

Men and fatherhood: Who are today's fathers?

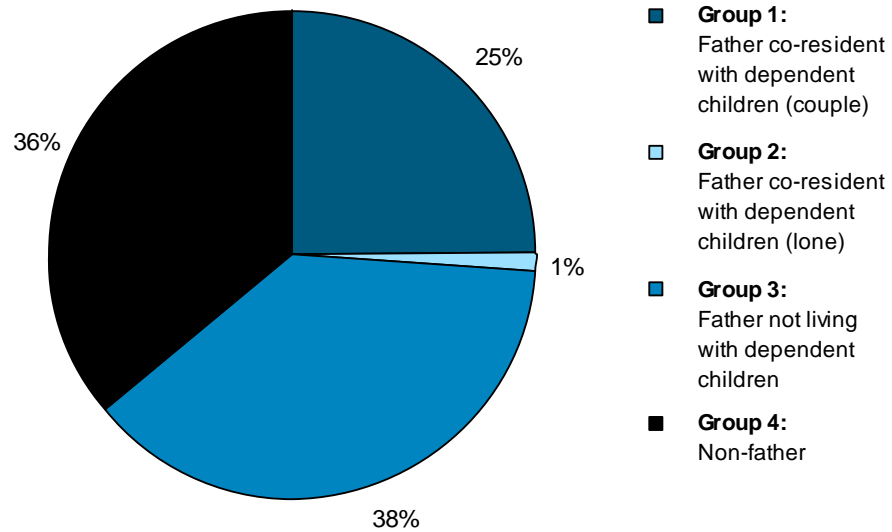
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As the role of men in family life has changed, fatherhood has become increasingly complex. This paper uses data from the UK-wide survey Understanding Society (2009-11) to examine modern fatherhood and attempts to shed light on the question 'what are today's fathers like?'

Defining fatherhood

There are different ways to define and categorise fatherhood. These definitions vary depending on the biological, social and legal relationship between the child and father, whether the child lives with their father and the financial relationship of fathers with their child.

Fatherhood groups



Base: All men aged 16+ (N=20741)

In this study, we have grouped men into four different 'father type' groups.¹ These are based on whether they have ever fathered a child and whether they live with their dependent children² (including biological and non-biological children) and a partner.

Just over a third of men aged 16 and over (36%) are 'non-fathers', that is, they have never fathered a child biologically or played a father role to a child (e.g. step-dad). The remaining 64% of men are 'fathers'.

¹ The proposed grouping does have some restrictions and does not claim to be a comprehensive overview of fatherhood as experienced by men. It is designed to give an overview of fathering groups based on a number of key dimensions.

² A dependent child is defined as an individual aged under 16. A person will also be defined as a dependent child if they are 16 to 19 years old; and living with parents; and in full-time non-advanced education or in unwaged government training.

Men in different fatherhood groups have different average age.

- Men without children ('non-fathers') are 33 years old on average
- Men in couples with dependent children are 41 years old
- Lone fathers with dependent children are 45 years old
- Fathers with no dependent resident children are 62 years old³

Young dads are rare: only 6% of men aged 16 to 24 are fathers, and just 2% of men aged 16 to 19 are.

The older men are, the more likely they are to be a father. Only 11% of men aged 70 years or more have never fathered a child or played a fathering role to a child.

Biological versus social fatherhood

A man does not need to be the biological father of a child to be a father in a child's life. Men adopt, foster and become step dads to children - but for the majority of men who live with dependent children, these are their biological children:⁴

- 94% of fathers with resident children live with their biological children
- 11% of fathers live with step children
- 1% of fathers live with adopted children
- 0.4% of fathers live with foster children

³ This grouping does not represent men with non-resident children. The vast majority of men in Group 3 are men with children who are older than dependent age. Non-resident children are discussed in a separate section below.

⁴ The percentages above do not add up to 100%. This is because some fathers live in families where some of the children are their biological children, and to others they are a "social" father (including adoptive, step and foster fatherhood).

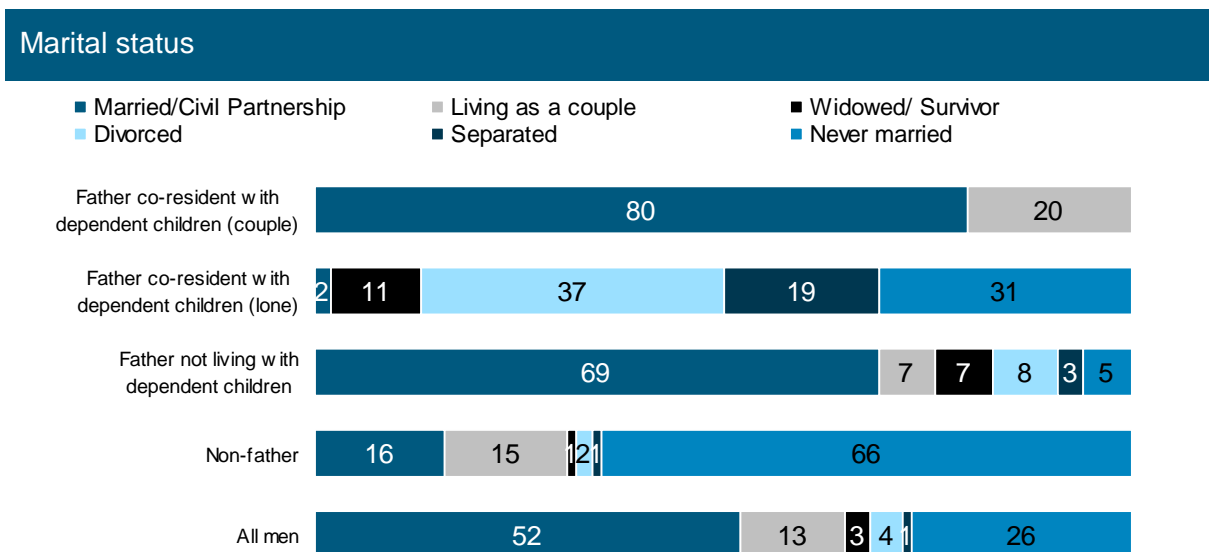
The make-up of families is complex. The percentages above add up to more than 100% because some fathers live in complex families including both biological and non-biological children.

- **Men in couples** – 88% have biological children only, 7% have both biological and non-biological children and 6% have non-biological children only.
- **Lone fathers** – 96% have biological children only, 2% have both biological and non-biological children and 2% have non-biological children only.

Who are fathers?

This section outlines some key characteristics of men and how they vary by fatherhood group.

Most men live with a partner, with just over half of all men reporting that they are legally married or in a Civil Partnership. However, marital status varies greatly by fatherhood group – this is related to different life stages men are at. Eight in ten fathers who are living with a partner are married and just two in ten are cohabiting. This shows that among two parent families marriage is still the norm.



Base: All men aged 16+ (N=20732)

Fathers in couples with dependent children are most likely to work full-time.⁵ Fewer lone parent dads are in full-time work. Lone fathers are more likely to be unemployed or economically inactive but this is likely to be because there is not another adult in the household to look after the children.

For fathers who do not live with any dependent children and men without children, the lower rates of employment and higher rates of economic inactivity are likely to be related to age. Fathers without resident children are on average older, so may have taken early retirement. Men without children are on average younger and may still be in education or training.

Economic status

Father co-resident with dependent children (couple)
 Father co-resident with dependent children (lone)
 Father not living with dependent children
 Non-father
 All men



Base: All men aged 16-64 (N=16593)

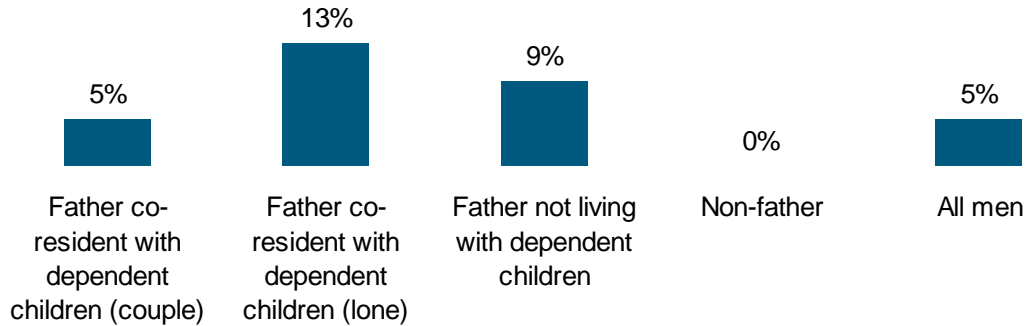
Non-resident fathers

Overall, 5% of men have at least one non-resident child aged under 16 but this varies by fatherhood group.

Surprisingly, it is lone fathers who are the most likely have a non-resident child or children. 13% report this compared with 5% of fathers in a couple. This may suggest that for some of them, on the break-up of their relationship, some children stayed living with their mother.

⁵ Working full-time is defined as working 30 hours per week (not including hours of overtime). Part-time work is defined as working 1-29 hours per week.

Non-resident children



Base: All men aged 16+ (N=20663)

The vast majority of fathers who have at least one non-resident child are not living with any dependent-age children:

- 71% of fathers with non-resident children do not live with any children
- 29% of fathers with non-resident children are living with other children; these could be biological, step, adopted or foster children.

Whether a father is in contact with their non-resident dependent children, and the frequency of this contact, both vary greatly.

- 38% of fathers are in touch with their non-resident children at least several times a week
- 21% are in touch about once a week
- 28% are in touch less often than that but at least several times a year
- 13% of fathers have no contact with their non-resident children

Fathers who have both resident and non-resident children are more likely to report that they never see their non-resident children than fathers who have only non-resident children (21% and 10% respectively). The lower incidence of contact for fathers who also have resident children could be related to the demands which having resident dependent children make on the father's time – i.e. having a new family or a step family leaves them with less time to maintain a close relationship with their non-resident children.

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Lone fathers

Lone fathers are a very different group of fathers. On average, they are older than fathers in couples - 45 years old compared with 41 years old for fathers in couples.

Lone fathers also have fewer children living with them. 59% have just one child compared with 42% of coupled fathers. The children they live with tend to be older - only 15% of lone fathers have a child aged under 5 years old, compared with 49% of fathers in couples.

Lone fathers are less economically secure than fathers in a couple. This is not surprising given the lack of another potential wage earner in lone parent households. Lone fathers, compared with coupled fathers, are:

- less likely to be in the highest socio-economic group (management and professional) - 45% compared with 49%
- less likely to be educated to degree level or higher (24% compared with 29%)
- less likely to own a house outright or with a mortgage (46% compared with 73%)