to spend with their children is their number one fathering issue, they might not be inclined to make time to attend a fathering course. This is consistent with the low numbers of fathers who attend existing courses, as reported in Chapter 7. If this supposition is correct, there would be a significant challenge for providers of fathering courses to get fathers to attend them. As discussed in the literature review, this could be best accomplished by providing courses where and when fathers can most easily access them. In contrast to Pudney's (2006) conclusion, and the view expressed by some fathers at our earlier consultations, few fathers who responded to this survey wanted courses at their workplaces – almost all wanted them to be in the local community, either provided by a local community group, or at a school or a church. This is also consistent with the results of one of our earlier polls, where respondents were keener on attending parenting courses with their partners than they were on attending courses at the workplace.

This discussion has concentrated on courses for fathers, but the same argument applies to the provision of information and support services to fathers. While there was some level of need expressed for these two things, it may not be straightforward to provide them in a manner that fathers would utilise. This is particularly true of support services, since few fathers had support needs in common. The most commonly named need was

for a fathers' support group, mentioned by nine percent of fathers, and this contrasts with the very small proportion of fathers who have ever belonged to some sort of support group (four percent), and with the experiences of some organisers of support groups which failed to attract sufficient interest to be viable.[23]

We have discussed the benefits for children of having engaged and supportive fathers. Researchers (Jaffee et al, 2001) have pointed out that this style of fathering does not always come naturally. In particular, some fathers who have had their own difficult life experiences may need more training and support than others.

12.5 BARRIERS TO FATHERING

Fathers who responded to our survey did not often mention barriers to fathering other than work-related issues, yet previous research has come up with a list of other barriers. Presumably, the survey fathers did not mention as many barriers because of a combination of two factors. First, our telephone survey did not allow us to question fathers in depth. Had we probed more, we might have got some agreement that the barriers listed in the literature also affected a significant number of these fathers. Second, some barriers may be very important for subgroups of fathers, but not be much of a concern to the majority of fathers.

Work and time-related barriers to fathering

The surveyed fathers often mentioned work commitments as a barrier to fathering. Just over three-quarters (76 percent) of fathers said that they wanted to spend more time with their children, 53 percent cited work as a barrier to fathering and a further eight percent cited a lack of time as a barrier. Other New Zealand surveys have had similar results (EEO Trust, 2003; Robertson, 2007). This result is also consistent with the finding that many New Zealand fathers work at least 50 hours a week (Callister, 2005a), and with the Families Commission's own research on the impact of long working hours on families (Families Commission, 2009). When fathers talk about work as a barrier, they appear to be talking mostly about the time taken up by work, but work can also leave fathers unable to interact with their children the way they would like because of tiredness. Previous New Zealand research has shown that shift-workers and low-income workers working long hours can have particularly disrupted family lives (McNaughton & O'Brien, 1999; Saville-Smith, 1996; Williams & Kelly, 2005).

Our survey results appear to be at odds with Baxter's Australian research (2007), which found that the hours that fathers work have little impact on the time they devote to their children. While this finding primarily means that fathers working long hours somehow prioritise time with their children, putting it another way, it also suggests that if you somehow gave fathers more time, they would not spend it with their children. This seems unlikely given the large number of fathers who expressed a desire to do so.

Fathers' time is also taken up by unpaid work around the home. This survey has shown how involved fathers are with household and property chores, and, as stated earlier, it should be remembered that the Time Use Survey has demonstrated that fathers with young children work about the same number of hours as the mothers when paid and unpaid work are taken into account together (Callister, 2005b).

Previous research by the Families Commission and other researchers has shown that flexible workplace practices and parental leave are important in allowing fathers to be involved with their families. This survey did not cover flexible work, but did ask whether

[23] As related during the consultations with fathers organised by the Families Commission and NGOs in 2008.

fathers had the opportunity to take parental leave. Research has shown that fathers who spend time with their babies are better able to bond with them, and this is associated with better involvement with them at later ages (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Olah, 2001). A sizeable minority of the survey fathers said they did not have an opportunity to take parental leave, although we do not know whether this was because it was not offered by their workplace, or because their circumstances precluded them from taking up parental leave which was on offer. These findings provide further support for our earlier call for parental-leave options to be made more attractive and practical for parents (Families Commission, 2007). Earlier research shows that flexible work arrangements are reasonably widely available to fathers (Families Commission, 2008).

Attitudes towards fathering

A significant finding in previous studies, as summarised by Julian (1999), was that attitudes towards fathering affected fathering. Apparently many fathers, mothers and other people thought that it was not a father's role to be engaged closely with their children. The fact that this did not show up in this report to any real extent suggests that this may be diminishing as a barrier to fathering. Positive attitudes towards fathering have been fostered through media programmes and articles extolling the virtues of engaged fathers, or advertisements depicting supportive and engaged fathers. Researchers have also noted that over the past few decades, the expectation has grown that fathers should be emotionally and physically involved with their children (Gendall, 2005; Rouch, 2005; Wilson et al, 2005).

Nevertheless, it is likely that attitudes are still preventing some fathers from achieving their full potential. For example, some recent research has produced evidence of gatekeeping by some mothers. This occurs when a mother acts to reinforce traditional roles and exclude fathers from aspects of childcare. As recently as 2008, Vandeskog found that some New Zealand mothers discourage fathers from some routine childcare activities, and McPherson (2006) found that mothers had contradictory attitudes towards fathers' roles – they should be fully involved in childcare, but they must fulfil their primary role of being a provider for the family through full-time work.

Society's attitude towards men and fathers

Although the survey fathers did not list society's attitude towards fathers as a barrier, only a third thought that society recognised the importance of fathers, and the majority thought that fathers were portrayed negatively in the media. This is an interesting response given the frequent use of wholesome family images in advertisements, usually incorporating a positive picture of a loving father fully engaged with his family. Although there have been at least two notable exceptions in recent times, this appears to be the predominant advertising portrayal of fathers. The surveyed fathers may be reacting to television dramas, where positive portrayals of fathers are not as frequent. As they point out, fathers are often shown as confused, stupid or absent. Although the survey did not show these portrayals getting in the way of their fathering, it is clear from earlier consultations and previous research that some fathers are affected by this. In particular, some fathers have felt unable to be fully involved in childcare because of the way that the dangers of paedophilia have been highlighted.

Other barriers towards fathering

Another barrier listed by Julian (1999) was fathers' lack of parenting skills. This also did not show up in our survey. The survey fathers were satisfied with their performance as fathers, even though it appears that they mostly learnt how to father by picking the best of what their fathers did, or just by doing.

The fathers did not have too many problems interacting with professionals, early childcare workers and others who provide child-oriented services. They generally felt comfortable in these environments, aside from occasional comments about services being dominated by females or not being as welcoming towards fathers as mothers.

12.6 SUBGROUPS OF FATHERS

Vulnerable fathers

The key point to take from the literature about vulnerable fathers is that they tend to be invisible to policymakers and service providers. The opposite is true for vulnerable mothers, who tend to be targeted by specific policies and by services, presumably because in general they are more closely linked with raising their children. There is a growing awareness of the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. This suggests that more effort should be made to support vulnerable fathers in their role.

Our survey indicates that the majority of fathers who are separated, single or stepfathers are looking for more support; this is discussed below.

Teenage fathers

Previous research (Breiding-Buss et al, 2003; Coleman, 2005; Ferguson & Hogan, 2004; Pollock, 2002; Rouch, 2005) has found that teenage fathers have been especially invisible to service providers, have lacked support and have felt excluded. In response to some of this research, the United Kingdom Government has developed the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, which includes encouraging greater engagement of teenage fathers with their children. The Families Commission knows of no similar strategy in New Zealand. There were 84 fathers in our survey who had been teenagers when their first child was born, and their responses indicated that they were particularly unlikely to have learnt fathering from any source, or to have received support or training. Nevertheless, they were not significantly more likely to suggest that they needed additional support, nor were they any more likely to be dissatisfied with their performance as fathers.

Separated fathers

We were unable to locate any New Zealand research on separated fathers. Magazine articles have stated that some men feel that the Family Court is biased against them, and this was given added weight by research reported by Julian in 1999. She found that 41 percent of men and women considered this to be the case. Our survey did not cover this topic. Seventy-one separated fathers who were not living with any of their birth-children participated in our survey. Their responses to most questions were generally in line with those of other fathers. Clearly being apart from their children is a barrier to their fathering, but only 18 percent mentioned this. This suggests that most of these fathers answered this question within the context of their daily lives, rather than considering the context itself as a barrier. For the 18 percent who did list separation as being a barrier, their comments suggest that half were stating this as a matter of fact, rather than indicating some level of particular dissatisfaction. The other half (roughly nine percent of separated fathers) were clearly dissatisfied with their custody arrangements or had a difficult relationship with their former partner which made fathering difficult. Not surprisingly, earlier research has found that mothers have considerable influence on the access that separated fathers have to their children, and this access is best where the fathers and the separated mothers have a good relationship (Lewis & Lamb, 2007). A previous Families Commission report presents examples where separated parents have co-operatively worked out custody and access arrangements (Robertson et al., 2008).

Separated fathers were generally content with their performance as fathers, slightly more likely than other fathers to talk to other people about fathering and to want more information on fathering, unlikely to have attended a course on fathering and were slightly more likely than other fathers to say that they felt uncomfortable dealing with child-focused services. They were just as likely to talk to their ex-partners about their fathering as other fathers were to talk to their partners. One noticeable difference between them and the other survey fathers was their desire for more support. As did other fathers, they generally thought that more training courses would be a good idea, but they were much more likely to want some additional support, although they did not often specify what this support would look like. Some groups working with men have found that there are many separated fathers who need help such as that offered by a support group.

Stepfathers

Previous United Kingdom research has concluded that stepfathers found their fathering rewarding, but that they could be subjected to negative stereotyping, which affected what they felt they could or could not do with their stepchildren (Robertson, 2008). They could also be affected by their own perceptions of the limitations of their role. Our survey is consistent with the first part of Robertson's findings in that our separated fathers were generally satisfied with their performance as fathers (they were only slightly less satisfied than other fathers), but we did not find support for any particular difficulties besetting fathering by stepfathers. For example, only two stepfathers mentioned the fact that they were stepfathers as a barrier to their fathering. Nevertheless, as with separated fathers, stepfathers wanted more support than other fathers, and like separated fathers, they did not often state what sort of support. Like separated fathers, few stepfathers had attended a course in fathering. They were less likely to cite work as a barrier to fathering than fathers generally, perhaps because some of them might have had lower expectations about the extent to which they should engage with their stepchildren.

Fathers heading sole-parent households

We located no previous research on these fathers. Ninety-one participated in our survey (five percent of all survey fathers). At the time of the 2006 Census, there were 25,000 sole-parent households in New Zealand headed by fathers – 13 percent of all sole-parent households. This has been an increasing trend – 20 years earlier, there were half as many sole-parent households headed by fathers. As expected, a higher proportion of these fathers expressed a need for support than did the survey fathers generally, and like stepfathers and separated fathers, they did not often specify what sort of support. Slightly fewer of these single fathers than other fathers thought there should be more courses on fathering, perhaps because they would have difficulty finding time to attend them. They were generally satisfied with their performance as fathers, and did not stand out by listing more barriers to their fathering. As with stepfathers, they were less likely to list work as a barrier to the fathering, but presumably for different reasons. Some of them would be full-time at-home fathers, and work would therefore not get in the way. They were slightly more likely than other fathers to list finances as a constraint to fathering, but because of the low numbers of single fathers in the survey, we have to treat this result with caution, and cannot say whether this is a meaningful difference.

12.7 FAMILY AND CHILD-FOCUSED SERVICES AND FATHERS

There is a considerable literature on the invisibility of fathers to family and child-focused services, and the difficulties fathers face in engaging with these services. This is compounded by fathers' inability to recognise they need help or their willingness to seek

it. In this country, Chapman and Mitchell (2000, with McIntosh; and Mitchel & Chapman 2001) and Pudney (2003, 2006) have studied this issue and worked with services to make them more father-friendly. This literature has been canvassed earlier in this report. Briefly, services are usually tailored towards mothers and children, they tend to be staffed by women and there is awkwardness in dealing with fathers. Service providers tend to be unfamiliar with fathering issues. Worse, research has shown that some of the staff in these services believe that fathers are incompetent parents, and many fathers are likely to physically abuse their children (Fletcher, 2008; Russell et al, 1999). Aside from the work of the researchers mentioned above, we know of little research that has been done on these problems.

Rectifying this situation would not be easy. Considerable work would be needed to adapt services to suit fathers; provide training for staff to be more understanding of and more comfortable with fathers; and perhaps employ more men. Despite having an emphasis on engaging with fathers, a recent Australian report (Berlyn et al, 2008) indicates that the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy is failing to do so. Similarly, the Sure Start interventions in the United Kingdom and Head Start in the USA have both had problems engaging fathers (Fletcher, 2008). Other research has found that the main change needed is for child-focused services to treat fathers as important people in their children's lives rather than as support people for mothers (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004; Green, 2003; Pudney, 2006).

There is scant support for these issues from our survey. Only a small proportion of the survey fathers felt uncomfortable when interacting with child-focused services and professionals. This should not be taken as an indication that there is no problem here. There are at least two other possibilities. Interaction with services may be a problem only for some fathers under some conditions, or, a brief telephone survey may be an inadequate means of investigating this issue.

12.8 CONTRASTS BETWEEN SURVEY FATHERS AND CONSULTATION FATHERS

As outlined in the introduction to this report, the survey was preceded by two Families Commission polls and two consultations with fathers. The survey supports some of the issues raised then – listed in the introduction to this report – and not others. In particular, these earlier exercises and the survey agree on the difficulty that fathers have balancing work and family lives. They are also consistent about fathers asking for additional courses on fathering, although there was more support for courses in the workplace coming from the earlier consultations. Turning to the differences: first, the fathers in the earlier exercises placed much more emphasis on the need to make the processes surrounding the birth of their children more welcoming to fathers. Second, their support most frequently came from their partners and friends, whereas few survey fathers talked with their partners and friends about fathering. Third, they were generally happy with the support they received, whereas many survey fathers asked for more support services. Fourth, the consultation fathers saw traditional attitudes towards the fathers' role in families as the main barrier to fathering – something which was not prominent in the views expressed by the survey fathers. Fifth, the survey fathers did not share the consultation fathers' desire to join support groups. Finally, the survey fathers did not generally share the view that there is a need for child-support services to be more father-friendly.

This illustrates both the strengths and weakness of the survey. After canvassing the views of more than 1,700 fathers, we are confident that we are closer to getting the

views of fathers generally. The survey shows us that some of the views expressed at the earlier exercises are likely to be minority opinions. On the other hand, the survey could not explore issues in detail, and had it done so, we might have seen more consistency on some of these issues. In particular, there might have been more alignment on the issues of support for fathers around childbirth, and traditional attitudes being a barrier to fathering.

12.9 CONCLUSIONS

The survey paints a picture of fathers who are very involved with their families; who see themselves as friends and playmates to their children, and providers for their families; who are largely satisfied with their performance as fathers; who do not talk or read much about fathering, do not attend courses and are not members of support groups; but who say that more courses would be a good idea, and that they would like more support services, without specifying what they should be. Their main problem is that their work commitments are preventing them from spending more time at home with their children.

On the whole, the results reinforce an image of New Zealand fathers learning by doing. While many of them learnt fathering from their fathers or other male relatives, they do not talk to them about fathering, and presumably learnt from them in the sense that they copied what they liked and rejected what they did not.

The key issue from a policy or service perspective is: What does this research tell us about what should be done to support fathers? This is a difficult question to answer. Their desire for more courses and more support is at odds with their satisfaction with their performance, their failure to list attending courses as a key priority, their inability to specify what sort of support they need, their low attendance at currently available courses and their low membership of existing support groups. The fathers' responses to other questions also give the impression that they are time-pressured – would they have time to attend courses or link up with support services? We suggest that providing support for fathers should be approached with caution – rather than attempting universal services for fathers generally, services should be provided first for those most in need: teenage fathers, separated fathers, single fathers and stepfathers. All of these groups had higher support needs.

The survey fathers generally stated that they were comfortable interacting with child-focused support services. This is at odds with previous research, which showed that such services can fail to cater for fathers for a number of reasons, and with our previous consultations with fathers. It is clear that there is at least a minority of fathers who feel poorly served by existing child-focused family support services, which tend to be oriented towards mothers. The Families Commission supports the work underway in New Zealand to make services more father-friendly.

Only one in five fathers had attended antenatal training, although there are indications that the numbers are increasing. There are demonstrated benefits from fathers attending antenatal classes, such as better engagement with their children. Our consultations have shown that fathers want antenatal training that includes a component targeted at their role during and following the birth of their baby.

Nine percent of fathers said that they would like the support of a fathers' support group. This was the most commonly stated support need. Yet, we are aware that some attempts to establish such groups have failed because of low attendance by fathers, while

others are well established and fulfilling a need. As fathers' support groups are run 'by fathers for fathers', we feel that they should be left to enthusiastic fathers to establish. Government and other organisations could play a funding and support role.

This research provides further evidence that more could be done to enable fathers to take paternal leave. As has been said many times in the report, early bonding between fathers and babies is associated with increased involvement of fathers with older children. Nearly half of the fathers in this survey said that they did not have an opportunity to take parental leave. The Families Commission has previously called for progressive increases to the duration of paid parental leave, and the levels of payment. This report reinforces the need for these improvements.

Half of the fathers who responded to the survey thought that society did not recognise the value of fathers, and more thought that the media portrayed fathers in a poor light. For some fathers, society's non-recognition of fathering is linked to the way that some family services have viewed fathers as mother-supporters rather than key figures in the lives of their children. Further, it is not uncommon for fathers to state that they feel constrained in some childcare activities and interaction with other children because of the publicity that has been given to the dangers of paedophiles. The Families Commission is aware that many fathers are deeply resentful of broad-brush rules for protecting children that imply that all men are potentially dangerous, and of other portrayals that give an exaggerated picture of fathers as neglectful of their families. The Families Commission will continue wherever possible to promote positive images of fathers.

Lastly, the Families Commission intends to follow up on the findings from this report with other agencies and with fathers' and men's support groups. There is a wealth of material in this report – other people who are knowledgeable about fathers and their support needs can help us draw out the implications. We will also draw to the attention of the relevant government departments and other agencies the findings that suggest that improvements in policies and practices should be made. Fathers are vitally important to families, and the Families Commission will continue to work to support their role.

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APPENDIX ONE:

THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is <name> and I'm calling on behalf of a social research company called Research First. Today we're doing research about fatherhood in New Zealand on behalf of the Families Commission.

(If male ask if is a father of children under 19. If is not a father, ask if there is a father of children under 19 in the house we could talk to/if female, ask if there is a father of children under 19 in the house we could talk to).

The survey should take around 15 minutes and is about what it means to be a father today, and the kind of support fathers need. The Families Commission is the government agency whose job it is to speak out for all families, and promote a better understanding of family issues and needs among government agencies and the wider community. Is now a good time or can I call you at another more convenient time? All participants will go into a prize draw to win a $100 book voucher.

I should add that everything you say will remain anonymous, and that we can stop at any point you choose. A report on the results of the survey will be posted on the the website at a later date. Are you happy to proceed?
(If not convenient offer website option)

Section 1. Your role as a father

Q1.1 What sort of things do you do with your child/children, either by yourself or with your partner, taking into account things you do on a daily, weekly or occasional basis as household tasks and for pleasure? **Do not read out.**

☐ Main carer
☐ Bathe/change nappy
☐ Read story/put to bed
☐ Help with feeding/making meals/lunch box
☐ Help with reading/homework/projects
☐ Eating together
☐ Take/coach/assist in organised sport or other similar activity
☐ Household or section chores
☐ Specific hobby with child (eg fishing)
☐ Taking children to school
☐ Transporting children to activities/friends
☐ Playing with child
☐ Helping with/attending religious and/or cultural activities
☐ Other: WRITE IN: _____

Q1.2 In an average week, **approximately** how many waking hours would you spend in the company of your child/children? **Write in number of HOURS**

Q1.3 How would you describe your involvement in family chores, such as involvement with housework, cooking and other household chores, including looking after your yard? **Read out**

☐ Totally involved – is my major activity
☐ Very involved – takes up most of my spare time
☐ Quite involved – often involved in chores
☐ Somewhat involved – occasionally do chores
☐ Not very involved – do very little
☐ Not at all involved – rarely do anything

Q1.4 Who takes **main** responsibility for the following in your family? **Read out each line and code one for each. Use 50/50 only if respondent insists there is no main resposibility.**

	self	wife/partner	other – write in	50/50	not applicable
Day to day childcare – such as dressing, feeding, bathing, putting to bed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Caring for child when sick or during school holidays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Housework and chores around the house	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Helping child with homework	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Chores around the section/yard	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q1.5a. Would you like to spend **more** time parenting your child/children?

☐ Yes – continue ☐ No – skip to Q1.6

Q1.5b. What prevents you spending more time parenting your child/children?

☐ Work commitment/pressures ☐ Community commitment

☐ Live away from child/children ☐ Sporting commitments

☐ Pressure of chores

☐ Other: WRITE IN: _____

Now skip to Q2.1

Q1.6a. Would you like to spend **less** time parenting your child/children?

☐ Yes – continue ☐ No – skip to Q2.1

Q1.6b. What prevents you spending less time parenting your child/children?

☐ Sole carer/no-one else

☐ Other: WRITE IN: _____

Section 2. Fathering style

Q2.1 Which of these best describe your fathering role.
READ OUT COMPLETE LIST AND CODE THOSE THAT BEST DESCRIBE ROLE.

☐ Carer/nurturer ☐ Friend/playmate

☐ Coach ☐ Income earner and provider

☐ Confidant/adviser ☐ Rule/boundary/limit maker

☐ Disciplinarian ☐ Supportive partner/husband/boyfriend

☐ Other: WRITE IN: _____

Q2.2 Where did you learn how to be a father? **Do not prompt – record those mentioned or write in.**

☐ Nowhere/just instinct/picked it up ☐ From my partner

☐ From my father/grandfather/other male relation ☐ From friends/neighbours

☐ From parenting classes/fathers groups ☐ From books/reading/internet

☐ Other: WRITE IN: _____

Q2.3 How does your approach to fathering compare with your father's approach?
Write in response – CLARIFY HOW SAME/SIMILAR/DIFFERENT ETC

Q2.4a Is there anyone you talk to, or have talked to, about how to father or how you could father more effectively?
If Yes, ask 'Who is, or was this?

☐ No – not talked to anyone – skip to Q2.5
☐ Yes – father/grandfather/other male relation
☐ Yes – friend who is a father
☐ Other: WRITE IN:
☐ Yes – fathers group
☐ Yes – professional
☐ Yes – wife/partner

Q2.4b. How helpful is it to talk to others? **Read out**

☐ Very helpful
☐ Some help
☐ Neither/nor
☐ Not much help
☐ No help at all

Q2.5a Have you read anything about how to be a **father? If YES ask** 'When did you do this?'
Read out options – multiple responses ok

☐ No – never read anything – skip to Q2.6a
☐ Yes – before child was born
☐ Yes – immediately after child was born
☐ Other: WRITE IN:
☐ Yes – during pre-teen years of child
☐ Yes – during teenage years

Q2.5b. How helpful is it to read about how to be a father? **Read out**

☐ Very helpful
☐ Some help
☐ Neither/nor
☐ Not much help
☐ No help at all

Q2.6a. Have you ever attended a seminar, or any training specifically on how to be a **father? Read out. If YES ask** 'What did you attend?'

☐ No – never attended – skip to Q2.7
☐ Yes – at ante-natal classes
☐ Yes – fathering for under 5s
☐ Other: WRITE IN:
☐ Yes – fathering for 5 to 9s
☐ Yes – fathering for teens

Q2.6b. How helpful was the seminar/training? **Read out**

☐ Very helpful
☐ Some help
☐ Not much help
☐ No help at all

Q2.7a Have you ever been/or are you currently a member of a fathers support group? **If necessary explain that a fathers' group is…** an online or local group of fathers who support one another in how to be an effective father.

☐ No – never been – skip to Q2.8
☐ Yes – am currently a member
☐ Yes – have been, but am currently NOT a member

Q2.7b. How helpful do you/did you find the group? **Read out**

☐ Very helpful
☐ Some help
☐ Neither/nor
☐ Not much help
☐ No help at all

Q2.8a Do you feel you can talk honestly about parenting with other males in a workplace/club/pub/cafe situation?

☐ Yes – in all cases – skip to Q3.1
☐ No – continue
☐ Yes – to some people/in some situations – skip to Q3.1

Q2.8b. Why is that?

Section 3. Fathering supports

Q3.1 Do you think there is sufficient information available about how to be good fathers?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

Q3.2 Which of the following ways would you find most useful to access information on fathering? – internet, newspapers, TV, magazines or books. **Write 1 against 1st preference**. And next most useful? **Write 2 against next**. And third most useful? **Write 3 against next**. And next? **Write 4 against next**.

internet	newspapers	TV	magazines	books

Q3.3 Do you think more courses on how to be a good father would be a good idea?

☐ Yes
☐ No – skip to Q3.5a

Q3.4. Would you prefer the courses to be .....? **Read out options, multiple response ok**

☐ At work
☐ Close to home
☐ In a community group
☐ At school
☐ Don't know

Q3.5a. Are you currently using any type of support service to help you in fathering, such as a helpline, assistance from a government department, or from a social service or church group? **If YES ask** 'What type of service are you using? **Code all mentioned**

☐ No – not using any
☐ Yes – helpline
☐ Yes – govt department
☐ Other: WRITE IN:
☐ Yes – social service
☐ Yes – church group

Q3.5b. What type of support service would assist you in fathering?

Q3.6a Have you accompanied your child (with or without your wife/partner), to any form of well-child check, early childhood education, formal child care or medical service?

☐ No – skip to Q3.7 ☐ Yes – continue

Q3.6b. How comfortable have you been with the experience? **Read out**

☐ Very comfortable – skip to Q3.7a ☐ Uncomfortable

☐ Comfortable ☐ Very uncomfortable

☐ Neither/nor

Q3.6c. Is there anything that could have been done differently that would have made you feel more comfortable?

Q3.7a. In general, how confident do you feel when dealing with professionals involved in your child's health and education? **Read out**

☐ Very confident – skip to Q8a ☐ Not very confident

☐ Confident ☐ Not at all confident

☐ Neutral ☐ Don't ever get involved

Q3.7b. What would help you feel more confident or competent?

Q3.8a Could you take paid parental leave at work following the birth of your child/children?

☐ No ☐ Don't know

☐ Yes

Q3.8b Can you take special leave when your child/children are sick?

☐ No ☐ Don't know

☐ Yes

Section 4. Reflecting on fatherhood

Q4.1 What do you know about fathering now that you wished you knew when you first became a father?

Q4.2 What gets in the way of you fulfilling your role as a father?

Q4.3 Do you think that New Zealand society as a whole recognises the importance of fathers?

☐ No ☐ Not sure

☐ Yes

☐ Other: WRITE IN:

Q4.4 What is your opinion about the way fathers are portrayed in the media?

Q4.5a. How would you rank your overall satisfaction with your performance as a father? **Read out**

☐ Very satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
☐ Dissatisfied
☐ Very dissatisfied
☐ Don't know

Q4.5b. What is one way that your overall satisfaction could be improved?

Section 5. About you as a father

Q5.1a. In which of these age groups do you fall?

☐ 19 and under
☐ 20 – 29
☐ 30 – 39
☐ 40 – 49
☐ 50 – 59
☐ 60+

Q5.1b. And which of these ethnic groups do you identify with. **You can name more than one.**

☐ New Zealander/Pakeha
☐ NZ Maori
☐ Other: WRITE IN:
☐ Asian
☐ Other European

Ask only if necessary

Q5.1c. Do you live alone or with a partner/wife?

☐ Alone
☐ Other: WRITE IN:
☐ Wife/partner

Q5.1d. At what age did you first became a father. **Write in age**

Q5.1e. What is your employment situation?

☐ Working full time in paid employment
☐ Working part time in paid employment
☐ Working but not paid
☐ Not working due to ill health
☐ Other: WRITE IN:
☐ Not working/job seeker
☐ Full time carer/homemaker
☐ Retired

Q5.1f. And what is the highest level of education you have obtained?

☐ Less than High School
☐ High school grad level 11 or 12
☐ High school grad level 13
☐ Some college credits/uni papers no degree
☐ Other: WRITE IN:
☐ Bachelor degree
☐ Masters/post graduate degree
☐ Technical certificate or diploma
☐ Apprenticeship

Q5.2a. Do you have children living with you?

☐ Yes ☐ No – skip to Q5.2c

Q5.2b. What is your relationship to the child/children? **You can name more than one.**

☐ Birth father ☐ Foster father

☐ Step father

Q5.2c. Are there any (other) children that you have partial responsibility for, and that visit you or stay with you at any time?

☐ Yes ☐ No – skip to Q5.2e

Q5.2d. What is your relationship to the child/children? **You can name more than one.**

☐ Birth father ☐ Foster father

☐ Step father

Q5.2e. What is the age of the youngest child that lives with you/stays or visits you?

Q5.2f. What is the age of the oldest child that lives with you/stays or visits you?

Thank respondent and close interview

APPENDIX TWO: SAMPLING ERRORS

The following table shows the maximum error attributable to sampling biases for these subgroups. Technically, sampling errors should not be calculated for surveys or for samples but only for individual measures to take account of this sampling proportion effect. They are presented here to show the maximum sampling error present in the survey. The table assumes a 'sample proportion' (the proportion of people in the population being surveyed who answer a certain way) of 50 percent. This value produces the maximum possible variation. If, for instance, the answers to a question among these populations is split 75:25 rather than the 50:50 assumed here, the sampling errors associated with the achieved sample reduce markedly. To take a concrete example, the maximum error for the results for Pasifika fathers is +/-8.1 percent, but where 75 percent of Pasifika fathers in this survey agree (or disagree) with a point of view, the sampling error reduces markedly to +/-4.7 percent.

SAMPLE	NUMBER	MAXIMUM SAMPLING ERROR
All fathers (total sample)	**1,721**	**+/-2.5%**
Fathers by 'type'		
Birth-father	1,596	+/-2.5%
Stepfather	85	+/-10.9%
Foster-father	17	+/-25.0%
Other	16	–
Fathers by ethnicity		
Pākehā	1,146	+/-2.9%
Māori	235	+/-6.5%
Pasifika	151	+/-8.1%
Asian	79	+/-11.0%
Other	198	–

SAMPLE	NUMBER	MAXIMUM SAMPLING ERROR
Fathers by age		
20–29	129	+/-8.8%
30–39	618	+/-4.0%
40–49	700	+/-3.7%
50–59	239	+/-6.4%
60+	35	+/-17.1%
Fathers by 'type'		
Single/without current partner	135	+/-8.6%
Live with wife/partner	1,579	+/-2.5%
Declined	7	–
Fathers by age of youngest child		
0–4 years	786	+/-3.5%
5–9 years	406	+/-4.9%
10–14 years	346	+/-5.3%
15–19 years	183	+/-7.4%
Fathers by age of oldest child		
0–4 years	380	+/-5.1%
5–9 years	390	+/-5.0%
10–14 years	466	+/-4.6%
15–19 years	485	+/-4.5%

ENDNOTES

i. The systematic review design minimises the problems associated with less scientifically rigorous review methodologies by using strict protocols and clear research phases to deliver robust research outcomes. To do this, the systematic reviews use clearly specified research methods to avoid the introduction of bias in the selection and interpretation of the literature being studied, clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria for both the journal and the article selection, strict criteria to evaluate the quality of the measures used to assess the factor of review interest and strict criteria to evaluate the quality of each study's research methodology.

ii. Comprising respondents who identified their ethnicity as Other European, Australian, South Africa, African, Canadian, Zimbabwean, Aboriginal, Argentinean, Brazilian, Middle Eastern, Persian, United States and declined to provide an ethnicity.

iii. The survey also asked the respondents about the age at which they *first* became a father. The average age was 29, and the bulk of respondents had become fathers in their 20s and 30s.

TABLE E.1: AGE FIRST BECAME A FATHER

COMMENT	%	N
Under 20	5%	84
20–29	46%	792
30–39	44%	759
40+	5%	86

iv. Maximum margin of error for a 50 percent sample at the 95 percent confidence interval.

v. The accuracy of the sample results is a function of the size of the sample. The size of the population is largely irrelevant. More specifically, the margin of error (and thus the width of the confidence interval) is inversely proportional to the square root of the sample size. A consequence of this inverse square root relationship is that to double the precision of our estimate (ie halve the width of the confidence interval), we must quadruple the size of our sample.

vi. That is, if we were to repeatedly select random samples of a fixed size from a population of interest we would find that the sample statistic would vary from sample to sample. This variation is called sampling error and it simply represents the fact that different random samples contain different people with somewhat different opinions and experiences. Thus, the result of any one survey should be thought of as an estimate of some true population parameter. sampling error there is associated with an estimate, the less precise the estimate – and thus the less useful the estimate. Sampling error is unsystematic, in the sense that sample statistics vary randomly about the 'true' but unknown population parameter (sometimes the statistic will be less than the parameter, sometimes greater). Moreover, because of the random sampling process the level of sampling error associated with a statistic is a relatively simple function of sample size (ie the magnitude of sampling error decreases with increasing sample size).

vii. The researchers called a total of 23,435 numbers. Of these, 3,802 were disconnected or business numbers (and hence did not qualify); 6,383 were not answered; and 7,619 did not qualify (by either not having a father in the home, or having a father whose youngest children were older than 19). Of the remaining 5,631, 1,729 agreed to participate in the survey and 3,902 refused (or had someone refuse on behalf of the father in the home).

viii. It is standard practice in telephone research to 'audit' 10 percent of the completed surveys and 10 percent of the contacts who declined to participate. These audit calls are typically made by the call-centre supervisor and provide a quality-control check on the data collected and the performance of the initial caller.

ix. Because the refusal survey used a smaller sample than the main survey, its sampling error statistics will be larger. The results of this question in the refusal survey is accurate to +/-5.5 percent, whereas the same question in the main survey is accurate to +/-2.3 percent. This means that the true population value for the refusal population is between 54.5 percent and 65.5 percent, and the true population value in the main survey is between 56.7 percent and 60.3 percent. The fact that these true population values overlap means we can be confident that no significant differences between the two groups (on this question at least) exist.

x. See *The 2008 Social Report*. http://www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/social-connectedness/telephone-internet-access.html

xi. A phenomenon known in the industry as 'sugging' or 'selling under the guise' of carrying out research.

xii. Interviewers' instructions – not shown on the questionnaire.

xiii. Because the mean score +/-1 SD covers 67 percent of the values in a distribution.

xiv. Not that a small number of fathers were unable to specify an average amount of time spent with their children because of the great variation week by week, or because of changing circumstances.

xv. As above – a small number of fathers were unable to specify an average amount of time spent with their children because of the great variation week by week, or because of changing circumstances.

xvi. As above – a small number of fathers were unable to specify an average amount of time spent with their children because of the great variation week by week, or because of changing circumstances.

xvii. Excluding those for whom the chores are not applicable.

xviii. The Pasifika fathers and Asian fathers are smaller samples than those for Pākehā and Māori fathers and, as a consequence, have higher sampling errors. However, even allowing for these greater margins of error, the results for Pasifika and Asian fathers remain distinct from those for Pākehā fathers, with the results for Māori fathers falling between the two clusters of results.

xix. Asked as an open-ended question but with responses coded into the following options:

> Carer, nurturer

> Coach

> Confidant, adviser

> Disciplinarian

> Friend

> Homework-helper, teacher, tutor

> Income-earner and provider

> Nappy-changer and baby-bather

> Rule, boundary, limit-maker

> Supportive partner, husband or boyfriend

> Other (please specify).

xx. Role is more about what is done, while style is more about why what is done is done.

xxi. This question, although part of the exploration of where fathers are turning for their support, was asked later in the question (Q.3.5a) as it was found during designing the questionnaire that it fitted better there.

xxii. Asked as a closed-ended question where the options were (in alphabetical order) books, internet, magazines, newspapers and television.

xxiii. One possible explanation is that many fathers would have answered this later question in terms of their performance at the time they were with their children, rather than commenting on their feelings resulting from being at work rather than with their children.

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