Men:
Working through life: Living through Work

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Work and family issues for men in Australia have come under increasing scrutiny in recent years by researchers, policy makers, politicians, practitioners and the media. Work and family for men is clearly on the political agenda at the national level – a substantial budget has been allocated to support projects and programs that directly address the needs of men. There are have been national and regional forums on men (e.g., Men and Family Relationships: 1998 and 2000 – sponsored by the Federal Government) and there have been several recent academic and social commentaries on men and work and family (e.g., Connell, 2000; Dye, 1998; Hand & Lewis, 2002; Lee & Owens, 2002; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; McMahon, 1999; Russell, Barclay, Edgecombe, Donovan, Habib, Callaghan & Pawson, 1999; Weston, Qu & Soriano, 2002). Importantly too, there has been a national analysis of fatherhood that has focused on a review of research, policies and services, and on the current involvement of Australian fathers in work and family life (Russell et al, 1999).

The aim of this paper is to review the approach to work and family for men in Australia, with a particular emphasis on fatherhood. The central argument though is that the approach can be characterised by efforts to: (i) understand both the contributions men make to families and what their needs are; and (ii) to work with men where they are both psychologically and physically.

1. Where is “men and work/family” on the political agenda? Why is this a topical issue?

There is little question that compared with ten years ago, there is a greater focus on work and family issues for men in the political arena. The initial impetus for the emphasis on men at the political and policy levels appears to have come from three sources. First, the ongoing family law debate about custody, access and property/financial matters. There appeared to be several forces operating here. One was the perceived and actual lack of responsibility many men were taking for the financial well-being of children after separation and divorce. Another was the increasing number of what was
termed “intractable access” cases where there was a high level of continuing dispute and conflict around the extent to which fathers had contact with their children after divorce and separation. These cases were also utilising considerable resources in the Family Court. A final concern was that many men felt that they were not getting a “fair deal” in relation to custody and access, and many were highly successful in having their voices heard as part of the political process (eg., public hearings conducted as part of the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee review of the Family Law Act in 1991-92).

The second impetus for the political focus on men came from concerns about family violence. There was increased public debate about the incidence and impact of violence (physical and sexual) against women and children perpetrated by men. Resources were allocated through the “Partnerships Against Domestic Violence” Initiative – with funding for: services to address the needs of women; public awareness campaigns targeting men and later, the funding of programs to address issues associated with perpetrators. These partnerships have also been extended to the workplace.

The third came from concerns about the relatively small number of men who access relationship-counselling services. This was of particular concern to policy makers, funders and practitioners because of a perceived loss of opportunity to engage with men and potentially prevent some of the negative outcomes associated with family relationship conflict.

One of the initial projects funded was Men as Parents (see Russell et al, 1999). This study provided a significant and timely opportunity to review, investigate and provide up-to-date information and analyses on the role of men as parents, and the extent and nature of current services available to men who are parents. It therefore provided the basis for recommendations for specific strategies to address the needs of men and facilitate the development of more effective parenting. An ultimate goal was to strengthen the preparation of men for their role as parents.
What followed soon after was the Men and Family Relationships initiative of the Family Relationships Services Program (FRSP) of the Department of Family and Community Services. The FRSP funds a range of family relationship support services through community-based organisations. The major goal of these support services is to assist men deal with the emotional effects and unresolved problems following the breakdown of their marriage relationship, so that they can manage a range of relationship difficulties with partners and ex-partners, children and step-children, and re-establish positive relationships in all these areas.

The initiative also aims to help relationship service organisations develop more sensitive and responsive approaches to working with male clients. While many of the funded services are generalist - they include counselling, relationship education and parenting skills programs - they are designed to be attractive to men and to take men’s particular help-seeking and problem solving strategies into account. Men and Family Relationships services are located in every State and Territory, in a range of metropolitan, rural and regional locations. 16.5 million dollars over 4 years was allocated to 54 early intervention and prevention services for men seeking help with their relationships. Twenty-six of these specifically target men who are parents. These programs were refunded in the 2002 budget for another 12 months.

Arguments about the broader social reasons for the current interest in men and work/family cover the range of issues identified in most other western countries. The most common is that both the interest in work/family issues for men, as well as explanations for changing patterns of involvement of men in family life (within individual family relationships) is a direct response to changes in the behaviour and expectations of women.

Many commentators view broader social changes (eg. feminism, changing maternal employment patterns) as being the major or a major driver of the current focus on work/family for men. For example, Lupton & Barclay (1997) argue that the major drivers of the fatherhood debate in Australia are “The second-wave feminist movement, the entry of larger numbers of women into the
workforce, their continuing participation in paid employment after having children and a decrease in the size of families....." (p.1).

White (1994) argued that the fatherhood debate is associated with the “politicisation and theorisation of gender relations”. White also argues that higher divorce rates with more men living apart as single parents, with compulsory child support payments and the availability of paternity leave, added to men finding themselves unemployed because of retrenchment or depressed job opportunities in today’s economic climate, provides opportunities and pressures more than ever before to be available for childcare. Other demographic changes that have influenced the focus on fathers include: a decline in the proportion of two-parent families in which fathers are the sole breadwinners; the increase in the number of families in which fathers do not live with their children; an increase in the number of families in which children live alone with their fathers (associated with an increased acceptance or paternal custody by courts and society, and an increased tendency by fathers to seek custody); and changing conceptions of fatherhood.

There can be little question that changes in social (eg changes in family law) and economic circumstances and the nature of work (eg changes in family and employment patterns), the feminist debate and changed expectations of women regarding gender equity are common themes in explanations for an increased interest in fatherhood. What is not clear is the extent to which men themselves have been active in the process of change. Much of the discussion concerning the active involvement of men in changing the perspective of fatherhood comes from social movements associated with men’s rights, especially in relation to custody and access. Yet, Russell (1999) in a review of families in which fathers are primary caregivers indicated that recent findings suggest that fathers have become more active participants in advocating and supporting this family pattern. This is partly driven by the increased recognition (based on a burgeoning research knowledge base) of the contribution fathers make to child development outcomes. Connell (2000) also highlighted the active involvement of men themselves in addressing gender issues and in advocating change. Evidence from the analysis of
services designed to address the needs of men (Russell et al 1999) also indicated that there is an emerging group of highly committed and skilled male practitioners working within the service framework to change the approach to service provision for fathers – to work with fathers where they are psychologically and physically (eg. in the workplace).

2. Labour Market Changes for Men and Women

*Men are less likely to be the sole breadwinner.* In line with trends in the USA and Britain, Australian women have entered the workforce in increasing numbers. Participation rates increased from 50% in 1989 to 54% in January 2001. In the same time period, the participation rate for men has decreased from 75% to 72%. 31% of men and 29% of women in Australia who are in the workforce have dependent children under 15 years of age. Further, 88% of fathers and 59% of mothers in two-parent families with dependent children are employed. Labour force participation rates for single parents with a child under 15 years of age are: fathers: 65%; mothers: 53%.

Nearly half of the women in Australia with young children are now in the labour force. Mothers with young children are still less likely to be in the workforce than mothers of older children – the lowest employment rates for mothers are for those with children aged less than 4 years old. Nevertheless, there has been an increase in the number of females in the labour force with children aged 0-4 -- from 43% in 1988 to 48% in 1998 (ABS, Cat. No. 4102.0). Employment rates increase for mothers when children reach school age and then again, particularly for single mothers, when children reach 15 years (ABS , Cat No. 4102.0).

*Dual income families with children are increasing.* When statistics for the participation of couple families in the workforce are examined it is clear that the traditional family model of one working partner is fast vanishing. In 2002, more than half of couple families in Australia with dependent children had both parents in the workforce. Between 1988 and 2000 the proportion increased
from 50% to 56%. Many of these families with both parents employed, of course, are responding to the current economic realities in Australia.

The standard working week has declined: The norm of a 35-44 hour week has given way to either a part-time working week or longer hours in the full-time working week. The proportion of the working population working 35-44 hours a week fell from 42% in 1988 to 36% in 1998. 27.4% worked longer than 44 hours a week in 1998 compared with 25.1% in 1988. 36.9% worked between less than 35 hours a week in 1998 compared with 32.7% in 1988 (ABS, Cat. No. 4102.0). Families which are not so threatened by the possibility of job insecurity, unemployment or underemployment might experience difficulties on another front – that of negative impacts from working intensively for longer hours. Working smarter and longer hours against a background of high unemployment, means that for many men the need to earn an adequate income takes an overwhelming priority in their lives. Indeed, the percentage of men in the age brackets of 25-44 and 45-64 who reported working 45 hours of more each week increased significantly from 1988 to 1998 (25-44: from 39% to 41.4%; 45-64: from 36% to 42.7%).

The demise of standard working hours for full time work - working harder and longer - is making inroads on family life. Many children therefore are likely to see less and less of their parents in daylight hours and the weekends. The time demands of the workplace cut across all job sectors and indeed may be most keenly felt at the highly skilled end of the job market. The pressures to work "discretionary" time extra to nominated working hours has been documented by Edgar (1995). The information age is replacing the industrial age and bringing with it longer hours of work involving harder and more challenging tasks and the need to be multi-skilled. The worker is being bound ever more securely to the demands of work and the tussle between time and space for family and time and space for work is ever more entrenched. Advances in information technology while providing much needed flexibility for many employees (e.g., telecommuting) also have the potential to increase the number of hours worked (especially for managers and professionals) by enabling them to more easily
conduct work from home and to be more independent of traditional support staff (e.g., e-mails and memos can be typed from home late at night).

Further, Bittman and Rice (1999) conclude that:

“The study of time-diaries provides support for those who argue that changes in working time are affecting the time available for other activities. Since the 1970s, working times have become more dispersed, with higher rates of unemployment, fewer days of work, but longer working days. Standard working hours are now less typical for both men and women workers. Work at unsociable times (outside the hours of 9 to 5 on weekdays) has also increased over the course of this period.” (p. 5).

Working longer, it can be argued, is potentially a response both to the heightened need for businesses to maintain a competitive edge and to restructuring and downsizing. The industries which have experienced the biggest shift to very long hour employment (mining and electricity, gas and water supply) are industries in which employment has been in decline (ABS, Cat. No. 4102.0).

There is concern that the workforce is polarising into underemployed part-timers who want to work more and are suffering from inadequate earnings; and overworked full-timers who are suffering a decreased quality of working and family life. Either way there is a potential for family well-being to be threatened.

Similar results were reported in a large study undertaken by Galinsky & Swanberg (2000) in the USA, which found that US mothers and fathers are working longer hours and report being under greater pressure to work harder. In the United Kingdom Brannen (2000) has termed these two groups the “work poor” and the “work rich”. In Australia, less skilled occupations were more likely to fit into the former group and more highly skilled occupations were more likely to fit into the latter group. In 1998 the latter were increasingly made up of non-managerial occupations as well as the employers and managers and
administrators who have always been more likely to work a longer week (ABS, Cat. No. 4102.0).

Results from the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey conducted nationally with employers and employees across 2001 workplaces (staffed with more than 20 people) include data about employees’ satisfaction with the balance between family and work in relation to the total weekly hours worked in 1995 (Morehead, Steele, Alexander, Stephen & Duffin 1997). This study also computed a “work intensification index” using answers to questions about perceived increases in the effort workers put into their job, the stress they had in their job and the pace at which they worked. A decline in satisfaction with family-work balance was found to be related to longer working hours and to a high score on the work intensification index. Full-time employees were more likely than part-time employees to report a decline in satisfaction with work and family balance and males were overall more likely than females to report a decline in satisfaction. Further, males with dependent children were found to be working longer hours than males who did not have dependent children.

Similar findings were reported in a national survey by the ACTU (1999) across a number of employment sectors and involving 7000 employees. Only 44% of respondents claimed to be happy with work and family balance, and fewer females (41%) than males (46%) were happy with their balance between work and family. The most common perceptions across the workplaces in the 12 months prior to the survey included an increase in the amount of work (perceived by 65% of respondents) and an increase in stress (59%) and the pace (56%) involved in work.

**Part-time and casual jobs have increased.** Part-time workers have increased as a percentage of the total employed from 20% in 1988 to 26% in 1998 and those employed on a casual basis from 19% to 29%. Women make up 73% of the total part-timers employed (ABS, Cat. No. 4102.0). Further, 43% of all women in the workforce are employed part-time, compared with 13% of men (an increase from 7.2% in 1989). Of the female part-time workforce a slightly higher than average number choose part-time work during the child-bearing years from
25-44 years of age. Of the married women in the paid workforce, 33% of those in the age category 20-24 are employed part-time, whereas the comparable for figures for those aged 25-34 and 35-44 are 40% and 52% (ABS Cat 6203.0). Of the men who have dependent children, 84.5% are employed full-time, 5% are employed part-time and 7% are not in the labour force at all. Some recent analyses also indicate that there is growing trend for men in younger age categories (and especially professional men) to seek part-time work as an option for a period of time.

Job insecurity. Analyses of recent workplace changes consistently highlight the potential impact of downsizing, contracting out and relocation (cf. ACIRRT, 1999; Fallon, 1997; Morehead et al, 1997). The analysis conducted by Morehead et al (1997) indicated that in the year prior to 1995, 27% of organisations intentionally reduced their workforce (compared with 26% in 1990) and that the major reason (41%) for doing this was restructuring (up from 24% in 1990). Methods used to reduce the workforce changed quite substantially from 1990 to 1995. This was particularly the case for the use of ‘voluntary redundancies’ (1995: 37%; 1990: 19%) and ‘compulsory redundancies or retrenchments’ (1995: 37%; 1990: 30%). There was also a reduction in the use of ‘natural wastage or attrition (1995: 51%; 1990: 60%). Further, thirty-one percent of employees said that they “felt insecure about their future” at their place of employment. This is a particularly salient issue for men in the age bracket of 45-60.

The impact of globalisation. The globalisation process has resulted in increased and intense competition for talented employees and for market share based on higher product quality and lower prices. A consequence has also been significant changes in the job demands experienced by many employees and especially managers – most of whom are men with families. Demands have increased for employees to travel and to be accessible during 24-hours of operations (either in person, or via video links, telephone or e-mail). In a recent study conducted by the author, senior managers in a global organisation said they worked an average of 66 hours/week, and that in the past three months they had spent an average of 30 days away from their home base, ten of which
were overseas. Of the fathers in this corporation, only 52% said it is possible to have a good family life and still get ahead, and only 30% were satisfied with the degree of balance they had between their work and family/personal life.

Globalisation has also meant that organisations have a greater need to ensure higher levels of productivity and expanded market share by having flexible workforces, to relocate to enable a quick response to changing market and business demands. Yet, few organisations have conducted an analysis of the impact of expectations associated with globalisation have on the capability of men to be involved in family life, nor on the impact of these changes have on the practice of fatherhood.

Organisational factors that potentially could impact on a man’s ability to be an involved father include: (i) The structure of the organisation, especially reporting systems. In many global organisations it is common to report to more than one person – and these people are often at different locations. (ii) Career path expectations. This includes expectations about the nature of work experiences (e.g., in different parts of the business), and the location of assignments. The timing of these (e.g., in early vs mid-career phases) will also have an impact on fatherhood opportunities (including whether or not to become a father!). (iii) Expectations about overseas assignments, including the specific location and for how long. How a company plans for this and supports an employee and his/her spouse/partner and children will have a major impact on employee well-being and organisational outcomes. (iv) Expectations about access or availability. Many organisations now require people to be available outside of local business times. For some, access is expected in their family homes by telephone and computer. This can also have an impact on fatherhood opportunities.

These globalisation expectations could have an impact on fathers by: limiting their psychological and physical availability to their children; limiting their opportunities to be available at critical and salient times (e.g., when a child has an accident, when a child has an important school function); reducing a man’s positive self-image as a father and reducing his sense of self-efficacy as a
parent; and it could impact on the quality of his relationships with his children by reducing his opportunities to spend focussed and “hanging out” time with them. With men themselves, their partners, their children and the community expecting more of fathers, increased work demands within a global environment will necessarily lead to higher levels of conflict and provide new challenges for men seeking to establish an identity as an involved and committed father.

3. Policy interventions for work/life balance

There is general agreement in Australia that industrial law and policy should address work and family issues. This is the case for recent developments in Australia and particularly in relation to the Workplace Relations Act 1996 which has provided a strong focus on work and family balance. The emphasis in the WR Act is on providing choice for employers and employees in how they deal with their workplace relations and it is argued that it should enable “more innovative work styles and working patterns that balance work and family responsibilities more effectively” (DEWRSB, 1999, p. 3). Characteristics of the WR Act that particularly address work and family issues include:

• Assisting employees (both women and men) to balance their work and family responsibilities effectively through the development of mutually beneficial work practices with employers is a principal object of the Act.
• There are provisions for minimum entitlements to parental leave and protection from dismissal on family-responsibility related grounds.
• There are provisions for paid “family caregiver’s” leave to allow employees to provide short-term care for an ill family or household members, by accessing their sick leave or bereavement leave entitlements
• “The two types of agreements provided for under the WR Act, certified agreements and Australian workplace agreements, enable employers and employees to tailor their working conditions to meet their work/life
needs. There are safeguards for both types of agreement-making to ensure that employees are not disadvantaged.” (DEWRSB, 1999, p. 3).

- The protection afforded to workers with family responsibilities by awards is reflected in the WR Act through the inclusion of relevant allowable award matters, notably hours of work, personal/carer’s leave, parental leave and type of employment.

- The provision of regular part-time work is encouraged. The WR Act aims to remove unnecessary constraints on regular part-time work from and awards and providing greater access to part-time work with pro-rata conditions and reasonable predictability of working hours. Overall, encouragement is given for the development of more appropriate mixes of regular part-time, casual and regular full-time employment as a way of providing employees with improved access to preferred working time arrangements.

- The Employment Advocate is required to have particular regard to assisting workers to balance their work and family responsibilities.

_Paternity Leave:_ Mandatory unpaid 12 months paternity leave is available for men to care for a child up to 12 months of age, after either birth or adoption. In a 1995 survey of 2700 workplaces in Australia (Morehead et al 1997) 34% of organisations reported they offered paid maternity leave (23% private and 59% public sector) while only 18% offered paid paternity leave (13% private and 31% public sector). Findings from another study of 154 private sector organisations are broadly consistent with this: 14% were found to offer paid paternity leave (Mulvena, 1998).

One private sector organisation, AMP, has reported a high take up rate for paid paternity leave (at that time, 2000, available for caregivers for a six week period). Overall 129 men had taken paid parental leave (for more than a week) since it was introduced in December 1995. This has increased from the first half of 1996, when 3 men took paid parental leave (6 weeks in total), to the first halves of 1997 (14 took 57.4 weeks) 1998 (19 took 93.8 weeks), and 12 men took paid parental leave (a total of 40 weeks) in the six month period 1 April 1999 to 30 August 1999 (two of these were managers).
Carers’ Responsibilities Legislation: In a recent change in the state of NSW, the Anti-Discrimination Act has been changed to make it illegal to discriminate against someone in employment on the basis of their carers’ responsibilities. Carers’ responsibilities have been defined to cover children, adopted children, de facto spouses, parents and parents of a carers’ spouse. These changes also mean that men will be able to claim discrimination on the basis of caring responsibilities (previously women in this situation could claim indirect sex discrimination). Potentially employers could face claims if they fail to provide appropriate flexible work practices (working from home, flexible start and finish times, job share) to enable a person to meet their work and family responsibilities.

Workplace support programs for men. In the recent study of 1000 Australian fathers (Russell et al, 1999) participants were asked what they thought were the major barriers to men becoming involved as fathers. Of the responses given, 57% were workplace factors (eg., work demands, hours). Further, when asked what support and information they needed as fathers the two most common responses were: “greater workplace flexibility and support” and “better access to advice and education”. While the most commonly thought of workplace initiative to support fathers is parental leave, there are a range of other possibilities.

Supporting men in their roles as fathers is now quite clearly positioned in the corporate arena in Australia. Russell (1998) described both the pathways to getting work/family issues for men onto the corporate agenda and the different contexts in which these issues can be addressed. These pathways include: (i) Conducting fatherhood workshops as part of a broader and more inclusive approach to advancing equal employment opportunity and diversity agendas; (ii) Developing education programs for men in response to needs identified either as part of counselling conducted by an Employee Assistance Program or findings from employee surveys; and (iii) Addressing the work/life balance issues for senior managers and their partners/spouses – a focus on parenting and fatherhood will be an inevitable outcome of this process. Russell (1998)
provides several examples of the nature of his corporate work with fathers (eg., Workshops for fathers; Workshops for senior managers and their partners/spouses).

The Federal Government recently provided funding to support several different workplace initiatives, eg., Relationships Australia, Interrelate, Unifam, and Centacare. The Men at Work program which is conducted as a partnership between the author and Interrelate, for example, is designed to assist both the individual and the organisation explore issues of work/life balance. The expected outcomes of the program are: For the organisation: (i) The development of staff driven family friendly policies; (ii) Work redesign and the development of more creative and effective work practices; (iii) Greater understanding of the needs of men and fathers; (iv) Increased employee commitment and productivity. For the individual: (i) Awareness of work/life balance issues; (ii) Developing alternative methods of structuring work/life pressures; (iii) Better coping strategies; (iv) Enhanced knowledge and skills to enable better quality relationships with partners/spouses and children; (v) Improved health outcomes; and (vi) Improved relating and communication skills. The program is conducted over eight hours and covers four major content areas: (i) Work/life balance; (ii) Personal well-being (physical and psychological); (iii) Relationships (at work and at home); (iv) Fathering and mentoring. This program has now been conducted successfully in several Australian workplaces (see Russell & Llewellyn-Smith, 2001).

4. Changing work/family patterns for men

Whether the heightened focus on fatherhood is directly related to a fundamental change in the level of involvement of fathers and the emergence of a “New Father” who is highly involved in the day-to-day care of children is debated in Australia, like it is in many other countries. In a comprehensive review of fatherhood in the US, Cabrera Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb (2000) argue that “paternal involvement, responsibility, and care have increased over the past three decades” (p. 128). Evidence cited to support
this comes from Pleck’s (1997) comprehensive review as well as the findings from Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth (1999).

Time use findings from Australia provide a slightly different perspective. Russell & Bowman (2000) reported that there is very little evidence that a gender redistribution of family work has occurred (Bittman & Pixley, 1997) – despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of both men and women believe that husbands and wives should share household tasks equally if wives work full-time (de Vaus, 1997). Findings indicate that overall, fathers are not spending any more time than they always have on family and child activities. Mothers reported spending, on average, 6 hrs: 46 mins a day on child care activities in 1992 and 6hrs: 7mins in 1997. Fathers reported spending 2hrs:31mins on child care activities in 1992, and 2hrs:24mins in 1997.

Nevertheless, in their study of a national random sample of 1000 fathers Russell et al (1999) found that in comparison to 15 years earlier, fathers were spending more time alone with their children. This study also found that fathers, their spouses and family workers, had the perception that the current generation of fathers are closer to and spend more time with their children than the previous generation of fathers did.

McMahon (1999) has presented an alternative view on the “New Father” debate. Based on an analysis of a mixture of mainly Australian, UK and US data on men’s involvement in childrearing and household chores McMahon (1999) concluded that little has changed and that researchers and social commentators have been overly optimistic about the extent of change. Further, he argues that discussions about these issues have avoided the political point that men’s material interests provide a major motivation for resistance to pro-equity change, and indeed, that men are in fact “caring for themselves” by ignoring this.

Providing a definitive answer to the question of whether there has been a significant shift in the level of involvement within any culture or subculture will
remain difficult given the paucity of data and the lack of consensus about what the appropriate measures of father-involvement should be. We can, however, be certain that there has been an increased scholarly and social interest in what men do and feel as fathers, and we know more about the day-to-day involvement of Australian fathers in the lives of their children.

The practice of fatherhood. A common thread in studies of fathering is an attempt to clarify what is meant by father involvement and how to measure it. Pleck (1997) distinguished three components: (i) Paternal engagement -- direct interaction with the child in terms of caretaking, play or leisure; (ii) Accessibility or availability to the child; and (iii) Responsibility for the care of the child -- as distinct from the performance of care. Russell (1999) broadened the conceptualisation of paternal involvement in two ways. First, by including measures of involvement in decision-making and responsibility (eg., monitoring) as well as task performance. Second, by identifying six core domains of fathering: (i) Employment and family financial support; (ii) Day-to-day care of and interaction with children; (iii) Child Management and Socialisation; (iv) Household work; (v) Maintaining relationships between caregivers; and (vi) Parental commitment/investment.

Taking a broad brush approach, Australian studies over the last 15 years are consistent in showing both that: (i) there is significant diversity in the practice of fatherhood and (ii) there are still quite marked gender differences in patterns of involvement in family life (Bittman & Pixley, 1997; Dempsey, 1997; McMahon, 1999; Russell et al 1999). For example, time use data indicates that fathers spend approximately 30% of the time mothers do on childcare tasks. Nevertheless, in contrast to figures often quoted in the media, fathers report spending significant amounts of time either engaged with children (especially young children) or available to them. In the recent Australian study (Russell et al, 1999), the average available time was 4.2 hours/day and the average time fathers reported they spent taking sole responsibility for their children was 1.5 hours/day.
An essential ingredient of the description of fathering is the need to recognise the diversity of involvement, from the highly nurturant (Russell, 1983, 1999), to the more traditional (eg. the breadwinner, the head of the house and family protector, the disciplinarian and masculine model - especially for sons), to fathers who are disengaged and fathers who are physically and sexually abusive.

Discussions of diversity in Australia have also included families in which both parents are employed and share child care, and those in which fathers are unemployed and at home caring for their children full-time -- commonly termed 'shared' or father-primary caregiving families (Russell, 1999). Findings also show that divisions of labour for family work are potentially problematic in dual worker families (Dempsey, 1997; Russell, 1983). Employed mothers adjust their jobs and personal lives to accommodate family commitments more than employed fathers do. Mothers are less likely to work overtime and are more likely to take time off work to attend to children's needs. Mothers spend less time on personal leisure activities than their partners, a factor that often leads to resentment.

Family therapists and social workers are increasingly defining family problems in terms of a lack of involvement and support from men, and are concerned with difficulties involved in having men take responsibility for the solution of family and child-behaviour problems (Heubeck, Watson & Russell, 1986). The need for a change in divisions of responsibilities for family work has also been raised by those concerned about incest and domestic violence. A consistent theme has been the relationship between incest and domestic violence, and a lack of responsibility taken by men for family work and nurturance. The need to focus on shared responsibility rather than 'helping out' has been emphasised in this debate. The social facts of sexual abuse demand closer scrutiny by researchers to examine those paternal factors that lead to this outcome.

Finally, it is worth noting that little research has been conducted into the subjective experiences or feelings of men in relation to family life – how men
in diverse contexts perceive and construct both their identities as fathers and the nature of their involvement with their children. Marsiglio, Amato, Day & Lamb (2000) draw attention to the growing body of recent research that has used either symbolic interactionism or identity theory to address this aspect of fathering. What this research shows is that for fathers “there are competing discourses and desires that can never be fully and neatly shaped into a single identity” (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 16). Knowledge of the subjective experiences of men in relation to their family life, is critical for our understanding of both the nature and diversity of father involvement, the effects men have on other family members and the effect fathering has on the development of men themselves (cf. Heath, 1978; Russell, 1983; Snarey, 1993). Indeed, some have argued that men who are more highly involved in family life are likely to have higher levels of work-related skills, and to be even more attractive to employers.

*Fatherhood in Australia: A summary snapshot.* Russell et al (1999) conducted a study of a national random sample of 1000 men in Australia who defined themselves as parents. They also interviewed 250 of the partners of these men. In sum, they found:

1. Fathers worked an average of 47 hours each week and 33% reported spending over 50 hours a week on paid work. The majority, however, said they would prefer to spend less time on paid work, with the ideal being 10 hours less than their current worktime.

2. Few differences were evident in the average time fathers spent with their children in 1998 in comparison with 1983. Nevertheless, fathers in 1998 were, on average, spending more time alone with their children than fathers were in 1983.

3. Approximately 15% of fathers were the major caregivers of their children for some period during the day.
4. Approximately 50% of fathers reported having extremely close, warm and affectionate relationships with both their daughters and their sons. Less than 5% of fathers reported distant and cold relationships with their children. These perceptions were also supported by the responses of their partners/spouses.

5. Compared to fathers who participated in a 1983 study, the fathers in this sample were less likely to perceive their role in terms of breadwinning and more likely to perceive their role as providing emotional support to their children.

6. More fathers believed that they are able to influence self-control/self-discipline, personal values, education and interests/sport than the affective and emotional aspects of their children’s lives.

7. “Being accessible to children when they need you” was rated as being the most important way in which fathers can have an impact on their children’s well-being and adjustment. This was followed by: “Guiding and teaching your children”, “Providing an income and economic security”, and “Providing emotional support to children”.

8. While the majority of fathers believed they should share equally in the responsibilities of bringing up children, a substantial number also believed mothers were naturally better at nurturing children and that pre-school aged children needed their mothers more than their fathers.

9. Contrary to the current popular debate about fatherhood, the majority of fathers (and their partners) believed that in comparison with their own fathers, fathers of today spend more time with their children and are closer to their children. They also believed that working long hours was not a necessary impediment to establishing a good relationship with their children. Nevertheless, 68% also said that they did not spend enough time with their children.
10. While the majority of fathers believed they are committed and competent parents, their spouses rated them even more highly on these dimensions.

11. Fathers were less satisfied with their role as a parent and with their relationships with their children than their spouses were.

12. A significant number of fathers reported experiencing high levels of stress in their lives and that they did not have enough time for themselves.

13. Although only 20% of fathers experienced very high levels of conflict between work and family, a significant number reported an absence of support to enable them to balance their work/family commitments and 64% said that in the past five years they had made changes to their work life to improve the quality of their personal or family life.

14. The majority of fathers reported that they learnt their fathering skills from observing and listening to their own parents, but more especially their father. Very few reported that formal parent education classes or information from the media had had an impact on how they have approached fathering.

15. Less than 30% of fathers reported they had difficult and distant relationships with their own father and 65% said they could talk freely together.

16. Fathers reported that they would be more likely to turn their partners when they needed support as a parent, however, a significant number also said they would obtain support from their fathers and male friends. Very few indicated they would seek support from professionals.

17. Fathers showed a high level of interest in obtaining information from different forms of media (TV/Documentaries, Book and the Internet) and
from fathers who had similar experiences, but showed less interest in formal groups for fathers/men.

18. Overwhelmingly, men believed the major barrier to them being involved as parents are the commitments they have to paid work. Personal (e.g., lack of knowledge) and relationship (partner operating as a gatekeeper) barriers were mentioned much less often.

19. Nearly a third of fathers were not able to identify a current need of fathers. The most frequently mentioned needs related to changes at workplace to be more supportive of fathers balancing work and family commitments and in providing greater access to advice and information.

5. Family instability

There were 52,600 divorces in Australia in 1999. This is a small increase on the number granted in 1998 (2% more), however, it represents an increase of 27% from 1989 (ABS Cat. 3310.0, 1999). ABS also reports that between 1989 and 1999 the proportion of divorces where children were involved fell (from 55% to 54%), reflecting an overall decline in fertility. Nevertheless, because the number of divorces has increased over the same period, the actual number of children involved in divorce has increased from 43,300 (1989) to 53,400 (1999). Further, in 36% of the divorces that involved children, the age of the youngest child was 5-9 years and in nearly two-thirds of the divorces involving children, the age of the youngest child was under 10 years.

Following separation, the most common pattern is for children to live with one parent, usually the mother (ABS Cat. 4102.0). In April 1997, there were 978,000 Australian children living with one natural parent and who had a natural parent living elsewhere. The vast majority (88%) lived with their natural mother in either one-parent families (68%) or in step or blended families (20%). 12% lived with their natural father, with 9% being in one-parent families and 3% being in step or blended families with their fathers.
Only 3% of children whose parents had separated were in a shared care arrangement (defined as each natural parent caring for the children for at least 30% of the time). Very few young children live with their natural fathers – of children aged 0-4 in separated family situations, only 4% live with their natural fathers.

In terms of contact with the other natural parent, 42% of children spend time with this parent fortnightly or more frequently. Yet, 36% of children saw their other natural parent rarely (once a year or less) or never, and this trend is even more evident for older children. Extrapolating these figures further, it can be estimated that 32% of children who experience parental separation do not have continuing regular contact with their fathers.

6. Policy interventions to support fathers and fathering

As is the case in most other countries, issues of financial support for children after separation and fathers having continuing contact, have been the subject of major public, policy and political debates in Australia. In terms of financial support, a Child Support Agency (CSA) was established in 1988. The primary purpose of the CSA is to ensure adequate financial support for children of separated parents, and that both parents share the costs of supporting their children according to their capacity to pay. The CSA has the authority to collect child support through the tax system, nevertheless, parents are encouraged to make payments directly to the parent with whom their children live. While parents are encouraged to make their own arrangements with regard to amount and frequency of payment, the CSA has the role of making this assessment when parents are unable to agree. In 1997, 42% of all separated families were receiving cash child support payments. Over half (54%) were paid directly by the liable parent while over one third (38%) were paid through the Child Support Agency.

It is generally agreed in broader policy and social analyses conducted in Australia that children benefit from having continuing contact with both parents. In a 1992 Family Law Council Report, it was stated that:
“Most children want and need contact with both parents. Their long-term development, education, capacity to adjust and self-esteem can be detrimentally affected by the long-term or permanent absence of a parent from their lives. The well-being of children is generally advanced by their maintaining links with both parents as much as possible.”

Changes made to the Family Law Act in 1996, reflect these views. These changes were also made in part, as a response to research which showed that many separated men experienced a deep sense of loss from a lack of contact with their children. Of significance here was a change to better reflect the needs and rights of children by replacing the traditional (parent oriented) concepts of custody, access and guardianship with a broader concept of parental responsibility. The new principles outlined in the Act are:

1. Children have a right to know and be cared for by both parents.
2. Children have a right of contact, on a regular basis, with both parents and any other person significant to the care, welfare and development of the child.
3. Parents share the duties and responsibilities concerning the care, welfare and development of the child; and
4. Parents should agree about the future parenting of the child.

The social and policy debate about contact between fathers and children after separation and the notion of shared responsibility for parenting, however, has again emerged in Australia. A research report recently released (Rhoades, Graycar & Harrison, 2000) argues that: (i) Reforms have failed to change parental attitudes, or their use of old terms (both by practitioners and parents) – interestingly though 60% of separated men surveyed indicated that the idea of sharing day-to-day responsibilities would work for men, whereas only 25% of separated women thought it would; (ii) Instead of encouraging more private agreements the reforms have led to an increase in disputes about “contact” and a greater number of “abusive” non-resident parents alleging breaches of orders; (iii) In cases of alleged domestic violence, more orders for unsupervised contact are being made at interim court hearings than in the past.
On the other hand, the report shows that more men have succeeded in getting court orders that increase their contact with their children. Although the most common arrangement is still for fathers to have contact two nights each fortnight (usually at the weekends), an increasing number of orders are for four or more nights a week. One commentator (Horin, 2001, SMH 24/2/01), however, argues that this trend and the “reforms have created an environment where concern for fathers’ rights has increasingly taken precedence over concern for children’s rights.”

7. What next?

“Men and Work and Family” has been a topic of concern for academics, policy makers and practitioners in Australia for quite some time. What has changed in recent years, however, has been the increased involvement of governments and employers, as well as the consideration of the diversity of the needs of men.

While most reviews of national initiatives observe that men have been largely ignored in policy deliberations and in social support services, or that the emphasis has been on men as breadwinners and ensuring that they fulfill their financial responsibilities in the context of family separation, it is clear that this is in the process of rapid change. This is also true of workplace initiatives, where there has been a rapid expansion of policies and programs to address the needs of men and especially working fathers.

While we can be certain that there is a greater focus on men, we cannot be certain of the extent to which there has been an increase in the level of involvement of men in family life. Also much greater attention has been given to what men do in families (eg., involvement in child care), with little attention being given to the feelings of men. Yet, understanding better the subjective experiences of men in a range of social and cultural contexts is critical to inform both our theoretical conceptualisations of men and our approaches to
policies directed at men and work and family. In contrast to earlier perspectives on men in Australia, there is now a growing literature that recognises the diversity of men. One of the challenges for scholars, policy makers and practitioners is to recognise, understand, value and work with this diversity. As was argued by Russell et al (1999) approaches that could be taken in the future include:

7.1 Policy

• Develop a coherent multisectoral policy framework that addresses: (i) the diversity of the needs of men in family life, and (ii) the diversity of services/programs that are effective in addressing these needs. The intention of this policy framework should be to: *enhance the capacities of institutions and social systems to engage with men in a flexible way to enable men to become more competent and confident in their role as fathers and to achieve a more rewarding balance between their paid work and family commitments.*

• Encourage health, welfare and employment sectors to be proactive in addressing men’s issues.

• Develop a Fatherhood Research Agenda and actively support academic, workplace and community based projects that address this agenda.

7.2 Families

• More emphasis needs to be given to enabling men to achieve a better balance between paid employment and parenting time. This should be done through the development of programs based in the workplace to ensure that work/family balance strategies are fully integrated with business and employment needs.

• Facilitate the development of continued emotional closeness for men with children -- both boys and girls -- as they mature. Consideration should be given to developing school- and work-based programs and strategies that focus on father-son as well as father-daughter relationships. These issues also need to be reflected in resources (e.g., videos, Internet Site)
developed for men. Models currently in place that address father-son relationships could be used as a basis to begin this process.

7.3 Professionals

- Address the negative and ambivalent attitudes and beliefs many professional and service providers currently hold about men and fathers.
- Develop a training module for practitioners and policy makers that address the assumptions they bring to their work with men and fathers and that develops skills to enable practitioners to establish principles of father inclusiveness in their day-to-day work.

7.4 Organisations

Possible actions for organisations to address the work and family/life needs of men include:

- Regularly consult men on their work and family/life issues and needs, emphasising the identification of differences as a function of age (eg., preferences for part-time work in both early and later career phases) and family situation (eg., dual career).
- Include the consideration of men’s work and family/life needs in both recruitment and retention strategies. Recent analyses indicate that a significant number of men (63%), especially those in dual worker/career families (including those in senior positions) say they would take account of family and lifestyle issues when making decisions about their jobs, and 20% said they had already made a decision on this basis.
- Regularly conduct impact analyses to identify how current work demands (eg., travel and accessibility) and expectations (eg., fixed career pathways) restrict the opportunities for men to be actively involved in family life.
- Become a father-friendly organisation and use this in recruitment and marketing campaigns.
- Adopt a holistic approach to work and life, to include physical, emotional, psychological and relationship well-being.
• Look for opportunities to engage both the minds and hearts of senior managers on work and family/life issues. A particularly powerful strategy is to include partners in company retreats and to consult partners about how the organisation responds to work and family/life issues.

• Focus on the development of support for work and family/life issues within management teams and especially the senior management team. Data collected from a range of senior management teams indicate that there are considerable opportunities to increase the level of mutual support managers provide to each other. A sample of findings is presented below (note, the frame of reference in asking these questions was about their experiences within the senior management team);

• Work and family conflict and stress are dealt with openly 69
• The majority of people at this level in the organisation are positive role models for work/life balance 27
• Personal health/wellness are given priority when we are making decisions about work demands and travel 53
• It is easy to discuss my work and family/life issues with my colleagues at this level 65
• As a group, we are generally open in our discussions about the impact work demands have on our families/personal lives 60
• As a group, we are generally open in our discussions about the impact work demands have on our personal health/wellness 38
• There is someone at this level whom I can trust to talk openly about my own work and family/life issues 79
• Work/life balance is given a priority when we are making decisions about work demands and travel 56
• It would be a career-limiting move to refuse a promotion in this organisation because of family or personal commitments 43
• There is a high level of mutual support for work/family/life balance at this level 67

Even though the findings from recent Australian research show that to a large extent involvement in family life remains stereotypically gendered, it is also evident that men are showing a greater willingness to examine their behaviour
and feelings, and the values they attach to work, family and their relationships with their children. Many are actively seeking to address constructively the challenge to change. Findings also indicate that the demand for support and information by men and fathers, and by professionals who work with men, has increased substantially in the past 15 years. In their research, Russell et al (1999) identified a variety innovative programs and services for men. For example, father support programs (e.g., fathers in gaol, fathers with children with disabilities, single fathers, separated fathers), parent preparation and education classes, programs addressing the changing nature of relationships (amongst men and between men and women) and violence in relationships, and work/life balance programs in the workplace. The challenge for the future is to develop effective strategies to work with men in a diversity of situations and to harness the knowledge and experience of people who have been researching and working with men in many different contexts. This is clearly an issue that will become increasingly important to the workplace.

References

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