

Extended Abstract

Title: Non-resident Fatherhood in Britain: Factors affecting contact and the payment of maintenance.

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Abstract

This work uses data from a national birth cohort study of men born in Britain in 1970 to a) quantify the extent to which younger fathers are more likely to be non-resident and, if so, the extent to which this is due to a greater chance of never having lived with their child and/or a higher propensity of younger fathers to separate from the mother and child; and b) explore, for younger fathers, the factors associated with differential levels of contact and payment of maintenance.

The conceptual framework used is shown in Figure 1. Information about cohort members has been collected in a number of survey waves, from birth through childhood, to when they were aged 30. We therefore use a life course framework to examine the way in which parental characteristics and childhood experiences impact on the probability of becoming a young non-resident father. These earlier experiences together with more recent circumstances are then examined for their impact on levels of contact and maintenance among non-resident fathers.

Key findings from our analyses of the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) include:

One half of men who had had their first birth in their teens were *not* living with their first child at age 30, compared to 40 percent of those who became a father in their early twenties, and 15 percent of older fathers. More than one fifth of teenage fathers, and 15 percent of those who became a father in their early twenties reported that they had *never* been co-resident with their first child compared to just six percent of older fathers. Young fatherhood and non co-residential fatherhood do not share the same aetiology. Our multivariate analyses suggest that young

fatherhood is more strongly predicted by socio-economic background factors, whilst non co-residence is more strongly predicted by behavioural and psychological characteristics, particularly a history of conduct disorder and having an external locus of control.

Irrespective of age at fatherhood, the majority – around two thirds - of non-resident fathers see their child at least once per month and a similar proportion report that they make some kind of financial contribution toward their child's maintenance. Both of these outcomes decline with increasing time since the father lived with the child and his or her mother.

Over and above this, factors that decrease the frequency of contact are whether the mother is in a new relationship (where the likelihood of weekly contact is halved) and whether the father is in a new relationship and has further biological children (which reduces the likelihood of weekly contact by two-thirds). Having controlled for all these factors, fathers who were themselves not living with two biological parents at age 10 continue to be only half as likely to maintain weekly contact with their own children.

Younger (under 23) fathers are more likely to be unemployed, to have lower earnings and lower educational qualifications. Once these characteristics and time since separation are controlled for in a simultaneous model, younger fathers are, in general, no less likely to maintain contact, and, among the BCS70 cohort at least, are actually twice as likely to make payments.

The multivariate analyses suggest that the factors that influence payment of maintenance are similar for younger and older fathers, and include the frequency of contact with the child, the presence of new biological and/or step-children, and educational qualifications (those with no or below 0-level qualifications are around half as likely to make payments). However, unlike the finding for contact, the mother's current relationship status does not affect the probability of maintenance payments.

The paper concludes with some policy implications of these findings.

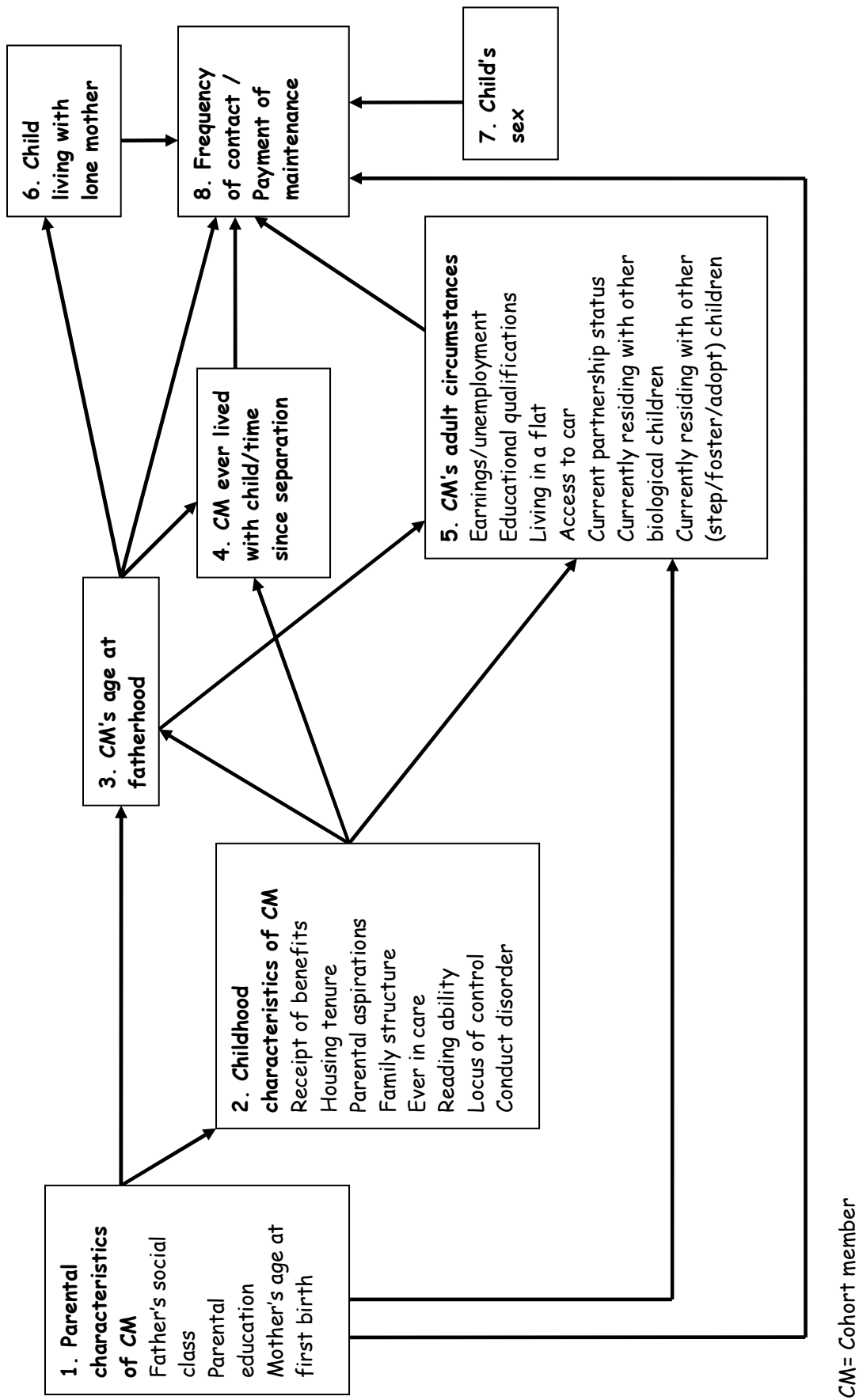


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

