



Where's the daddy?

Fathers and father-figures in UK datasets

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Condensed Report

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It summarises the findings and recommendations from our review of the ways in which sixteen UK large-scale repeated cross-sectional and longitudinal quantitative datasets identify and collect data about fathers in varied forms of co-residence and relationships with their dependent and adult children.

The full findings and recommendations can be found in the Full Report which, along with the much shorter Executive Summary, can be viewed or downloaded from the Fatherhood Institute website from 5 February 2018 here: <http://wp.me/p1bEpu-1Ai>.

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About the authors

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About the Fatherhood Institute



The Fatherhood Institute (founded 1999, charity number 1075104) is a world leader in the fatherhood field, with a unique grasp of policy, practice and research. Our twin focus is child wellbeing and gender equality. Our research summaries, published free of charge on our much-visited website www.fatherhoodinstitute.org, are drawn on and cited all over the world; and our trainings in father-inclusive practice (online and face-to-face) are highly praised and evaluated by service providers. We work directly with fathers and couples in community, education and health settings, and train local facilitators to undertake this work. We also work with fathers and mothers in the workplace (seminars/ webinars/company intranet materials) and offer HR support to organisations aiming to develop competitive edge and reduce gender inequalities at work, through recognising and supporting male employees' caring responsibilities.

About the Nuffield Foundation



The Nuffield Foundation is an endowed charitable trust that aims to improve social well-being in the widest sense. It funds research and innovation in education and social policy and also works to build capacity in education, science and social science research. The Nuffield Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation. More information is available at www.nuffieldfoundation.org.

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Disclaimer: Statements made in this report about each quantitative dataset, including the tables in Appendix A, are based on the authors' interpretations of online dataset documentation reviewed in 2014-15.

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Our Recommendations

- Adequate parenthood questions for both men and women should be viewed as a priority for research instruments, alongside other core variables such as “sex”/gender, socioeconomic group and economic activity.
- In addition to ‘household grid’ questions that identify parents whose children live wholly or primarily in their household, datasets should routinely ask questions to identify (i) fathers and mothers with dependent and/or adult children living wholly or primarily elsewhere; and (ii) children with a living birth (or adoptive) father or mother living wholly or primarily elsewhere. The questions asked should also establish patterns of part-time residence and overnight care.
- Organisations funding and directing cross-sectional and longitudinal studies should consider more comprehensively differentiating categories of fathers and mothers through adaptations and additions to questionnaires (see our Condensed Report).
- Some level of dataset harmonisation may be appropriate on these issues, taking into account the different purposes of different datasets. Cognitive interviewing might explore how respondents interpret questionnaire terms.
- Increased funding may enable longer interviews with, and observational data for, full-time co-resident fathers, in order to establish a more comprehensive picture of how these fathers affect cohort members’ childhoods and lives into adulthood.
- With increased budgets, cohort studies could trial data collection directly from the most involved separated fathers. Fathers with a substantial pattern of overnight care could be defined as a second household for data collection, including interviews with any cohabiting partner (step-parent).
- Cohort studies might track married/ cohabiting fathers into new households if they become non-resident, for example as a result of relationship separation, as in Understanding Society.
- With an ESRC review of longitudinal studies and preparations for the 2021 Census in progress, it may be an opportune time to re-evaluate how the design of data collections can take account of the much greater diversity of families in recent decades. In addition to input from individual studies, there may be roles for the National Statistics Harmonisation Group, the CLOSER harmonisation stream, the UK Data Archive and the Royal Statistical Society in considering our findings.

1.0 Rationale and activities

1.1 *Why review fathers in UK datasets?*

Family structures are becoming more diverse. Referring to UK datasets, researchers have written about “a growing requirement for new statistics that reflect the complexity of ‘family’ relationships including relationships outside each household” (Wilson, 2010, p57) and that “there are revolving doors to family life with many parents and children living together only some of the time” (Kiernan, 2006, p666). Many more of the parents who live “only some of the time” with their dependent children are, of course, fathers.

Concern is also being expressed in an international literature on how social surveys can take into account individuals living at more than one address, and couple and family relationships across households (Baxter, Edwards and Maguire, 2012; Brown and Manning, 2012; Callister and Birks, 2006; Manning, 2015; Noël-Miller, 2013; Qu and Weston, 2005; Schmeekle et al, 2006; Stewart, 2001; Stykes, Manning and Brown, 2013; Toulemon and Penneec, 2010).

Limitations in the identification of so-called ‘non-resident’ fathers, as well as limitations in differentiation between resident biological/ adoptive fathers and ‘social’ fathers (such as stepfathers) in major European harmonised datasets, restrict the potential for evidence-based social policy (Sigle-Rushton et al., 2013).

Failing to identify and collect data about a range of types of fathers (in this review, when we use the term ‘father’ we include father-figures) also limits analyses of UK data. Official Statistics publications that give figures for families which include resident dependent children, focus on ‘family type’ rather than on the specific parental status of mothers and fathers (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2014a; ONS, 2014b; ONS, 2015). Furthermore, little is known about demographic trends in the numbers of fathers of dependent¹ children who do not primarily live with them - estimated at 5% of UK men aged 16-64 in 2009-11 (Poole et al, 2016). In particular, birth/ biological fathers who have not lived with their child from his/ her earliest years have been called “largely statistically invisible” (Kiernan, 2016). A welcome innovation is that the Census introduced questions on second addresses in 2011 (ONS, 2010a; ONS, 2014c).

Another issue of significance is from whom data is collected. Researchers may collect data about fathers directly from the men themselves, for example through questionnaires, interviews, psychological tests and medical examinations. They may also collect data about fathers from other research participants, for example mothers, children, health professionals and teachers. There is potential bias when mothers are asked to report on fathers’ characteristics, perceptions, attitudes and behaviours (Kiernan, 2016).

¹ We use the term ‘dependent children’ to refer to children under the age of 16 or 18 (with the specific age varying by dataset). We use the term ‘adult children’ to refer to children older than 16 or 18 years. Individual datasets may have their own definitions of these terms.

Our aims for this review are two-fold. Firstly, for funders and providers of large-scale quantitative datasets, we have documented questions and fieldwork practices² which enable researchers to identify specific categories of fathers and collect data directly from them. Where relevant, these precedents could be used (or adapted) and tested for use in future studies, and in future waves and sweeps of ongoing datasets. There is an ongoing Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Longitudinal Studies Review to look at scientific needs for future longitudinal studies including how data is collected in cohort studies (Townsend, 2017). A recent Nuffield Foundation-funded project has concluded that a new bespoke longitudinal study may be needed to fill evidence gaps on separated families in the UK (Bryson et al, 2017).

Secondly, for researchers planning secondary analyses to study fathers, we have assessed whether different categories of fathers can be identified in the data. However, researchers would need to look at sample sizes, and at response and attrition (which may bias the achieved sample and make it less representative, and/ or reduce sample size). Researchers also, of course, would need to review the quality of and response for individual data items. Bespoke scoping work would be required for each dataset in relation to specific research questions.

We must stress that our critique in this review is not intended as a criticism. We are well aware that decisions made by research funders and directors are made in a specific historical context, and according to resources, priorities and available methodologies at that time. These change; these evolve. Our appraisal we intend as a contribution to such evolution.

1.2 The datasets we reviewed

The Fatherhood Institute has reviewed how sixteen UK large-scale repeated cross-sectional³

² We focused on information available at the time of our investigations in 2014-15 on study websites and the UK Data Service website, and so can be readily accessed and scrutinized by our readers. There may also be internal guidance and manuals, including interviewer training documents and responses to interviewers' fieldwork queries. We examined questionnaires and interview schedules, and therefore looked at the data collected. We did not use codebooks to investigate which variables (including derived variables) are included in the datasets compiled by the dataset owners for their own analysis or for other researchers' secondary analysis. Where online documentation was unclear, we contacted dataset organisations for clarification.

³ We looked at repeated cross-sectional research datasets whose main purpose is not specific to parents or children: the 2011 Census for England and Wales, British Social Attitudes, Labour Force Survey, Family Resources Survey, Health Survey for England, ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, and 2000 and 2014-15 UK Time Use Surveys. We classified the Labour Force Survey as a cross-sectional dataset for the purposes of our review, but looked at elements of its panel design which potentially enable the identification of non-resident fathers. We also looked at ONS Birth Registrations, an administrative dataset.

and longitudinal⁴ quantitative datasets identify and collect data about fathers in varied forms of co-residence and relationships with their dependent and adult children. This datasets review is part of a wider project *Fathers in the UK: what do we know? what do we need to know?* funded by the Nuffield Foundation, which has assessed evidence on UK fathers, including in an extensive literature review.

So that the findings of our review, published here as a Working Paper, might be applied to new waves and sweeps, we prioritised continuing repeated cross-sectional datasets and ongoing longitudinal studies, and excluded one-off 'ad hoc' cross-sectional surveys. We focused in more detail on the identification of fathers than on fieldwork practices to complement recent reviews of the recruitment and retention of fathers in research studies (Kiernan, 2014; Bryson, 2014).

We reviewed datasets which are large-scale in terms of having a large sample size, and collect data from (and designed to be representative of) a defined population across a UK country (e.g. Scotland), countries (e.g. England and Wales) or a county (e.g. the former county of Avon). Identifying a full range of fathers among research respondents in large-scale repeated cross-sectional datasets could provide nationally representative time series about their demographics, health, health behaviours, wellbeing, time use, employment, social attitudes and finances.

We examined research instruments (questionnaires) and published fieldwork documentation in relation to two research questions:

- How can biological/birth, adoptive and social⁵ fathers (relationship categories), and resident (full-time and part-time) and totally non-resident fathers (residence categories), be identified and differentiated in these datasets?
- How is data about fathers collected?

In particular, we assessed how these datasets take account of less extensively researched categories of fathers. Parenthood has been defined - in addition to biological parents - as including those who adopt or foster children or have stepchildren (Hakim, 2005). Such parents/ fathers may, and may not, live full-time with children they are parenting (Speight et al, 2013).

We also considered modes of data collection. Most of the research datasets we have included in our review, collect data in face to face or telephone interviews, with self-completion components. We will see that the mode of data collection (interviewer-mediated or postal)

⁴ We selected ongoing longitudinal studies which collect a variety of contextual data and 'outcomes data' about fathers, mothers and children over time that can be used in analyses of fathers and their impacts: the National Child Development Study (NCDS), the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS), the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (Alspac), Growing Up in Scotland (GUS), the first Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE/Next Steps), and Understanding Society (UKHLS). We looked at both childhood and adulthood sweeps.

⁵ Social fathers include stepfathers and foster fathers.

and the introduction of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI)⁶ in the 1990s to replace paper interview schedules have influenced questionnaire design. The current shift to online (web-based) data collection in many of these datasets and potentially to an Administrative Data Census will offer new possibilities and challenges in the future.

1.3 A new 'residence' typology

As our work progressed, we developed a 'co-residence' typology of fathers which incorporates into the definition of 'residence' and 'non-residence' those who are resident part-time or who temporarily live away from at least one of their children (more about this below). We hope that our typology contributes to addressing the need for "more nuanced" terms when collecting data on separated families (Bryson et al., 2017). Limitations of a 'resident' and 'non-resident' dichotomy have been noted in relation to the UK (Bryson et al., 2017; Masardo, 2009). In New Zealand, the term "two household children" has been used (Callister and Birks, 2006).

In our typology, we use the terms **resident** and **non-resident** to refer to whether a parent is co-resident full-time or part-time **with the child** – rather than (as is often the case in the research and policy literature) referring to residence with the child's *other parent*. Our finer-grained typology takes into account fathers or children who have more than one residence.

Thus, our category of **resident** fathers is not limited solely to men who live full-time with their child/ren and their mother, but includes birth/ adoptive fathers who are separated from (or have never lived with) her, but whose dependent children regularly stay overnight with him⁷.

'Relationship' categories (biological, adoptive, 'step' and so on) our 'co-residence' typology, and some of the questionnaire and data collection issues that we consider apply to mothers as well as to fathers. However, given the gendered aspects of contemporary family life in the UK, the issues apply more often to fathers. Fathers are *less likely* than mothers to be full-time co-resident with their dependent birth child/ren. They are *more likely* to fall into such categories as:

- *Co-resident step-parents* ('social' fathers), who live with the child and one of its birth/ adoptive parents – whether or not that parent lives full-time with their own child
- *Non-resident birth/biological parents of dependent children* (fathers who at the point in time in which data is being collected, live in another household and have little or no contact, or day-time-only-contact, with their child/ren)
- Parents who normally live full-time with their child and their child's mother, but who are, for example, in prison or detention or working away *for extended periods*

⁶ And variants CATI (telephone interviews), and CASI (self-completion components of face to face interviews).

⁷ and his cohabiting partner, where this applies.

- Parents who are *resident part-time* with the child/ren: for example, they regularly spend some nights a week working away, they cohabit part-time with the child's mother, or they regularly have the child to stay overnight in their own, separate, household.

2.0 Identifying fathers: our terminology

2.1 Relationship and residence categories⁸

At the beginning of our review we developed working definitions for both residence and relationship categories to guide us when investigating datasets. We found however that the research datasets rarely use explicit definitions when presenting terms such as “own child”, “adoptive parent”, “step-parent”, “father figure”, “lives with”, “main residence” or “shared care 50/50” to research respondents in research instruments. Instead, research respondents use their own interpretations of the meaning of these terms when selecting a category sometimes guided by the interviewer instructions.

Respondents may also be influenced by disclosure issues and social desirability bias, for example whether they want to disclose themselves or a family member as a non-biological father, adoptive father or non-resident father, or that a child regularly stays overnight with the other parent. Therefore, our statements and tables reflect these varied meanings and disclosures.

2.2 Working definitions for relationship categories

A **birth father** is biological father to a child, or believed to be a biological father, or a man otherwise named on a birth certificate. Some fathers categorised by research respondents as birth fathers, “natural fathers” or biological fathers may not be biological fathers.

An **adoptive father** has legally adopted a child i.e. is named on an adoption certificate, as distinct from a foster father or male legal guardian. He is not biologically linked to the child and is therefore in one sense a ‘social father’, but his legal relationship to the child is more like that of a birth father, so he is placed in a category of his own.

A **social father** can be:

- a **stepfather**

⁸ Except in relation to the identification of stepfathers, we have not documented whether (in each dataset) fathers can be categorised as cohabiting or not with a partner (as a couple). Household grid questions in most (but not all) research datasets can ascertain whether an individual who has been identified as a ‘resident’ father lives with a partner, and also whether his resident child/ren have a mother living in the same household.

- a **foster father** or other **male guardian** (including relatives/ kinship carers and **legal guardians** such as Special Guardians) when neither birth parent is resident with a dependent child.

A **resident stepfather**, living with the child full-time or part-time, is a male cohabiting partner or former cohabiting partner⁹ of a child's birth/ adoptive parent (mother or father) **who is not himself a birth father or adoptive father in relation to that child**. The stepfather may not be married (or have been married) to the child's birth/ adoptive parent. Our resident stepfather category therefore includes the groups often described as married stepfathers and cohabiting (non-married) stepfathers in the research literature.

Our broad category of **resident stepfathers** has **not** been defined according to whether a research respondent declares a "step" or parental relationship in relation to the child, but according to his cohabiting relationship (currently or previously) with the child's birth/ adoptive parent. We therefore differentiate resident stepfathers into:

- **'declared stepfathers'**: these are stepfathers described as a "stepfather"¹⁰ or "parent/ guardian" (not a birth or adoptive father) to a child¹¹ by the father himself or by the mother, the father's partner, child or other household member who is the research respondent;
- **'other cohabiting partners'** (male) not declared by the research respondent to be a "stepfather" or "parent/ guardian" in relation to the child, but who may be identified, for example, as a generic "non-relative" in relation to the child (Baxter, Edwards and Maguire, 2012; Hadfield and Nixon, 2013, citing Marsiglio, 2004; Qu and Weston, 2005). Family members may think that a 'step' relationship requires marriage to the child's birth/ adoptive parent, especially those interviewed in the earlier cohort studies. Or they may not regard the relationship as "step" or parental if the birth/ adoptive parent's partner has only recently started cohabiting with the birth/ adoptive parent or cohabits part-time. These 'other cohabiting partners' may instead be called "my [mother's/ father's] boyfriend/ partner".

We included within our scope two distinct groups of **non-resident stepfathers** who are not co-resident with the child full-time or part-time. Bryson et al. (2017) suggest that research studies of family separation might include separations from a step-parent.

⁹ We use the term 'cohabiting' for parents' co-residence (full-time or part-time) with each other as a couple. We use the term 'partner' to include male partners of the child's mother in an opposite sex relationship, as well as male partners of the child's father in a same-sex relationship.

¹⁰ We define this 'declared stepfather' status through the relationship that is named by the research respondent. We make the assumption that the respondent's label reflects at least in part their perception of the relationship and the label used in the family to describe the relationship, in addition to disclosure issues, perceived linguistic norms for the meaning of "stepfather", and any survey instructions for interviewers and research respondents.

¹¹ And/ or where the child is described as a "stepchild" or "son/ daughter" of the stepfather.

- **Group 1: former cohabiting partners** (Schmeeckle et al., 2006¹²; Noël-Miller, 2013): a male **former** cohabiting partner of a child's birth/ adoptive parent who lived with the birth/ adoptive parent and child previously as a resident stepfather, and now maintains contact with the child. This category may be most relevant to cohort studies.
- **Group 2: current cohabiting partners of a non-resident (i.e. does not reside with his/her child, either full- or part-time) parent**¹³ (Stewart, 2001; Qu and Weston, 2005; Schmeeckle et al, 2006; Noël-Miller, 2013): the current male cohabiting partner of a child's **non-resident** birth/ adoptive parent (regardless of whether the cohabiting partner is called a "stepfather" by family members) who is not himself a birth or adoptive father to that child, where the child and non-resident birth/ adoptive parent are in contact. This includes:
 - male cohabiting partners of the non-resident mothers/ fathers of **adult** children (who may have been co-resident with the child at a time when the pre-adult or young adult child lived with their now non-resident birth/ adoptive parent);
 - male cohabiting partners of the non-resident birth/ adoptive mothers/ fathers of **dependent** children: this group of non-resident stepfathers will be very small because relatively few non-resident parents of dependent children are mothers, and relatively few non-resident fathers will be in a same sex relationship.

Despite our broad definition of fathers, we did not include the following relationship categories as 'social fathers', nor did we seek to identify them within the scope of our review. These men may in some cases be perceived as a 'father-figure' or 'like a father to me' by dependent or adult children:

- resident grandfathers, older male siblings and male adult relatives in extended families (where a dependent child also lives with one or both birth/ adoptive parents);
- 'non-cohabiting' male partners of resident parents i.e. not cohabiting with the resident parent, and who are not birth/ adoptive parents nor Group 1 non-resident stepfathers (previously lived with the resident parent and child);
- fathers-in-law.

2.3 Working definitions for the residence categories (our 'co-residence' typology)

We used overnight contact between a father and his child/ren to define the residence categories. We shall see that many large-scale datasets do not explicitly define 'residence'. However, when a definition is provided, there is typically some reference to spending the

¹² In a quantitative analysis of US data, one fifth of adult children perceived a former step-parent (mother or father) at least partially as a parent (Schmeeckle et al., 2006). This was more likely when the adult 'step-child' and former step-parent had co-resided.

¹³ Around a fifth of Australian and US adults with dependent non-resident stepchildren were male (Stewart, 2001; Qu and Weston, 2005).

night or sleeping at an address. Additionally, using overnight contact in our definition enables us to differentiate separated fathers with overnight care of their children from separated fathers with none. We intend these categories to be broad characterisations of different residence situations, and they will not describe the situation of all fathers:

Full-time resident fathers (i.e. no regular overnight absences)

Part-time resident fathers (regular pattern of part-time residence e.g. during each week or fortnight)

- **Part-time away fathers** (father changes residence)
- **Fathers of part-time away children**¹⁴ (child changes residence)
- **Overnight care fathers** (dependent child of non-cohabiting birth/ adoptive parents changes residence, alternately staying overnight with each parent)
 - **Minority overnight care fathers** (child stays with him for minority of nights)
 - **Equal overnight care fathers**
 - **Majority overnight care fathers** (child stays with him for majority of nights)

Temporarily¹⁵ **(full-time) non-resident fathers** (longer-term non-residence)

- **Long-term away fathers**
- **Fathers of long-term away children**

Other full-time non-resident fathers.

The **part-time resident fathers** are part-time resident and part-time non-resident. For the purposes of this datasets review, we term them 'part-time resident'. This is consistent with the MCS using this term for 'part-time away' fathers regularly spending "one or two days a week" in the cohort child's household (see Kiernan, 2006 for an analysis).

Some '**part-time away' fathers** will work away from home during the working week, regarding their child's address as their permanent home. Others may maintain their own separate home and cohabit part-time with the child's other resident parent.

Non-cohabiting birth/ adoptive parents have usually separated from their previous couple relationship together (and may have since re-partnered), or were never together in an

¹⁴ These fathers cohabit with the child's mother, with the child living part-time in their household and part-time elsewhere (not with another parent). An adult child may be away for work or study during the working week, or a dependent child at weekly boarding school or in institutional care may come home at weekends. We did not consider this group of fathers in any detail.

¹⁵ The absence from the household is expected to be temporary (at the time of the period of non-residence).

ongoing couple relationship with their child's other parent. A subset of non-cohabiting birth/ adoptive parents will remain in a couple relationship with one another whilst living separately ('living apart together').

The **'minority overnight care' fathers**¹⁶ are often not differentiated in the policy and research literature from non-resident fathers (men who have no regular overnight care of their children or no contact at all). Yet even the children of 'minority' overnight care fathers may have an equivalent number of regular overnight stays with their father as the children of 'part-time away' fathers who, for example, are away during the working week and home on weekends. And their mothers, normally described as 'lone' or 'single parent' mothers (sometimes even if they have a cohabiting partner), are actually 'majority overnight care' mothers.

In line with the UK approach of "an equal division of time" described in the report of a Nuffield Foundation-funded project (Fehlberg et al, 2011), and with our focus on overnight stays, we use a definition for **'equal overnight care'** for equal or near-equal distribution of nights between birth/ adoptive parents (e.g. three or four nights per week). Other researchers and policy commentators have used terms such as "shared parenting (time)", "shared/ dual residence", "[equal] shared care", or "50:50 care", sometimes taking into account daytime care as well as overnight stays, although this may not be explicit.

The **'majority overnight care'** fathers may be included in research and policy discourse along with 'sole care' fathers within the category of resident 'lone fathers' or 'single parent' fathers, if they do not have a cohabiting partner.

'Long-term away' fathers may temporarily live away, for example for work or in prison or another institution, perhaps making occasional visits home. Likewise, children may live away temporarily, for example for work, or at college, university or boarding school, or in institutional care. Resident family members may consider the temporarily away fathers or children as remaining part of the household. Researchers carrying out analyses would need to define the length of a 'long-term' period of non-residence in relation to specific research questions and ages of children. We do not intend it to include ad hoc (non-regular) short stays of less than a fortnight away from home for work, holiday or in hospital.

For the non-cohabiting birth/ adoptive parents of dependent children, our typology could be extended by other researchers to incorporate sole care, daytime care, indirect contact (not face-to-face), and no contact.

In this report, you will see that we sometimes use quotation marks around the terms **'resident'** and **'non-resident'**. We do so when referring to the identifiable category in a dataset when that identifiable category does not comprise solely resident or solely non-resident fathers according to our definitions. Each dataset's questions and household

¹⁶ Almost half of fathers of 'non-resident' dependent children say that these children regularly stay overnight with them (Poole et al, 2016). Based on the report of their primarily resident parent, a third of dependent children with a 'non-resident' parent regularly stay overnight with them (Bryson et al., 2017). Most of these 'non-resident' fathers will be 'minority overnight care' fathers.

definitions affect the identification and classification of fathers. For example, a subset of temporarily non-resident fathers are often included among the identifiable 'resident' fathers (see Table 1, below). Conversely, a subset of what we would label part-time resident fathers is often included among the identifiable 'non-resident' fathers in a dataset.

3.0 Identification and differentiation of fathers in the datasets¹⁷

3.1 Which fathers?

When examining **cross-sectional research datasets**, we looked at how fathers among research respondents and other household members can be identified and differentiated.

When examining **longitudinal studies**, we looked, firstly, at these issues for the fathers of the cohort children¹⁸/ young sample members¹⁹ in childhood²⁰; and, secondly, for cohort members and sample members who, as teenagers and adults, are fathers themselves.

Summary tables are in Appendix A, below.

3.2 Broad-brush inclusive identification of fathers in the datasets

When identifying fathers among research respondents, it is common for the datasets to separately identify 'resident' fathers and 'non-resident' fathers²¹, or to identify only 'resident' fathers. Only British Social Attitudes among the cross-sectional research datasets, and three of the longitudinal studies²², have asked a broad-brush 'declared parenthood' question that establishes whether the research respondent considers him/ herself to be a father or a mother or have a living child:

¹⁷ When we refer to, for example, "the cross-sectional datasets" or "the longitudinal studies", we mean the datasets that we examined for this review.

¹⁸ For cohort studies, we use the term 'cohort child' to refer to a cohort member (of whatever age) in relation to their father/s in childhood. We use the term 'cohort member' to refer to the same person in the teenage years or adulthood in relation to their children ('children of cohort members').

¹⁹ We use this term to refer to Understanding Society sample members aged 10-15 from whom data is directly collected through youth questionnaires.

²⁰ By 'childhood', we mean birth to age 18 i.e. including adolescence.

²¹ Most datasets use implicit or explicit dichotomous classification of parents into 'resident' and 'non-resident'.

²² Recent adulthood sweeps of Alspac, the National Child Development Study and the British Cohort Study.

“Which, if any, of these types of relatives do you yourself have alive at the moment? Please include adoptive and step relatives: Son/ Daughter” (British Social Attitudes, 2001-2014)

3.3 Resident fathers in the datasets

3.3.1 Residence categories

- On the whole, it is possible using the **cross-sectional research datasets** to identify two categories of resident fathers (our definition) among research respondents and household members as ‘resident’ (dataset definitions). These are (i) full-time resident fathers (the great majority of the ‘resident’ fathers); and (ii) part-time resident fathers *where the sampled household is regarded as the father’s and children’s ‘main residence’, so that both they and their children are included (for research purposes) as household members*. However:-
 - these cross-sectional datasets are rarely able to differentiate the full-time resident fathers and these part-time resident fathers (see Table 2, below)
 - these part-time resident fathers are likely to comprise ‘majority overnight care’ fathers, and a proportion of ‘equal overnight care’ fathers, ‘part time away’ fathers and fathers of ‘part-time away’ children (see Table 1, below)
 - the identifiable group of ‘resident’ fathers may also include a proportion of temporarily non-resident ‘long-term away’ fathers and fathers of ‘long-term away’ children included as household members (for example temporarily absent from the household for less than six months) (see Table 1, below), who can rarely be differentiated from the full-time and part-time resident fathers within the group.
- Part-time resident fathers where the sampled household is not regarded as the father’s and children’s ‘main residence’ will not²³ generally be identifiable as ‘resident’ fathers. Furthermore, key cross-sectional datasets such as the Census and Labour Force Survey do not identify **as fathers** those men whose children do not primarily live with them. These are likely to comprise ‘minority overnight care’ fathers, and a proportion of ‘equal overnight care’ fathers, ‘part time away’ fathers and fathers of ‘part-time away’ children.
- ‘Part-time away’ fathers and ‘overnight care’ fathers cannot be separately identified through questions asked routinely²⁴ in the **cross-sectional research datasets** (see Table 2, below). Questions in the Census and the Family Resources Survey go part-way to identifying ‘overnight care’ fathers. The Census also identifies ‘resident’ fathers who stay at another address for more than 30 days per year without their resident children (those in the Census household).

²³ Unless they have other children (e.g. full-time resident or ‘majority overnight care’) included among the members of their sampled/ Census household.

²⁴ ‘Overnight care’ fathers can be identified in family separation question modules included in the ONS Omnibus/ Opinions Surveys (now the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey) over the period 2006-09 (Lader, 2008; Peacey and Hunt, 2008; Wilson, 2010), which we discuss in our Full Working Paper.

- It is rare for the **cross-sectional research datasets** and **longitudinal studies** to state in published documentation (as does the Census) whether children who reside equally part-time with each of their non-cohabiting parents should be included (for research purposes) as household members.
- Among the **longitudinal studies**, only the Millennium Cohort Study specifically includes (as ‘resident’) and differentiates (among the identifiable ‘resident’ fathers of cohort children) ‘part-time away’ fathers (Table 3, below). These include men staying in the cohort child’s household for one or two days each week; and (in later sweeps²⁵) include men who are a ‘declared stepfather’ or ‘other cohabiting partner’.
- Only the three most recent **longitudinal studies** (the Millennium Cohort Study, Growing Up in Scotland, and Understanding Society) can separately identify cohort children or young sample members with an ‘overnight care’ birth/ adoptive father (categorised by the dataset as ‘resident’ and/or ‘non-resident’), but to differing degrees of completeness and accuracy (Table 3, below). The latter two studies differentiate²⁶ ‘majority overnight care’, ‘minority overnight care’ and/or ‘equal overnight care’ in at least one sweep. Where a cohort child or young sample member’s resident ‘overnight care’ birth/ adoptive parent (most likely to be a ‘majority overnight care’ mother) lives with a male cohabiting partner, this cohabiting partner is identified as a part-time resident stepfather.
- In the other longitudinal datasets, cohort children and young sample members with a ‘part-time away’ or ‘overnight care’ father may not be identifiable as having a ‘resident’ father. Instead, a ‘part-time away’ or ‘minority overnight care’ **birth or adoptive father** may be categorised as the child’s ‘non-resident’ father. As in the cross-sectional datasets, the identifiable category of cohort children and young sample members with a ‘resident’ father may include temporarily non-resident fathers.
- Understanding Society can be used to separately identify ‘overnight care’ fathers among adult sample members, differentiating ‘majority overnight care’, ‘equal overnight care’ and ‘minority overnight care’. It is not possible to separately identify ‘overnight care’ fathers among adult cohort members in the four cohort studies with adulthood sweeps.
- In both **cross-sectional datasets** and **longitudinal studies**, the questions identifying ‘resident’ fathers (and relationship categories among ‘resident’ fathers) may not be answered by the father but by another member of his household (for example his cohabiting partner/ mother of his children) who completes the ‘household grid’ section of the questionnaire or

²⁵ For clarity, we use the term sweep to refer to each time point in a longitudinal study; and the term wave to refer to each time point in a repeated cross-sectional dataset. A few longitudinal studies, for example Understanding Society, use the term ‘wave’ instead of ‘sweep’.

²⁶ Subject to a caveat that there are differences in estimates of the prevalence of regular overnight stays (and of contact more generally) derived from interviews with resident parents (mainly mothers) and interviews with non-resident parents (mainly fathers) (Peacey & Hunt, 2008; Wilson, 2010; Bryson et al., 2017). Less frequent overnight stays are generally derived from resident parents’ reports.

a ‘main parent’ questionnaire (cohort studies). This applies even when the father later completes an individual interview or questionnaire.

3.3.2 *Relationship categories*

- Most of the **cross-sectional research datasets** can identify birth, adoptive and social fathers as ‘resident’ fathers in relation to each dependent or adult child who is also ‘resident’ in the household. They usually differentiate three categories: (i) birth fathers/ adoptive fathers/ male guardians (combined in a single category of “parent/ guardian”); (ii) stepfathers (‘declared stepfathers’ combined with ‘other cohabiting partners’) and (iii) foster fathers (see Table 4). The “parent/ guardian” category may include (and consequently the “stepfather” category may exclude) long-established stepfathers (for example, living with their stepchild/ren from the early childhood years) for whom this generic code (rather than the “step-parent” code) is selected by the research respondent.
- The **cross-sectional research datasets** can generally differentiate married and cohabiting (non-married) ‘resident’ stepfathers, but cannot reliably differentiate ‘declared stepfathers’ from ‘other cohabiting partners’²⁷.
- Only the Health Survey for England collects the information necessary to fully differentiate birth fathers, adoptive fathers, other male legal guardians, and stepfathers (including ‘other cohabiting partners’) among the identifiable ‘resident’ fathers in a sampled household (see Table 4).
- In contrast, most of the **longitudinal studies**²⁸ include and differentiate birth, adoptive, foster and step fathers (‘declared stepfathers’ combined with ‘other cohabiting partners’) among the identifiable ‘resident’ fathers of cohort children and young sample members in childhood (see Table 5). These datasets can generally differentiate ‘resident’ married and cohabiting (non-married) stepfathers.
- Three datasets (the National Child Development Study, the British Cohort Study and Understanding Society) differentiate ‘resident’ birth, adoptive, foster and stepfathers among male adult cohort members and sample members in relation to each child identified as ‘resident’ in his household (see Table 6, below).

²⁷ As a result of identifying a substantial group of ‘other cohabiting partners’, the first Longitudinal Study of Young People in England extended partner interviews in their second sweep to all cohabiting partners of the young person’s resident “main parent”, regardless of whether the household interview respondent had declared a parental relationship (birth/ step/ adoptive/ foster) between this cohabiting partner and the young person (Collingwood et al, 2010).

²⁸ In the childhood sweeps of cohort studies.

3.4 *Non-resident fathers in the datasets*

- Across the **cross-sectional research datasets** that we investigated (see Table 7, below), only the Family Resources Survey has asked a question in successive waves²⁹ with the aim of identifying (among research respondents) fathers of ‘non-resident’ **dependent**³⁰ children.
 - These identifiable ‘non-resident’ fathers may include a substantial subset of ‘minority overnight care’ fathers’ whose children, regularly staying overnight, have not (for research purposes) been counted as household members. It is not possible to differentiate these part-time resident fathers from the non-resident fathers with no regular overnight care of their children.
 - It is not differentiated whether these fathers are birth, adoptive or step fathers in relation to their ‘non-resident’ children.
- Up to 2015, the broad-brush ‘declared parenthood’ question asked in BSA combined with household grid questions enabled the identification of survey respondents who were non-resident birth, adoptive or step fathers with no resident children among household members. This subcategory of non-resident fathers would have included men with non-resident adult and/or dependent children.
- In other **cross-sectional research datasets**, including the Census, non-resident fathers of living dependent and/or adult children are generally not identified or only subsets. These research respondents cannot be identified as fathers unless categorised (for research purposes) as a ‘resident’ father in relation to other children living in the sampled household.
- Nearly all of the **longitudinal studies** can identify (in at least one sweep) cohort children or young sample members with a ‘non-resident’ birth father (Table 8, below). Depending on the dataset, this ‘non-resident’ category may include temporarily non-resident ‘long-term away’ fathers; and also fathers who have died³¹ (by the time of the current sweep), ‘minority/equal overnight care’ fathers and ‘part-time away’ fathers who cannot be differentiated from the non-resident fathers.
- Understanding Society and adulthood sweeps of the National Child Development Study and the British Cohort Study³² can identify, among adult men, ‘non-resident’ birth fathers

²⁹ Fathers of non-resident dependent children can also be identified in the 2014-15 UK Time Use Survey; and in family separation question modules in British Social Attitudes and the ONS Omnibus/ Opinions Survey (now the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey) asked in 2012 and over the period 2006-2008 respectively.

³⁰ Up to age 20, “in non-advanced education or training” and living with their other parent.

³¹ This applies to what is likely to be a small proportion of fathers not in current contact or paying child maintenance where death has not been reported by the research respondent.

³² Alspac and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England can identify only those ‘non-resident’ birth fathers who have no ‘resident’ birth children. A greater degree of differentiation may be possible for Alspac cohort members who agree to participate in the Children of the Children of the 90s (G2/ COCO90s) study.

and adoptive fathers whose children live primarily or all the time in another household (Table 6, below).

- A number of the **longitudinal research studies**, but rarely the **cross-sectional datasets**³³ (see Table 2, below), differentiate (through survey questions) ‘long-term away’ fathers and fathers with ‘long-term away’ children. These fathers may be categorised as ‘resident’ or ‘non-resident’.
- Growing Up in Scotland, the Millennium Cohort Study and Alspac identify cohort children whose resident mother has a ‘non-cohabiting’ male partner who is their birth father i.e the birth father is in a couple relationship with the child’s mother. In Growing Up in Scotland and Alspac, these ‘non-cohabiting’ birth fathers may include ‘part-time away’ fathers not counted as ‘resident’ in the child’s study household (the household in which data is collected about cohort members and their families).
- The **longitudinal studies** have less frequently identified non-resident stepfathers:
 - Only the Millennium Cohort Study identifies cohort children with a Group 1 non-resident stepfather (former cohabiting partner of a birth/ adoptive parent) (see Table 8, below). The child remains in contact (but does not “often” have overnight stays) with a previously resident stepfather (part-time or full-time resident with the child at a previous sweep, and has since left the child’s household. The child remains co-resident with the birth/ adoptive parent.
 - Other cohort studies and Understanding Society can, to varying extents, identify former cohabiting partners of a cohort child or young sample member’s ‘resident’ parent. However, these studies ask insufficient questions to identify whether these individuals are non-resident stepfathers to the cohort child/ young sample member at the current sweep.
 - The second Growing Up in Scotland birth cohort, the Millennium Cohort Study and Understanding Society can (in at least one sweep) identify cohort children or young sample members whose non-resident birth mother or father (with whom they are in contact) has a cohabiting partner who may be considered to be a Group 2 ‘non-resident’³⁴ step-parent to the child (see Table 8, below). However, these datasets do not establish the

³³ The Labour Force Survey and the Census can separately identify the fathers of birth, adoptive or step children who are ‘long-term away’ in term-time at boarding school or as a student. Temporarily non-resident individuals (fathers or children) among household members may be identified in fieldwork outcomes in all the datasets.

³⁴ Where there are regular overnight stays with the ‘non-resident’ birth parent, these part-time resident step-parents can be separately identified, with differentiation of ‘minority overnight care’ and ‘equal overnight care’ in Growing Up in Scotland and Understanding Society.

“sex”³⁵ or gender of the cohabiting partner. The majority will be ‘non-resident’ stepmothers when the ‘non-resident’ parent is (most commonly) a birth father; but male partners of non-resident fathers in same-sex relationships, and male partners of non-resident mothers, will also be in this group.

- On the basis of its “split-off” households, Understanding Society can identify a small subset of young sample members whose non-resident step-parent (the cohabiting partner of their non-resident birth parent) is known to be male (see Table 8, below). However, this small subset is subject to a high level of attrition, resulting in even smaller sample sizes and a likelihood of systematic bias in survey estimates.
- Three of the longitudinal studies (the British Cohort Study, the National Child Development Study and Understanding Society) can identify subsets of non-resident stepfathers (Group 1 and Group 2) among adult cohort members and sample members (see Table 6, below).
- Where **cross-sectional and longitudinal research datasets** identify ‘non-resident’ fathers (among research respondents, adult cohort members, or the ‘resident’ fathers of cohort members and young sample members), they can generally identify ‘resident’ fathers who also have children assessed as living at another address. These fathers are ‘resident’ and ‘non-resident’ in relation to different children.
- It is challenging to achieve a representative sample of self-identifying non-resident fathers. Non-resident parents may be less likely than resident parents to participate in surveys and to be retained in longitudinal studies. Those who do participate may be reluctant to disclose in research that they have non-resident children. Non-resident parents with no contact with their children are especially unlikely to be included in achieved samples of non-resident parents. The resulting samples are subject to response bias and (in longitudinal studies) attrition bias.

3.5 *Limitations in the identification and differentiation of fathers in the datasets*

We have seen that there is potential across the datasets we looked at to carry out secondary analyses focusing on a number of categories of fathers, should sample sizes be sufficient. However, we also identified gaps in the identification and differentiation of fathers which mean that researchers cannot fully exploit the potential in these large-scale datasets for analysing fathers. Datasets commonly fail to identify parent-child relationships across households. This applies particularly in the cross-sectional research datasets, but also in the longitudinal studies. So, for example:

³⁵ Research datasets usually label this variable as “sex”. It is coded subjectively by the respondent, or identified by the interviewer.

- we can rarely compare all fathers (full-time and part-time resident/ non-resident/ birth/ adoptive/ step/ foster) with non-fathers among research respondents in the cross-sectional datasets (for example in relation to wellbeing or social attitudes)
- we cannot derive a continuous time series from large-scale repeated cross-sectional datasets for the prevalence of fatherhood at different ages
- we do not have a time series (derived from large-scale repeated cross-sectional datasets) for the numbers of non-resident fathers and ‘minority overnight care’ fathers of dependent children;
- we cannot use the Health Survey for England to look at the changing emotional health and health behaviours of different categories of fathers over time
- we cannot use the Labour Force Survey to compare full-time resident fathers, ‘minority overnight care’ fathers and non-resident fathers of dependent children in terms of their employment
- we cannot use British Social Attitudes to compare resident birth fathers, resident stepfathers and non-resident birth fathers in terms of their social attitudes concerning family life and children
- there is little opportunity to enumerate and examine subgroups of fathers such as adoptive fathers, non-resident stepfathers and ‘equal overnight care fathers’ by combining data from successive waves or sweeps (some subgroups are not identified at all sweeps of the longitudinal studies), nor by using the largest-scale population data in the Census
- only one or two longitudinal studies can be used to investigate the impacts on fathers, mothers and children of:
 - different categories of overnight care for the children of non-cohabiting parents (minority of nights, equal number of nights or majority of nights)
 - a father being part-time away
 - a child being in contact with a non-resident stepfather, for example a previously resident stepfather who becomes non-resident.

Some of the categories of father that we looked at in our datasets review may give sample sizes that are too small for separate analysis, or for complex longitudinal analyses. Examples are adoptive fathers, foster fathers, male guardians, ‘equal overnight care’ fathers, stepfathers not declared as such by research respondents, non-resident stepfathers and long-term away fathers.

However, our view is that questions which make it possible to establish the prevalence of these subsets of parents in the UK population, and carry out descriptive analysis of their characteristics, is important as a baseline for future demographic change. ‘Equal overnight care’ fathers and non-resident stepfathers are under-studied groups that may become more prevalent among future generations of children, and so may be increasingly relevant to the

design of future studies. Similarly, the proportion of men who are not fathers may change. An analysis of Understanding Society data from 2009-11, using an inclusive definition of fathers, showed that, at that time, just over a third of men aged 16 and over (36%) had never fathered a child or played a significant fathering role in the life of a child (i.e. with no birth, adoptive or stepchildren); and 11% of men aged 70 years or older were 'non-fathers' (Speight et al., 2013).

3.6 Suggestions for more comprehensive identification and differentiation of fathers in future datasets, waves and sweeps

Our datasets review has pointed to a number of issues in questionnaire design which limit whether fathers, mothers and different categories of parents can be identified and differentiated for analysis by researchers. We acknowledge constraints on questionnaire space due to budget and the burden on respondents. However, fatherhood is a defining feature of men's lives, and both fathers and mothers have substantial impacts on their children.

We know that male research respondents may under-report their non-resident dependent children, and that non-resident fathers may be under-represented in survey samples, introducing response bias into the achieved samples. However, sensitivities, under-reporting and substantial bias in survey estimates apply to social research topics such as sexual behaviours, mental health problems and alcohol use which are measured with caveats.

We therefore propose that adequate parenthood questions for both men and women are viewed as a priority for research instruments, alongside other core variables such as "sex"/gender, socioeconomic group and economic activity.

At minimum, in order to comprehensively identify fathers and mothers among research respondents, we propose that datasets routinely ask questions to identify fathers and mothers with dependent and/or adult children living wholly or primarily elsewhere. This could include where cohabiting partners have non-resident children with whom the research respondent or his partner is in contact. This is in addition to the routine household grid questions that identify parents whose children live wholly or primarily in their household, and any fertility history questions which identify birth parents.

We also suggest that datasets which collect substantive data about dependent children, for example the Health Survey for England, ask questions to identify those children with a living birth (or adoptive) father or mother living wholly or primarily elsewhere. They could establish whether these fathers and mothers are in contact and any overnight stays.

Using a broad-brush 'declared parenthood' question to differentiate parents and non-parents among research respondents (as in recent adulthood sweeps of Alspac, the British Cohort Study and the National Child Development Study, and past waves of British Social Attitudes) may be relevant to some research questions. Where appropriate, it reduces respondent burden, and may reduce non-disclosure, compared to asking separately about different types of parenthood. When combined with household grid data, it enables identification of 'non-

resident' parents of dependent or adult children who have no 'resident' children among household members.

We also suggest (where relevant to the purposes of the dataset) that organisations funding and directing cross-sectional and longitudinal studies consider more comprehensively identifying and differentiating categories of fathers and mothers through the following adaptations and additions to questionnaires. Some of the precedents we found across the datasets could be used as household grid components in a range of surveys to identify any adults (not just parents) and children with second addresses. Whilst carrying out this review, we found an international literature making similar proposals for datasets in the US, Australia, New Zealand and France, as we noted in the introduction to this report.

Asking additional questions or more fully differentiating response codes to identify smaller categories of parents may be most relevant to the largest-scale datasets in which there may be sufficient numbers for analysis across consecutive waves or sweeps, for example the Census (in relation to differentiating resident birth, adoptive and step parents), Labour Force Survey and Understanding Society. All the datasets we reviewed have changed incrementally over time between waves and sweeps, even though changes can cause discontinuities in cross-sectional time series and affect repeated measures in longitudinal analyses.

Our suggestions and their potential benefits are summarised in the table below:

No.	Suggestion	Benefit
1	Include a full relationships grid in the household grid, including in cohort studies and in cross-sectional surveys of individuals. (This has been included in the most recent waves of the large-scale cross-sectional datasets and the most recent longitudinal studies included in our review.)	To include as resident parents, and as step-parents, those 'other cohabiting partners' (of resident mothers and fathers) who have not been declared (household grid relationship codes) as a birth or adoptive parent, step-parent, foster parent or other guardian to resident children.
2	Use a fully differentiated set of relationship codes in the household grid; and in questions identifying resident or non-resident parents.	To differentiate birth parents, adoptive parents, step-parents and foster parents among fathers and mothers.

No.	Suggestion	Benefit
3	<p>Have explicit household inclusion/ exclusion rules for interviewers or research respondents to apply in terms of whether part-time resident adults/ parents and part-time resident dependent children are counted as ‘resident’ (for research purposes) in the household. Be clear about dependent children who reside regularly or equally with each of their non-cohabiting parents.</p> <p>Include household definitions and inclusion criteria in online documentation.</p>	<p>These would complement the household inclusion/ exclusion rules for temporarily non-resident individuals which are often included in questionnaires and other dataset documentation. They may avoid double counting or under-counting in family and household statistics.</p>
4	<p>Include (for example in household grids):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • questions asking whether household members (adults and dependent children) reside full-time or part-time in the household or have a second address, and whether they have a regular pattern of staying in the household or are long-term temporarily non-resident • questions which ask about any regular overnight stays* of dependent children with each of their non-cohabiting parents • questions which identify any ‘part-time away’ fathers and mothers of dependent children in the household (if questions are not asked about all household members, as suggested above) • questions which enumerate and collect demographics for any part-time resident adults and dependent children who have been excluded (for research purposes) among household members. <p>* <i>Where relevant to the dataset, questions could identify the average number of overnight stays per week of a child in each parent’s household, or ask where the child stays for the majority of stays, to enable researchers to differentiate one to two nights per week (minority overnight care) from equal or near-equal overnight care (three to four nights per week) or five or six nights per week (majority overnight care).</i></p>	<p>To separately identify part-time resident adults and children for analysis (‘part-time away’ and ‘overnight care’).</p>

No.	Suggestion	Benefit
5	<p>Ask questions (for example, in household grids) which identify or enumerate those adults and dependent children temporarily absent** from the household who have been included or excluded (for research purposes) among household members. Collect demographics for temporarily absent individuals not categorised as ‘resident’ in the household.</p> <p><i>**Where relevant, questions could identify the length of continuous absence.</i></p>	<p>To separately identify ‘long-term away’ adults and children for analysis.</p>
6	<p>Include a question for interviewers, and in self-completion questionnaires, to record who completes the household grid questions, and/or which household members are present during the interview in which household relationships are defined</p>	<p>To enable analysis of the characteristics of those research respondents who identify household members and household relationships</p>
7	<p>Have unique person numbers for household members in longitudinal studies.</p> <p>This has been standard practice in the most recent longitudinal studies included in our review.</p>	<p>To enable analysis of moves of specific categories of individuals into and out of households.</p>
8	<p>Identify the “sex”/ gender of the non-resident parents of dependent children.</p> <p>Ask (in particular in longitudinal studies) whether non-resident birth or adoptive parents (of cohort children or young sample members) have cohabiting partners (including their “sex”/ gender) and children resident in their household, and about the cohort child or young sample member’s contact with these individuals.</p>	<p>To more reliably identify cohort children and young sample members with non-resident fathers, and those with non-resident mothers, including where parents have had a same sex relationship.</p> <p>To identify cohort children and young sample members with a Group 2 non-resident stepfather or stepmother (current male or female cohabiting partner of their non-resident birth/ adoptive parent).</p>

No.	Suggestion	Benefit
9	<p>Asking additional questions to birth/ adoptive parents in relationship and residence histories in longitudinal studies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whether their former cohabiting partner also previously lived with the cohort child or young sample member; • the “sex”/ gender of each former cohabiting partner, and the relationship category of each partner in relation to the child/ren (birth/ adoptive/step/ foster); • whether the former cohabiting partner is currently in contact with the child/ren. 	To identify cohort children and young sample members with a Group 1 non-resident stepfather or stepmother (former male or female cohabiting partner of a birth/ adoptive parent).
10	<p>Asking questions to identify whether adult sample members and cohort members have lived previously with a stepchild (a child of a current or former cohabiting partner), whether they remain in contact with each previously resident stepchild and/or perceive a parental type of relationship, and whether their current cohabiting partner is in contact with any non-resident children from previous relationship/s.</p>	To identify non-resident stepfathers and stepmothers among adult sample members and cohort members.

It is encouraging that, for many of these suggestions, at least one dataset provides an example of relevant questionnaire design. We have detailed these examples in our Full Working Paper, and they provide precedents for future questionnaire design. Innovations would need to be tested and piloted.

Some of these examples are from the later studies and sweeps benefitting from the design advantages of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). CAPI was introduced into UK survey practice in the 1990s, and greatly affects what is possible and affordable in questionnaire design. This is in contrast to the oldest cohort studies using paper questionnaires during a historical period when cohabitation of parents without marriage, and overnight stays with non-resident parents, were less common.

Some level of dataset harmonisation may be appropriate on these issues, taking into account the differing purposes of different datasets (see Walthery and Plewis, 2015 for family composition variables). This could also cover the use of consistent terms to describe birth

parents³⁶, and resident and non-resident parents including where a child stays equally or near-equally with each of their non-cohabiting parents³⁷.

Cognitive interviewing³⁸ (an interviewing technique used by researchers during questionnaire development) might explore the range of ways in which respondents interpret questionnaire terms. These include “own child”/ “natural parent” (include birth parents who are not biological parents, and adoptive parents?); “step-parent” (include cohabiting and not married?; include a parent’s cohabiting partner who is not termed a “stepfather” or “stepmother” by partner or child?); “live together” (include part-time cohabitation?); “main residence” (based on time or the concept of a permanent/ family home?); and “spent the most time” (include daytime as well as overnight stays?).

4.0 Collecting data about fathers

4.1 How is data about fathers collected in the datasets?

There is rich data collected in cross-sectional research datasets, the older cohort studies (the National Child Development Study, the British Cohort Study, Alspac and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England) and Understanding Society about resident and non-resident fathers among research respondents and cohort members. Much of this data is not about parenthood, and is collected regardless of the research respondent’s parental status. Topics include health, health behaviours, wellbeing, time use, couple relationships, social networks, employment, caring for adults, social attitudes and finances.

However, we have seen that identification of fathers is sometimes limited to full-time resident fathers and subsets of part-time resident fathers, and that relationship and residence categories are often inadequately differentiated among those identified.

Some data about fathers has been obtained directly from fathers, for example through questionnaires, interviews, psychological tests and medical examinations. Other data has been collected from fathers’ partners, their children and the resident mothers of cohort members, as well as from practitioners and administrative records.

³⁶ Questionnaires use the terms “own”, “natural” and “biological”.

³⁷ Relatively recent questionnaires sometimes use the term “joint custody” or “shared custody”, even though these terms are generally no longer used in law and professional practice. These terms may be intentionally used in questionnaires to reflect lay language, or may need to be updated with contemporary language.

³⁸ Also called “cognitive testing” of survey questions. In the 1990s, the UK Census Offices carried out cognitive testing of household relationship codes for the 2001 Census (General Register Office for Scotland, 2003). The ONS used this technique for the development of new questions on second addresses (ONS, 2010a) and new household inclusion instructions (ONS, 2010b) in the 2011 Census.

We found substantial variation in the rate of proxy interviews in cross-sectional household surveys, when interviewers are not able to interview eligible research respondents, for example because they are unavailable, temporarily away or incapacitated. In the Labour Force Survey, about 30% of data about household members is provided in proxy interviews³⁹, many of which are with female partners to collect data about their male partners. So a substantial proportion of data about 'resident' fathers is given by mothers. In contrast, the Family Resources Survey, Millennium Cohort Study and Understanding Society appear to have much lower proxy interview rates.

In the childhood sweeps of cohort studies, following fieldwork guidance⁴⁰ would usually result in the mother receiving a 'main parent' interview or questionnaire at each sweep when a cohort child lives with a mother and father in the study household.

All the more recent cohort studies have collected data directly from cohort children's resident fathers (including all cohabiting partners of their 'main parent') whether or not the father has been categorised as the child's 'main parent' for research purposes. This was usually in shorter 'partner' interviews during childhood sweeps, with the exception of Alspac which had lengthy self-completion questionnaires for fathers. Partner interviews have mostly had relatively high response rates.

Studies with partner data collection have not all carried out partner interviews or issued partner questionnaires in every sweep. Consequently they have collected a narrower set of data directly from resident fathers than from resident mothers. In contrast, Understanding Society collects broadly the same set of data from resident fathers and resident mothers.

Additionally, even taking account of data about the fathers gained from cohort children's mothers and other individuals (which may be subject to item non-response and systematic biases; see Kiernan, 2016), we generally collect a narrower set of variables about cohort children's 'resident' fathers than about their 'resident' mothers.

None⁴¹ of the cohort studies we examined has set out to collect data in their childhood sweeps directly from the 'non-resident' or 'minority/ equal overnight care' fathers of cohort children. This lack of fieldwork with non-resident fathers applies to cohort studies internationally (Kiernan, 2014). Varying amounts of data about these fathers have been collected from resident mothers.

³⁹ A 1997 Labour Force Survey methodology report found that there were substantive differences in data given directly by individuals and data provided in proxy interviews for detailed variables such as qualifications, hours worked and income (Dave & Knight, 1997).

⁴⁰ In recent studies such as the MCS, the CAPI interview program integrates these fieldwork 'rules' to suggest to the interviewer which parent should receive the 'main parent' interview and which parent the partner interview. However, if the mother cannot or does not want to participate in the sweep, or the parents prefer that the father is interviewed as the 'main parent', this fieldwork guidance may not be followed.

⁴¹ Alspac collected data from non-resident fathers who were the non-cohabiting partner of their child's mother.

Dependent children whose birth or adoptive parents do not live together may have two households in which they regularly stay overnight (are part-time resident) or in which have substantial daytime care. In terms of the long-term effects of childhood experience⁴², these children's protective and risk factors include those associated with parents, other adults (for example, parents' partners) and siblings in both households.

However, in the cohort studies, each cohort child has only one study household in which research interviews take place. Only later Growing Up in Scotland and Millennium Cohort Study sweeps specify (in published fieldwork documentation we accessed) that the father's household is selected if he provides an equivalent of 'majority overnight care'.

In cases of 'equal overnight care' of a cohort child, an 'overnight care' step-parent in the mother's household may be interviewed, whilst no data is collected from the part-time resident birth father, nor from the birth father's cohabiting partner (if that applies) who is also an 'overnight care' step-parent.

Understanding Society is the only ongoing UK large-scale longitudinal study that aims to track eligible sample members (adults and dependent children) who leave study households, and interview them⁴³ and all adult members of their new 'split-off' household at subsequent sweeps, for example following relationship separation. So, despite not being designed as a study of child development, Understanding Society collects data directly from subsets of the 'non-resident fathers' (including 'minority overnight care' fathers and 'non-resident' stepfathers) of young sample members.

Firstly, from men who are 'resident' with their child/ren in a study household (in line with the study's household inclusion rules) and become categorised in a later sweep as 'non-resident' in relation to at least one previously resident child (who is also a sample member), including where there are regular overnight stays, or when an adult child has left their household. These non-resident fathers include birth, adoptive and step fathers. Secondly, from any new cohabiting partners of these 'non-resident' / previously 'resident' birth or adoptive parents, whom we have defined as non-resident stepfathers (Group 2) where contact is maintained between the two households.

However, this potential of Understanding Society's 'split-off' households is restricted in practice. The annual separation rate for two-parent families with dependent children is around two per cent (Bryson et al., 2017). Even though using face-to-face interviews, extensive tracing of sample members who have moved, and with trained interviewers encouraging sample members to participate, there is a low response rate reported for 'split-off' households. Only a small proportion of the non-resident parents of dependent children remain in the study following a relationship separation (Bryson et al, 2017). This creates potential for attrition bias in the achieved small samples.

⁴² A scientific priority for future studies under consideration in the ongoing ESRC Longitudinal Studies Review is the 'long-term effects of childhood experience'.

⁴³ Children aged 10-15 living in the 'split-off' household/s are given questionnaires to complete, so include any new dependent children (e.g. stepchildren) now residing with eligible sample members.

Data collected about fathers through Birth Registrations, including whether they live with the child's mother, exclude those fathers who are not married to the birth mother and do not jointly register the birth.

4.2 Suggestions for data collection in future datasets, waves and sweeps

Direct data collection from both resident and non-resident fathers can take account of the lessons learned from previous attempts both in the UK and abroad. In particular, it is clear that fieldwork among non-resident fathers will neither be easy nor cheap and is likely to be subject to response bias. A recently published Nuffield Foundation/ ESRC-funded project reviewed the literature, and found low response rates when non-resident fathers are contacted for research (*Fathers and partners in the Life Study: a review*; see Kiernan, 2016 and associated dataset reviews: Kiernan, 2014 and Bryson, 2014). Using telephone or face to face interviews with a bespoke recruitment approach and financial incentives appears to maximise response in comparison to indirect recruitment through mothers or using postal questionnaires. Online (web-based) and smartphone survey technologies may reduce response rates and data quality, although could be useful for keeping in touch with fathers (resident or non-resident) between sweeps (Bryson et al., 2017; Bryson, 2014). There is methodological work in progress to see whether the proportion of Understanding Society sample members who self-identify as a non-resident parent can be improved (Bryson et al., 2017). This includes testing for differences by survey mode (face-to-face interview or online self-completion).

The differing proxy interview rates in cross-sectional surveys points to the importance of guidelines for interviewers. Funding is needed for repeat approaches to households at different times of day and on weekends over a substantial fieldwork period.

We suggest that, with increased budgets, cohort studies could trial data collection directly from 'minority overnight care' fathers and the most involved non-resident fathers. Responding 'non-resident' fathers in research are most likely to be those in contact and having good relationships with their children (see Kiernan, 2016; Bryson et al., 2017). A pattern of substantial or 'equal' overnight care of a cohort child could define a second household for data collection, including interviews with any cohabiting partner (step-parent) in this second household. This would enable the analysis of children's outcomes in the context of both households in which they are part-time resident.

Disentangling genetic and environmental effects of parents on children's characteristics, health and behaviours may require collecting genetic samples from non-resident and part-time resident biological fathers, as well as from resident biological fathers

Recruiting involved non-resident fathers and 'overnight care' fathers may have more success when cohort children are in the teenage years, and can themselves encourage their father to participate. Alternatively, Life Study had planned to recruit non-resident birth fathers during pregnancy and infancy, based on this being successful in studies abroad (Kiernan, 2014; Kiernan, 2016). In these earliest years, a substantial proportion of non-resident fathers remain romantically involved or friends with the mother.

Cohort studies might track the resident fathers and mothers of cohort children (who are resident during the study and may be interviewed at each sweep) into new households if they become non-resident during the study, and continue to interview them, regardless of their level of involvement with the child. However, based on the experience of Understanding Society, they will need to spend resources on maximising continued participation.

Increased funding may also enable longer interviews with full-time and part-time resident fathers, in order to establish a more comprehensive picture of how these fathers affect cohort members' childhoods and lives into adulthood. Data collection could include observational data on father-child interactions where this is collected for mother-child interactions. We acknowledge that symmetrical data collection is expensive and increases respondent burden and, for some measures and analytic purposes, data provided by mothers may be sufficient.

These proposals also might apply to cross-sectional studies of children and family life, although we have not looked at these in our datasets review.

5.0 Next steps

Many UK datasets continue to base both questionnaires and data collection on families comprising full-time resident adults and children in one household, despite the increasing prevalence of second addresses and couples and families split across households. With an ESRC review of longitudinal studies and preparations for the 2021 Census in progress, it may be an opportune time to re-evaluate how the design of data collections can take account of the much greater diversity of families in recent decades. In addition to input from individual studies⁴⁴, there may be roles for the National Statistics Harmonisation Group, the CLOSER⁴⁵ harmonisation stream, the UK Data Archive and the Royal Statistical Society in considering our findings.

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⁴⁴ For example, an Understanding Society workshop in 2016 on "family formation and change" considered how data collection can reflect family diversity such as non-resident fathers and couples 'living apart together'.

⁴⁵ The CLOSER network (Cohort & Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resources), funded by the ESRC and Medical Research Council, and in partnership with the UCL Institute of Education, British Library and the UK Data Service, includes five of the longitudinal studies we examined.

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7.0 Appendix A: Summary Tables

Note: In this report, we use quotation marks around ‘resident’ and ‘non-resident’ when referring to an identifiable category in a dataset not comprising solely resident or solely non-resident fathers according to our definitions. Additional footnotes and explanations can be found in our Full Working Paper.

Table 1: CROSS-SECTIONAL RESEARCH DATASETS: How does the identifiable category of ‘resident’ fathers based on 2017 Government Statistical Service harmonised definitions (GSS, 2017) relate to our residence categories

Full-time resident fathers	Part-time resident fathers	Temporarily non-resident			Other full-time non-resident
	Part-time away fathers	Overnight care fathers			
		Majority overnight care	Equal overnight care	Minority overnight care	
✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	

✓✓ = includes these fathers within the identifiable category of ‘resident’ fathers (subject to respondents’ disclosures and interpretations of questionnaire terms); ✓ = includes a subset of these fathers within the identifiable category of ‘resident’ fathers

Table 2: CROSS-SECTIONAL RESEARCH DATASETS: Can full-time resident fathers, part-time resident fathers and temporarily non-resident fathers be differentiated as separate categories for analysis?

	Full-time resident fathers	Part-time resident fathers	Temporarily non-resident				
		Part-time away fathers	Overnight care fathers (of dependent children)	All 'overnight care' fathers	Majority overnight care	Equal overnight care	Minority overnight care
British Social Attitudes							
Health Survey for England							
Labour Force Survey							✓
Family Resources Survey							
2011 Census for England and Wales							✓
Opinions and Lifestyle Survey - core demographic questions							
UK Time Use Surveys							

✓✓ = identifies these fathers (subject to respondents' disclosures and interpretations of questionnaire terms); ✓ = identifies subset of these fathers

Table 3: LONGITUDINAL STUDIES: Can cohort children/ young sample members who are part-time resident with a ‘part-time away’ father or ‘overnight care’ birth/ adoptive father be differentiated as separate categories in at least one (childhood) sweep?

Cohort child/young sample member with a...	Part-time away father		Overnight care father			
			All ‘overnight care’ fathers as one identifiable category	Majority overnight care father	Equal overnight care father	Minority overnight care father
Longitudinal Study of Young People in England						
Growing Up in Scotland		✓	✓	✓✓		✓
National Child Development Study						
British Cohort Study						
Millennium Cohort Study	✓	(✓)*				
Alspac						
Understanding Society		(✓)* *	✓✓	(✓)* * *		(✓)

✓✓=identifies these fathers (subject to respondents' disclosures and interpretations of questionnaire terms); ✓ = identifies subset of these fathers; (✓)(tick/s in brackets) = subset identified if assumptions made

* We do not know whether this is a regular pattern of stays.

** We did not find a question asking about the ‘non-resident’ parent’s ‘sex’/ gender.

*** In sweep 3, “shared care 50/50” may not be the same as our definition of ‘equal overnight care’.

Table 4. CROSS-SECTIONAL RESEARCH DATASETS: Can ‘resident’ birth, adoptive and social fathers be differentiated as separate categories for analysis?

	Categorised as ‘resident’				
	Birth fathers	Adoptive fathers	Social fathers		
			Stepfathers (married and cohabiting; nonmarried) including ‘other cohabiting partners’	Foster fathers	Male legal guardians
British Social Attitudes					
Health Survey for England	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Labour Force Survey			✓*	✓✓	
Family Resources Survey			✓	✓✓	
2011 Census for England and Wales			✓		
Opinions and Lifestyle Survey - core demographic questions			✓	✓✓	
UK Time Use Surveys			✓	✓✓	

✓✓=identifies these fathers (subject to respondents' disclosures and interpretations of questionnaire terms); ✓ = identifies subset of these fathers

* In the ONS datasets, the Family Resources Survey and the UK Time Use Surveys, a proportion of stepfathers will be excluded from this category if they are identified generically as a ‘parent’ or ‘guardian’ of their stepchildren, and their stepchild is identified as their ‘son/ daughter’ rather than their ‘stepchild’.

Table 5: LONGITUDINAL STUDIES: Can cohort children/ young sample members with a ‘resident’ birth father, adoptive father or social father be differentiated as separate categories in at least one (childhood) sweep?

	Cohort child/young sample member with a ‘resident’...			
	Birth father	Adoptive father	Social father	
			Stepfather (married and cohabiting; non-married) including ‘other cohabiting partner’	Foster father
Longitudinal Study of Young People in England	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Growing Up in Scotland	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
National Child Development Study	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
British Cohort Study	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Millennium Cohort Study	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Alspac	✓✓	*	(✓✓)* *	*
Understanding Society	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓

✓✓=identifies these fathers (subject to respondents' disclosures and interpretations of questionnaire terms); ✓ = identifies subset of these fathers; (✓)(tick/s in brackets) = subset identified if assumptions made

*In many Alspac childhood sweeps, stepfathers, adoptive fathers and foster fathers are included among the cohort child’s identifiable ‘resident’ fathers (“father-figures”), but relationship categories cannot be explicitly differentiated. Assumptions could be made using variables about whether the cohort child is adopted or fostered.

**Analyses of ‘resident’ stepfathers could use the assumption that if the cohort child’s ‘resident’ birth mother has a cohabiting partner who is not the child’s “biological or “natural” father, that cohabiting partner is a stepfather (a proportion of these cohabiting partners may be a stepfather who formally adopted the child).

Table 6: LONGITUDINAL STUDIES: Can adult cohort members/sample members who are ‘resident’ and/or ‘non-resident’ birth, adoptive and social fathers be differentiated as separate categories in at least one (adulthood) sweep?

	Categorised as ‘resident’				Categorised as ‘non-resident’	
	Birth fathers	Adoptive fathers	Stepfathers (married and cohabiting; non-married) including ‘other cohabiting partners’	Foster fathers	Birth fathers	Stepfathers
Longitudinal Study of Young People in England	✓✓	n/a *		n/a	✓ * *	
National Child Development Study	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
British Cohort Study	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Alspac***	✓✓	n/a	✓	n/a	✓ * * * *	
Understanding Society	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓ * * * * *	✓

✓✓=identifies these fathers (subject to respondents' disclosures and interpretations of questionnaire terms); ✓ = identifies subset of these fathers

*In early adulthood sweeps of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England and Alspac with published questionnaires at time of our dataset investigations, cohort members were too young to adopt or foster children.

**If they have no ‘resident’ birth children.

***We did not access questionnaires for the Children of the Children of the 90s (G2/ COCO90s) study.

****If they have no ‘resident’ birth children.

*****For sample members who were in the study at the first sweep.

Table 7: CROSS-SECTIONAL RESEARCH DATASETS identifying research respondents who are ‘non-resident’ fathers, including temporary non-residence

Dataset	Subset identified	Relationship categories (birth/adoptive/step) differentiated for analysis
British Social Attitudes	(Until 2015): Fathers (of living dependent or adult children) (‘declared parenthood, see section 2A of Full Working Paper) who have no ‘resident’ children (adult or dependent, including any part-time ‘resident’ children who stay regularly)	None
Health Survey for England	Fathers of sick/ disabled ‘non-resident’ dependent children (under 16 years) whom they personally help or support	None
Labour Force Survey	Subset 1: Fathers of ‘long-term away’ children at boarding school or university (halls of residence) during term-time Subset 2: ‘Assumed non-resident’ fathers in panel LFS whose ‘resident’ child/ren (adult/ dependent) at earlier sweep left sampled household by later sweep	Birth/ adoptive fathers and guardians (may include long-established stepfathers) Stepfathers (declared stepfathers/ other cohabiting partners)*
Family Resources Survey	Subset 1: Fathers of dependent children / young adults (under 20 years) living with other parent Subset 2: Fathers of young adults (16-24 years) in education - includes ‘non-resident’ stepfathers Subset 3: Fathers of sick/ disabled ‘non-resident’ children whom they help or support	None
2011 Census for England and Wales	Fathers of ‘long-term away’ children at boarding school or university during term-time	Birth/ adoptive fathers and guardians (may include long-established stepfathers) Stepfathers (declared stepfathers/ other cohabiting partners)
UK Time Use Surveys	2000 UKTUS: Fathers of sick/ disabled ‘non-resident’ dependent children to whom provide regular help. 2014-15: Fathers of ‘non-resident’ dependent children (under 18 years) with whom they have contact	None

**No data about whether the previously resident stepfather and previously resident children remain in contact at the later sweep, so we do not know whether the respondent meets our definition of non-resident stepfathers.*

Table 8: LONGITUDINAL STUDIES: Can cohort children/ young sample members with a 'non-resident' birth father or 'non-resident' stepfather be differentiated as separate categories in at least one (childhood) sweep?

Cohort child/ young sample member with a...	Living 'non-resident' birth father	'Non-resident' stepfather (Group 2) (current cohabiting partner of child's 'non-resident' birth/ adoptive parent)	Previously 'resident' stepfather no longer 'resident' in the child's household for reason other than death	'Non-resident' stepfather (Group 1) (former cohabiting partner who moved out of the child's household and remains in contact)
Longitudinal Study of Young People in England	(✓)*		✓	
Growing Up in Scotland	✓	(✓)* *	✓	
National Child Development Study	(✓)* * *		(✓)	
British Cohort Study	✓		✓	
Millennium Cohort Study	✓	(✓)* * * *	✓	✓
Alspac	✓		✓	
Understanding Society	✓	✓	✓	

✓✓=identifies these fathers (subject to respondents' disclosures and interpretations of questionnaire terms); ✓= identifies subset of these fathers; (✓)(tick/s in brackets) = subset identified if assumptions made

*No questions asked about 'non-resident' birth fathers so cannot identify that the father is alive; nor establish that he is known to have died unless he lived with the cohort child at an earlier sweep of the study.

**In second birth cohort; Don't know "sex" or gender of cohabiting partner of 'non-resident' birth parent.

***Not known whether alive if reason given for not living with cohort child is divorce/ relationship separation. No questions asked about current contact or child maintenance.

****Don't know "sex" or gender of cohabiting partner of 'non-resident' birth parent.