Australian Government
Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Occasional Paper No. 42

New father figures and fathers who live elsewhere

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Australian Institute of Family Studies

Improving the lives of Australians

ISSN 1839-2334

ISBN – 978-1-921975-41-7

Acknowledgements

This paper uses unit record data from *Growing Up in Australia:* the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. The study is conducted in partnership between the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The findings and views reported in this paper are those of the authors and should not be attributed to FaHCSIA, AIFS or the ABS.

The authors wish the thank colleagues at AIFS and FaHCSIA for valuable comments on earlier drafts of this report.

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Executive summary

This report presents information about two ways in which children's lives may be complicated through the nature of their parents' relationships. One complexity examined is that of children having a new father figure, and the other is that of children having their own father living in another household. Findings from *Growing Up in Australia:* the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) provides opportunities not only to examine how common such experiences are, but also to explore the nature of parents' relationships and the lives of the children who have these experiences. Data from the first three waves of LSAC have been used throughout this report.

Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children is conducted in a partnership between the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The study aims to examine the impact of Australia's unique social, economic and cultural environment on children growing up in today's world. The study follows two cohorts of children who were selected from across Australia. Children in the B cohort ('babies' at Wave 1) were born between March 2003 and February 2004, and children in the K cohort ('kindergarten' at Wave 1) were born between March 1999 and February 2000. To date, data from three main waves of the survey are available—collected in 2004, 2006 and 2008. Combined, these two cohorts and three waves provide information on Australian families with children aged from 0 through to 9 years. At each wave, information from around 4,300 to 5,100 children is available for analysis, although sample numbers are smaller for analyses of particular items.

The first section of the report uses the LSAC data to focus on the extent to which children experience a new father figure moving into the family and the implications of such a transition for child wellbeing.

These analyses begin by exploring the extent to which children had already experienced parental relationship transitions between birth and the beginning of the LSAC study. These data show that only a minority of 0 to 1 year-old children had experienced any parental relationship transitions at Wave 1. Exposure to new father figures at this age was quite rare, with very few children living with stepfathers or having lived with other father figures since their birth. Such experiences were more common for the 4 to 5 year-old children. Nevertheless, only a small minority of children were living with a new father figure at Wave 1 of LSAC. For example, at age 4 to 5 years (K cohort), fewer than 2 per cent of these children had lived with a new father figure.

At the second and third waves of LSAC, a new father figure was said to be present when the child's mother had a co-resident male partner who had not been recorded as such in the previous wave. For both cohorts, 3 to 4 per cent of children had a new father figure move into the home between two consecutive waves of the study. In most cases, these transitions reflect the movement of a new partner into a lone-parent household, but, in a small number of households, this reflects a change in the partner of the child's mother between waves. One key finding from this report is that the presence of a new father figure did not mean the same thing in all families. Some 'new' father figures actually were the child's biological father moving into the home, with a transition into the home perhaps reflecting reconciliation or a joining of previously separate households.

While mothers' new partners are referred to in this report as 'new father figures', these new partners may not actually see themselves, or be seen by mothers or children, as father figures, especially early in a relationship. These analyses show that, among new father figures who had no biological relationship with the children, some were given the title of 'stepfather', while others were not. Also, some were married, while some were cohabiting. Given that the research literature suggests that cohabitation is a more fragile family form than marriage, this may be relevant in considering the stability of these new relationships.

Having a new father figure between waves of LSAC was more likely to occur in some families than in others. Not surprisingly, lone-mother families, especially where mothers were already in a non-live-in ('dating') relationship, had a much greater likelihood of having a new father figure than those in couple-parent families. Also, the analyses show that older mothers were less likely to re-partner between waves. On the other variables, the multivariate analyses predicting which families were likely to have a new father figure produce quite inconsistent findings.

In considering the possible outcomes for children of having a new father figure, it is of interest that, compared to couple-parent families, lone-parent families more often had characteristics that are generally considered to be risk factors for poorer child outcomes, such as lower levels of education and lower parental income. Also, compared to couple mothers, single mothers had poorer physical and mental health, were less likely to be employed, were less likely to be home owners, had lower family incomes and were more likely to have the children's grandparents or aunts/uncles in the household.

When these characteristics are compared for families before and after the presence of a new father figure, there is not much evidence of change in circumstances with respect to the subjective measures of financial wellbeing, mothers' parenting behaviours (warm or consistent parenting) or mental health. The differences that are most often apparent are a change in housing, such that families were more often living in a house that was owned or bought, and an increased number of step or half-siblings to the child.

An important question these analyses seek to answer is how children's wellbeing is affected by the presence of a new father figure. The analyses use the K cohort of LSAC to explore how changes in social-emotional, cognitive and physical outcomes are associated with the presence of a new father figure. These analyses use fixed effects models that take account of the risk factors as well as any unobserved 'fixed' or time invariant characteristics. These analyses only include those children most likely to have a new father figure—children in lone-parent families.

The findings of these analyses show that the majority of differences in child outcomes are not associated with having a new father figure *per se*. This suggests that the poorer outcomes for children in stepfamilies that have been reported in the literature may not be due so much to the presence of the new father figure, but instead may be related to pre-existing differences that predispose parents to be a lone parent in the first place—and perhaps to the experience of parental separation that leads to the formation of a single-parent family. There is one notable exception, with teachers indicating that the emotional and behavioural problems of children with new father figures increased between Waves 1 and 2, which is the crucial transition period to primary school (4 to 5 years to 6 to 7 years). This particular period in a child's life is accompanied by significant normative changes on the commencement of school, and the disruption of having a new father figure enter the household may be difficult for children to accommodate.

The non-significant findings for most outcome measures may reflect the relatively small numbers of children experiencing a new father figure and may also indicate that there is great diversity in the nature of the relationship between this new father figure and the child. As discussed above, some of these new father figures were the child's biological father, some were said to be stepfathers to the child, while some were neither. Some new father figures had married the child's mother, while others were in less formally defined relationships. The wide range of circumstances in which these new father figures entered the home might explain why simple associations between indicators of the presence of these men and children's outcomes were not apparent. The relatively small sample number of children having a new father figure precluded more detailed exploration.

As with the circumstances surrounding new father figures, considerable complexity and diversity are apparent when examining fathers living elsewhere. This is the focus of the second part of the report. Having a father living elsewhere was a more common situation for children than was having a new father figure. For example, at age 4 to 5 years (K cohort), 17 per cent of children had a father living elsewhere.

As many studies of fathering by non-resident fathers have included children from a broad age range, the ability of this study to focus on young children, some of them very young, enables us to see the different circumstances for non-resident fathers by the age of their children. This highlights the fact that, for the youngest children with non-resident fathers, the majority had never lived with their father. However, it is interesting that one in five of the non-resident fathers of these 0 to 1-year-olds had a relationship of some sort with the child's mother.

These analyses show that some non-resident fathers are quite often involved in children's lives, while, at the other end of the spectrum, there are fathers who are completely removed from their children's lives. In between, of course, are varying levels and patterns of contact. Also important to children who have fathers living elsewhere is the quality of parental relationships. A great deal of diversity is also apparent here, with some parents reporting that they had a good, collaborative parental relationship, while at the other extreme were those who had hostile or non-existent relationships.

The notion of 'involvement' can of course include different ways in which fathers can be active as a parent. Some non-resident fathers spend time with children and are involved in their day-to-day activities; others may contribute financially; others contribute a mix of time and money to help raise their child. Such details are explored throughout this report, from the mothers' as well as the non-resident fathers' perspectives.

To summarise the various ways in which non-resident fathers contribute, we include mother-reported information on the frequency of non-resident fathers' contact with the child (whether this is at least fortnightly), any financial contributions he made (through child support or informal means), and whether he was often consulted over child-rearing matters. The more common patterns are: (a) for none of these types of involvement to be evident; (b) for all of these types of involvement to be evident; or (c) for fathers to see their child fortnightly and contribute financially, but not be consulted often about child-rearing issues. The next largest group, as identified by these measures, is those who only contributed financially.

Mothers and fathers generally wished for more involvement by non-resident fathers. This was more often apparent in the responses of non-resident fathers than of mothers. While relationship tensions between parents appear to constitute part of the difficulty in allowing greater levels of involvement, other factors (such as distance between parents' residences and fathers' job demands) also contribute to the inability of fathers to increase the involvement they had with children.

These analyses demonstrate very clearly that non-resident fathers are not a homogeneous group with respect to their fathering behaviour. Some of the heterogeneity reflects different pathways into being non-resident fathers; in particular, with some non-resident fathers having always been completely removed from the role of father.

Throughout these analyses, one aspect explored is whether fathers who had never lived with their child differed in their fathering from those who had lived with their child. This is of interest with these data because a relatively high proportion of children with non-resident fathers had never lived with them. The older the children were, the more likely they were to have lived with their father, which reflects the outcome of relationship separations (marriages or cohabiting relationships) as children grow older. Children who had lived with their father did tend to have more contact with him after separation, and, compared to children who had never lived with their father, only a small proportion had very infrequent or no contact with him. For children who had never lived with their father, the proportion very rarely or never seeing him was particularly high for children aged 2 or more years.

One goal of these analyses was to explore the characteristics of families with non-resident fathers in order to contextualise their potential involvement with their children. These analyses show the relative socioeconomic disadvantages of both the mothers' and fathers' family situations. In both instances, these families are more likely to be faced with financial disadvantage and to include parents who are more likely to have health problems, be relatively young and have low education levels. In part, this indicates that parental separation or births to single mothers are more often associated with these characteristics.

The analysis of fathers living elsewhere has been enriched by the inclusion in LSAC of fathers who live apart from their children. Even though the non-resident fathers who participated in the study are not likely to include the more distant fathers, the information gained allows for comparisons of how mothers and fathers in these families view their circumstances. The analyses presented here only begin to make use of these data. Understanding of factors affecting children's wellbeing in these families, in particular, will be enhanced by having mothers' as well as fathers' perspectives on parenting issues.

Such experiences of children, of course, come about when the relationship between the biological mother and father is not established or breaks down, and children in these families may therefore face having a father living elsewhere as well as having a new father figure. In the analyses presented in this report, we have not considered these two factors together, and these analyses therefore understate the complexity of some children's lives. Nevertheless, these analyses present a picture of considerable diversity across children's arrangements, both in terms of relationships with a new father figure, who may be a biological father moving into the family, a stepfather or another male to whom a parent title is not attributed, and also across the degree and nature of contact with non-resident fathers.

This report set out to explore the circumstances of children's lives when they have new father figures or fathers living elsewhere. Two main things stand out from these analyses. The first is that children who have these experiences are, on average, more likely to be living in socioeconomically disadvantaged families, when compared to children living in intact families. This is likely to be important for children's outcomes in these families. The second is that there is very great diversity in how these families look, not only in their socioeconomic characteristics, but in the structure of family relationships, where applicable, with relationships with fathers living elsewhere. Recognition of this diversity is particularly important in considering how such families can best be supported to achieve optimal outcomes for children and their families.

1 Introduction

This research focuses on the fact that some children's lives are complicated by their exposure to their mother's new partner—a new father figure—and by having their own father living in another household. Findings from *Growing Up in Australia*: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) not only provide opportunities to examine how common such experiences are, but allow us to explore the nature of parents' relationships and the lives of the children who have these experiences.

While the majority of Australian children are born to two biological parents and remain living with these parents through their childhood, there is a substantial minority who experience other family arrangements during this period (de Vaus & Gray 2003). For example, some children live with only one biological parent from birth, while others experience the separation of their parents. As biological mothers are most often the primary care givers, it is usually fathers who live elsewhere in these families. Some separated mothers and fathers may reconcile after a period of separation, or they may form new relationships with other people, leading to children having step-parents. These different experiences of family life are all likely to be important to understanding what affects the wellbeing of children.

Exploration of these issues is particularly relevant in Australia today, especially given two key aspects of family life. One is that, even in families with young children, it is quite common for parents to be cohabiting but not married (Hayes, Weston, Qu & Gray 2010). This family form is, on average, less stable than marriage, meaning that children born to cohabiting parents may be at greater risk of living in a lone-parent household at some time during their childhood (de Vaus, Qu & Weston 2003). This may also mean that lone parents may more easily re-partner, and this too may influence children. The other relevant factor is that relationship dissolution is likely to affect a significant minority of couples, both married and cohabiting, including those with children (Hayes et al. 2010), resulting in many Australian children having their parents living in separate households.

This report focuses on fathers—both new father figures in a child's home and non-resident fathers. It brings together two sets of analyses of Australian data. In the first of these analyses, the focus is on the transitions of new father figures into the home. In the second, the focus is on fathers living elsewhere, or non-resident fathers. While these analyses are quite separate and are explored in different ways, they both provide insights into the ways in which family life can differ when children do not live with both biological parents through childhood. The analyses use the first three waves of LSAC and therefore focus on Australian families with young children (0 to 9 years).

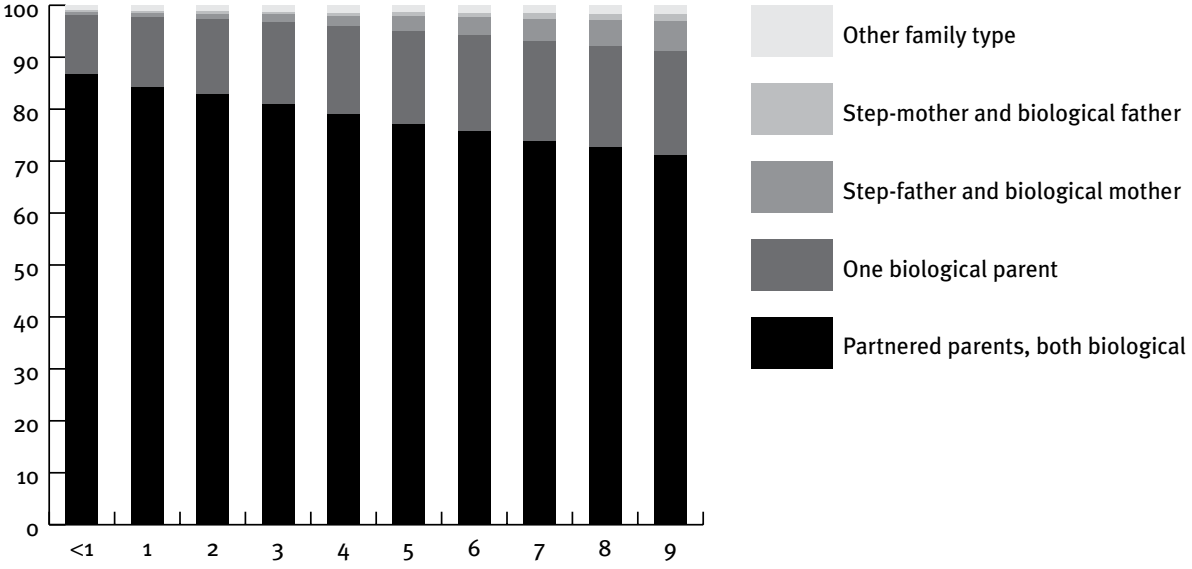
Australian Census data can be used to demonstrate the extent to which these experiences of different parental relationships may apply to young Australian children. Figure 1 shows that, at under 1 year old, 87 per cent of children live with either biological or adoptive parents, but by 9 years old, this has fallen to 71 per cent. At each age, and increasing over the ages, a substantial minority of children live with only one parent (11 per cent of under 1-year-olds up to 20 per cent of 9-year-olds). Smaller percentages live with a step-parent, with most of these living with stepfathers rather than stepmothers.

In the context of this research, having a non-resident father is likely to apply to a number of children, and the likelihood increases among older children as parental relationships break down.

The relatively small proportion of children living with a step-parent suggests that having a new father figure is less widespread, particularly when children are very young. Nevertheless, it is also possible, given that these data are cross-sectional, that children's experience of having a new father figure may be more common when considered over a different time frame. De Vaus and Gray (2003) examined Australian children's experiences of parental relationship transitions during childhood, highlighting the value of taking a longitudinal perspective rather than a cross-sectional one. They showed, for example, that 5-year-old children born between 1990 and 1995 had, averaged over all children, spent 87 per cent of their first five years living with both parents, 3 per cent in a stepfamily, and 11 per cent in a lone-parent family.

These analyses will focus only on children who live with their mother. A very small proportion of children do not live with their mother,[1] but these families are not represented in sufficient numbers in LSAC to allow analyses to cover them in this report.

Figure 1: Family type by age of child, children aged up to 9 years



Note: Biological parents include adoptive parents.
Source: Australian Census 2006, (one per cent sample CD–ROM)

The formation of new parental relationships and the presence of a new father figure may change the context within which children are being raised. For example, there may be changes in the children's relationships with their biological parent and the new parental figure, perhaps through shifts in the style of parenting they receive or through more tangible shifts, such as changes in housing and income levels. One of the important aspects of this paper, then, is to examine the extent to which children experience the re-partnering of their mother through the early years of their childhood. LSAC provides a useful set of data for such analyses, given the detailed relationship histories collected, as well as the capacity to detect parental relationship transitions that occur across the first three waves of the study. The first section of the report examines the extent to which children experience a new father moving into the family, along with characteristics associated with the likelihood of experiencing this transition. Further analyses then explore how children's outcomes vary if they have a new father figure move into the family.

The second section of this report then turns to non-resident fathers, to gain insights into fathering by non-resident fathers from this large sample of young children. In examining how fathering varies, we consider, in particular, the relationship histories between the non-resident fathers and resident mothers. Along with the characteristics of mothers and non-resident fathers, these relationship histories provide further understanding of the lives of children who have non-resident fathers. While much of the analyses in this section are based upon reports of mothers—the children's primary carers—we also incorporate information collected from non-resident fathers. This is one of the very great strengths of these LSAC data for analyses of these families.

These two aspects of family relationships—new father figures and fathers living elsewhere—are analysed and presented separately, and the relevant literature and data descriptions can be found in more detail in those sections. An overview of the LSAC data follows on from there, after which the two analytical sections are presented, and the report concludes with an overall discussion of the research findings.

2 The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children is conducted in a partnership between the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The study aims to examine the impact of Australia's unique social, economic and cultural environment on children growing up in today's world. The essential focus of LSAC is on children's lives, and therefore the child is the primary sampling unit of interest.

The study follows two cohorts of children who were selected from across Australia. Children in the B cohort ('babies' at Wave 1) were born between March 2003 and February 2004, and children in the K cohort ('kindergarten' at Wave 1) were born between March 1999 and February 2000. To date, data from three main waves of the survey are available, collected in 2004, 2006 and 2008.

Retention rates have been around 90 per cent from Waves 1 to 2 and 95 to 97 per cent from Waves 2 to 3, meaning the Wave 3 sample comprises around 86 per cent of the original Wave 1 sample. This attrition across waves has meant that the responding sample has some biases—being more likely to consist of couple parents, of higher education levels, for example. Sample weights have been designed to adjust sample estimates to take account of these and a range of other differences in the responding sample (Sipthorp & Misson 2009).

Sample weights are not adjusted to take account of non-response to particular instruments, such as the self-completion questionnaire, or of other item non-response. Table 1 shows the smaller numbers of self-completion questionnaires relative to the total numbers of responding families.

Table 1: LSAC sample size, B and K cohorts, Waves 1 to 3

	B cohort			K cohort		
	0–1 year in 2004 (Wave 1)	2–3 years in 2006 (Wave 2)	4–5 years in 2008 (Wave 3)	4–5 years in 2004 (Wave 1)	6–7 years in 2006 (Wave 2)	8–9 years in 2008 (Wave 3)
Total families	5,107	4,606	4,386	4,983	4,464	4,331
% of Wave 1 sample		90.2	85.9		89.6	86.9
Self-complete data from Parent 1 (primary carer)	4,341	3,536	3,831	4,229	3,495	3,807
Self-complete data from Parent 2	3,696	3,128	2,753	3,388	2,949	2,680

Note: In Wave 3, most of what was previously done in the Parent 1 self-completion mail-back questionnaire was done instead in a self-completion questionnaire while the interviewer was present.

The sampling frame for LSAC was created using the Health Insurance Commission's (HIC) Medicare database, a comprehensive database of Australia's population. Using the database, a stratified sample of postcodes was generated, a sample of children selected and their families invited to participate in the study. The final sample, comprising 54 per cent of these families, was broadly representative of Australian children (AIFS 2005). For a detailed description of the design of LSAC, see Gray and Smart (2009). In multivariate analyses, survey procedures were used that adjusted standard errors to take account of the stratified nature of the LSAC sample.

For each family, parents were asked to nominate one parent as the 'primary carer' (shown in Table 1 as Parent 1): that is, the parent who knew the most about the child. In most families, parents nominated the mother as the primary carer. This parent then provides an extensive set of data about their child and about themselves, and

also, on some items, about the other parent. Interview and self-complete questionnaires are used to collect this information. In couple families, the other resident parent is also asked to complete a questionnaire containing a large amount of information, particularly relating to parenting practices and different measures of wellbeing.

LSAC has been designed so that the study child is the main focus of the study. Reports from different respondents are sought in order to obtain information about the child's behaviour in differing contexts. Information is collected from the child (using physical measurement, cognitive testing and, depending upon the age of the child, interviewing), the parents who live with the child (biological, adoptive or step-parents), home-based and centre-based carers for preschool children who are regularly in non-parental care, and teachers (for school-aged children). From Wave 2, information has also been obtained from parents who live apart from their child but who still have contact with the child.

In addition to the interview and self-completion questionnaire, data are also collected in children's time use diaries, and other data are matched from administrative sources and aggregate Census data. These data have not been used in these analyses.

Each section of the report presents further information about the samples used in those analyses, addressing the derivation of the in-scope sample, the measures used and issues of attrition and non-response.

3 New father figures and child wellbeing

3.1 Introduction

This section of the report focuses on the extent to which children experience a new father figure moving into the family and the implications of such a transition for child wellbeing.

Interest in this subject stems in part from concerns about the impact on children of their experiences of parents' relationship transitions. While this question is most often analysed with respect to separating parents (for example, Amato 2010; Kelly & Emery 2003; Whiteside & Becker 2000), there are other changes in parental relationships that also need to be taken into account. For example, US research into fragile families (using the Fragile Families study) has highlighted the fact that children exposed to more parental relationship transitions during early childhood are subject to more parenting stress and harsh parenting (Beck, Cooper, McLanahan & Brooks-Gunn 2010). Osborne and McLanahan (2007), also using these data, found that experience of parental relationship transitions, especially multiple transitions, between a child's birth and age 3 years was associated with more anxious/depressive and aggressive behaviour at age 3 years. They also found that this association was accounted for by higher levels of maternal stress and poor parenting, highlighting the importance of parenting behaviour in explaining how parental relationship transitions may affect children's wellbeing.

Changes in parenting style or behaviour that may accompany re-partnering are just one way that children may be affected by the re-partnering of their mother. Having a new father figure may involve other changes, perhaps an increase in household income or a move to a different house. Such changes, even if they result in a higher standard of living, may be stressful, especially if they involve moving to a different locality. Changes in the nature of relationships within the household may add further stresses, due to the presence not only of a new father figure, but possibly also of his own children. Such stressors are commonly evaluated in analyses of stepfamilies (or blended families) that are formed when a new father figure joins the family. (For reviews, refer to Hetherington, Bridges & Insabella 1998; Osborne & McLanahan 2007; Sweeney 2010.)

The limited Australian research on children growing up in stepfamilies mirrors the findings of international research, suggesting that, on a wide array of educational, cognitive, emotional and behavioural outcomes, these children do not fare as well as children living with two biological parents (Baxter & Smart 2010). They do, however, fare better than children living in sole-parent families (Artis 2007; Barrett & Turner 2005; Brown 2004; DeLeire & Kalil 2002; Hawkins, Amato & King 2007; Hofferth 2006; Manning & Lamb 2003; Sweeney 2007; Sweeney, Wang & Videon 2009; Weston & Hughes 1999; Wise & Edwards 2005).

An important consideration, when examining the outcomes for children whose parents have separated or re-partnered, is that parents who have these experiences, especially while children are very young, are not representative of all parents of young children. They tend to have characteristics that may predispose them to having more unstable relationships, as well as having more difficulties in parenting. It may be these characteristics, and not the re-partnering itself, that explain differences in children's wellbeing compared to children living in stable couple families. These are often referred to as 'selection effects' and need to be taken into account when evaluating possible links between parental relationship transitions and children's wellbeing. The analysis of new father figures presented here, therefore, also examines the families in which parental relationship transitions are likely to occur, taking into account the mothers' relationship status as well as a range of maternal and family characteristics. Analyses of how children's wellbeing varies when a new father figure moves into the home are undertaken using an approach that helps to take account of these possible selection effects.

Throughout these analyses, we focus on children who live with their mother, which is the majority of young children. Further, our focus is on the family circumstances within the mothers' households. The analyses, therefore, do not fully capture the complexity of relationships that a child may have with other family members. In particular, for children with a father living elsewhere, we do not fully examine the children's relationships with this father or with any other family members in his household. We are therefore understating the complexity of

some children's lives, especially those who live part of the time with their non-resident fathers (Hetherington & Clingempeel 1992; Howden 2007; Qu & Weston 2005). Section 4 of this report, which focuses on non-resident fathers, presents some information on these other relationships.

This section of the report is structured as follows. Section 3.2 discusses the LSAC data used throughout the analyses. Section 3.3 then uses the Wave 1 data to describe children's experiences of parental relationship transitions from their birth to the time of that interview and to examine how characteristics of families vary according to different parental relationship forms. Section 3.4 then uses the three waves of LSAC to describe the parental relationship transitions between those waves, with a focus on the extent to which children experience a new father figure. In Section 3.5, this is examined more closely to analyse which family or parental characteristics might be associated with there being a new father figure over these waves. Section 3.6 then turns to the important question of whether children's wellbeing differs when they experience parental relationship transitions, again with a focus on those who experience a new father figure. Finally, the section concludes with a summary of the findings.

3.2 Data and measures used

The sample

These analyses use data from the B and K cohorts in Waves 1 to 3 of LSAC (see Section 2).

Some of the descriptive analyses focus only on Wave 1 of LSAC, and, for these analyses, the entire sample was used in which Parent 1 (the primary carer) was the child's biological or adoptive mother. Throughout the remainder of this analysis, for simplicity, these mothers are referred to as 'biological mothers'.

Cases were excluded if Parent 1 was the child's father, as these analyses make considerable use of the reports made by Parent 1, which were not comparable if reported by fathers rather than mothers. Other cases were excluded because of the existence of more complex family relationships, which we did not wish to examine in this report. Specifically, cases were excluded from these analyses if Parent 1 was the child's foster-mother or stepmother, grandmother or aunt. Additional cases were excluded in which Parent 2 was not a male partner of Parent 1. Among these exclusions were same-sex couples, as well as cases in which the person identified as Parent 2 was an aunt or uncle to the child, or reported to be related to the child's mother in a way that indicated a non-romantic relationship between Parent 1 and Parent 2. See Table 2 for the numbers excluded.

Table 2: Analytical sample for Wave 1 analyses, B and K cohorts

	B cohort, Wave 1	K cohort, Wave 1
	N	
Total original sample size (Wave 1)	**5,107**	**4,983**
Excluded cases		
Parent 1 is child's father	74	144
Female Parent 1 is not a biological or adoptive parent	10	19
Parent 2 is not a male partner of Parent 1	5	6
Sample remaining	**5,018**	**4,814**

For the analyses of family transitions across the three waves, results apply only to families participating in the study at all three waves. For these analyses, also, the sample was limited to families in which Parent 1 remained the same person at each wave and to those in which the relationship between Parent 1 and her male partner could be said to be romantic. Table 3 shows the numbers of cases that were excluded under each of these restrictions. The resulting sample size for analysis was 4,102 cases for the B cohort and 3,943 cases for the K cohort.

Throughout the analyses, and especially when incorporating detailed personal or family characteristics, or child outcomes, the sample sizes may be lower than those shown here, due to missing data on specific items.

Table 3: Analytical sample for cross-wave analyses, B and K cohorts, Waves 1 to 3

	B cohort, cross-wave sample	K cohort, cross-wave sample
	N	
Total original in-scope sample (Wave 1)	**5,018**	**4,814**
Excluded cases		
Family not present in Waves 2 and/or 3	833	744
Parent 1 at Wave 2 or 3 is different to Parent 1 in Wave 1	76	111
Parent 2 is not a male partner of Parent 1	7	16
Sample remaining for cross-wave analyses	**4,102**	**3,943**

Survey attrition and bias

A key concern is whether the sample responding to the three waves of LSAC differs to that responding to just the first wave. Analyses of survey attrition lead us to expect that non-response following Wave 1 may be more apparent for the more 'fragile' families, and we therefore may be underestimating the experience of parental transitions in the broader population (Sipthorp & Misson 2009). The LSAC sample weights, used throughout these analyses, help to address this to some extent.

Appendix Table A1 shows that families who remained in the sample for three waves were more likely to be married at Wave 1, although the differences were not considerable, with a significant proportion in the cross-wave sample having been single at Wave 1. Similarly, distributions on a range of other sociodemographic items were similar in the cross-wave sample to the Wave 1 sample as a whole. These results suggest that limiting the sample to those present in three waves may not be significantly affected by the loss of those non-respondents to Waves 2 and 3.

Measuring the presence of a new father figure

The main focus of this analysis is on the partnership status of the child's mother, which is used to determine whether a new partner, or a new 'father figure', has entered the household. The derivation of this measure of partnership status is therefore crucial for these analyses. At each wave, LSAC defines partnership status based on usual residence within the household. Respondents at Wave 1 were asked about who lived in the household, and relationships between household members were identified. Household members who are temporarily away from home for reasons such as work are included, and therefore parents are recorded as being partnered even if their partner is temporarily absent for these reasons. At Waves 2 and 3, any new household members were identified, as were those who had left the household, and relationships between household members were updated. These data can therefore identify changes in household composition from one wave to the next. They cannot identify any temporary changes that occurred between waves.

Using these data, then, a new father figure was said to be present when a person was recorded as a partner to the child's mother in one wave who had not been recorded as such in the previous wave. In most cases, these transitions reflect the movement of a new partner into a lone-parent household, but, in a small number of households, this reflects a change in the partner of the child's mother between waves.

No instructions were given regarding how part-time household residents were to be recorded, and so, if they have been included, they are not distinguished in these data from those who live full-time in the household. This may be an important point, as the boundaries that define cohabitation are not as clear as they are for marriage, especially in relation to part-time cohabitation (Knab & McLanahan 2006; Teitler, Reichman & Koball 2006). In particular, as new relationships form, there may be a period of transition as partners regularly spend some time

together without formally living together. In such circumstances, it is not clear at what stage mothers would report a new partner to be a usual resident of the household.

Because the focus in this report is on who is resident in the household, 'dating' relationships are not included in these analyses to the same extent as co-residential relationships, although some figures are presented.

These analyses will show that some 'new' father figures actually are the child's biological father moving into the home, with a transition into the home perhaps reflecting reconciliation or a joining of previously separate households. This reflects the fact that relationship trajectories are dynamic and often involve multiple transitions, especially in cohabiting families (see, for example, Binstock and Thornton 2003, for an analysis of young adults' relationship transitions). Therefore, the parental relationship observed at one point in time does not necessarily indicate a stable situation.

An important point to raise here is that, while mothers' new partners are referred to here as 'new father figures', these new partners may not actually see themselves, or be seen by mothers or children, as 'fathers', especially early in a relationship. Research on stepfamilies, for example, has shown that stepmothers and stepfathers can be somewhat reluctant to take on this title (Marsiglio 2004). When this occurs in LSAC (when new partners are not reported to be biological, adopted, foster, step or undefined parents of the child), the study only collects basic demographic information about these men, and information about their relationship with, or parenting of, the children is not collected. While these men are included as 'new father figures' throughout this section of the report, we are unable to examine the characteristics of new father figures because of the unavailability of information for those who are not reported to be parent figures.

Other variables

Throughout these analyses, a number of family or parental characteristics are incorporated. The key variables used are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Description of variables used in the analyses

Variable	Values	Notes
Mother's characteristics		
Age	Mean years, continuous	
Self-reported health	Five-point scale recoded to: 1 = Fair or poor 0 = Good, very good or excellent	This variable was dichotomised, which is a standard approach and consistent with prior analyses of the LSAC data (e.g. Baxter, Gray, Alexander, Strazdins & Bittman 2006; Baxter and Smart 2010).
Mental health	Mean score, range 1 to 5, treated as continuous	Score on the Kessler K6 Depression scale (Kessler et al. 2002), mean of 6 items. A higher score equates to better mental health.
Employment status	1 = Employed 0 = Not employed	Derived from information about parent's work situation. 'Not employed' includes mothers who are not in the labour force and are unemployed.
Education	1 = More than secondary education 0 = Secondary only or less than secondary	Mothers who did not complete Year 12 but had a certificate/diploma are coded as 'secondary only or less than secondary'.
Individual income	Mean $ per week (before tax), continuous	Includes income from all sources.
Family or household characteristics		
Total parental income	Mean $ per week (before tax), continuous	Includes income from all sources, only for resident parents.
Age of youngest child	Mean years, continuous	
Number of children in the household	Mean count, continuous.	Number of siblings of the study child in the household, plus the study child (includes step, half and foster-siblings of the study child).
Child with disability in the household	1 = Yes 0 = No	One or more children in the household has a disability or medical condition.
Child's grandparent or aunt /uncle in the household	1 = Yes 0 = No	Study child lives with a grandparent, aunt or uncle.
Housing tenure	1 = Owned/mortgaged 0 = Renting or other	'Other', for example, includes boarding.
Region	1 = Ex-metropolitan 0 = Metropolitan	Region in which family lives.

Children's outcomes are introduced in Section 3.6, where those analyses are presented.

Methods

LSAC sample weights have been used throughout the analyses in the calculation of means and percentages (see Section 2 regarding sample weight calculations).

In addition to descriptive analyses, multivariate analyses are used for two key areas. The first is in the analyses of which factors were related to families having a new father figure between Waves 1 and 2 or between Waves 2 and 3. The method used is described in Section 3.5. Secondly, Section 3.6 presents multivariate analyses of children's outcomes, according to whether they had a new father figure. Again, the methods are described fully in that section.

As appropriate, statistical tests have been used to assess the level of significance in differences across groups. Unweighted data were used in conducting these tests. Chi-square tests were used to compare distributions across groups. T-tests were used to compare two means, using paired t tests to compare the means across two groups. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to assess whether means varied across more than two groups.

3.3 Children's living arrangements from birth to Wave 1

We begin by exploring the extent to which children may have already experienced parental relationship transitions between birth and the beginning of the LSAC study. The analyses here are limited to the Wave 1 data. For children aged 0 to 1 year at Wave 1, clearly, very little time had elapsed between their birth and Wave 1, and so these children were quite unlikely to have experienced many parental relationship transitions in the form of separations, reconciliation or re-partnering of their parents. For children at age 4 to 5 years, there was more opportunity for such transitions to have occurred, and it is therefore particularly important to gain an understanding of their background before looking ahead to the transitions that occurred between Waves 1, 2 and 3.

Figure 1 on page 2, using the 2006 Census, shows that the majority of young Australian children lived in two-parent families with their biological parents, but that from birth onwards there was an increasing likelihood of children living in a single-parent family or with a step-parent. These data suggest that only a minority of children may have had a change in family circumstances that resulted in their living with a new father figure, even by age 4 to 5 years.

Table 5 shows the different family types of children at Wave 1, when the B cohort children were 0 to 1 years, and the K cohort were 4 to 5 years. By design, all children in this sample were living with their biological mother. In this table, stepfathers include residential partners of the child's mother, regardless of whether the family identifies them as 'father figures'. As expected, the table shows that the majority of children in both cohorts lived with both biological parents (89 per cent of 0 to 1-year-olds and 83 per cent of 4 to 5-year-olds). In most of these families, the majority of children were living with two married parents (71 per cent of 0 to 1-year-olds and 73 per cent of 4 to 5-year-olds). Interestingly, a higher percentage of the 0 to 1 year-old children had cohabiting parents (19 per cent) compared to 4 to 5 year-old children (9 per cent). The lower proportion at age 4 to 5 years may indicate that some parents who were cohabiting early in the child's life had ended their relationship, while others will have married by the time the child was aged 4 to 5 years.

Table 5: Parental relationship status, B and K cohorts, Wave 1

	B cohort (0–1 year)		K cohort (4–5 years)	
	%	*N*	%	*N*
Both biological parents	89.1	4,531	82.5	4,034
Married	70.6	3,624	73.1	3,607
Cohabiting	18.5	907	9.4	427
Two parents, with stepfather	0.2	12	2.8	125
Married	0.0	1	0.8	37
Cohabiting	0.2	11	2.0	88
Lone mother	10.7	475	14.7	655
Has non-live-in relationship	2.9	124	3.6	156
With the child's father	2.3	95	0.9	40
No non-live-in relationship	7.8	351	11.1	499
Total	**100.0**	**5,018**	**100.0**	**4,814**

Note: Includes only children living with a biological mother. Biological parents include adoptive parents. Stepfathers include those reported to be unrelated males.

Of the remaining children in each cohort, most were living in a single-mother family (11 per cent of 0 to 1-year-olds and 15 per cent of 4 to 5-year-olds). In Table 5, lone mothers are further classified according to whether or not they had a non-live-in relationship with someone, and, in both cohorts, lone mothers more often reported that they did not have such a relationship. Interestingly, especially among mothers of 0 to 1-year-olds, a significant number of those reporting to have a non-live-in relationship had a relationship with the child's father (95 out of 124 respondents in the B cohort, and 40 out of 156 respondents in the K cohort).

This leaves just a small number of children in each cohort who were, at Wave 1, living with a stepfather—here including those fathers defined as an unrelated male to the child. The number was negligible for 0 to 1-year-olds (< 1 per cent), and, among 4 to 5-year-olds, 3 per cent were living with a stepfather.

For children living with both biological parents at Wave 1, no information is available on whether any parental relationship transitions occurred between birth and this time. Such transitions may have occurred if parents separated but reconciled within this time frame. The primary carer in these families was asked if she had lived with the child since birth and also asked how long she had lived with her partner (the child's father). These data reveal that almost all (< 99 per cent) of the mothers reported always living with their child and with their partner since the birth of the child. No specific questions were asked about temporary separations.

For children living only with their biological mother, compared to those living with two parents, there was a greater likelihood that they had experienced the separation of their parents, although some children will have never lived with their father (Table 6). Eight per cent of 0 to 1-year-olds and 3 per cent of 4 to 5-year-olds had not experienced any parental relationship transitions, since they were living with a single mother and had never lived with their father or any other father figure. Another 2 per cent of 0 to 1 year-old children had experienced their parents' separation, but had not lived with any other father figure. For the 4 to 5 year-old children, not surprisingly, this figure is higher, at 10 per cent of children.

A small number of 0 to 1 and 4 to 5 year-old children had had new father figures since birth (< 1 per cent and < 2 per cent respectively), with most of these children having never lived with their biological father.

Table 6: Parental relationship transitions between birth and Wave 1, B and K cohorts

	B cohort (0–1 year)		K cohort (4–5 years)	
	%	*N*	%	*N*
No transitions				
Only biological parents since birth (assumed from currently living with two biological parents)	89.3	4,509	85.1	4,015
Only one biological parent since birth	7.9	349	3.4	135
One or more transitions				
Parents separated since birth, but no new father figure	2.4	103	10.2	447
Parents separated since birth, and has had new father figure/s	0.0	1	0.3	12
Never with father, but had new father figure/s	0.5	23	1.2	50
Total	**100.0**	**4,985**	**100.0**	**4,659**

Note: Includes only children living with a biological mother since birth.

To summarise, these data show that, for 0 to 1 year-old children at Wave 1, only a minority had experienced any parental relationship transitions. Exposure to new father figures at this age was quite rare, with very few living with stepfathers or having lived with other father figures since their birth. Such experiences were more likely for the 4 to 5 year-old children, especially in regard to having had their parents separate.

Mothers' initial relationship status, as explored in this section, is important in considering possible future relationship transitions, especially that of re-partnering, which would result in a new father figure. We would expect little re-partnering between waves for mothers who were married at the earlier wave, although this is not impossible. Given the more unstable nature of cohabiting relationships, we might expect cohabiting mothers to have a somewhat greater chance of re-partnering, compared to married mothers. However, we expect those with the greatest likelihood of re-partnering to be lone parents, and this might be especially so for those already in a non-live-in relationship at an earlier wave.

Before turning to the analyses of parental relationship transitions between waves, this section presents some of the characteristics of the families according to mothers' Wave 1 relationship status. This shows there is already some selection into the various family types, which has implications when considering how re-partnering and, consequently, the introduction of new father figures may be associated with variation in child wellbeing. In Table 7 (for 0 to 1-year-olds) and Table 8 (for 4 to 5-year-olds), the characteristics of couple families are compared to those of single-mother families.

Findings were similar for 0 to 1 year-old and 4 to 5 year-old children. Compared to couple mothers, single mothers had poorer physical and mental health, were less likely to be employed, had lower levels of education, were less likely to be home owners and were more likely to have the children's grandparents or aunts/uncles in the household. Single mothers had higher average personal incomes compared to partnered mothers, but the average total parental income in their households was significantly lower. Single mothers were more often living in ex-metropolitan regions than were partnered mothers. Among mothers of 4 to 5 year-old children, single mothers were more likely than partnered mothers to report having a child with a disability in the household, and single mothers had somewhat older children and fewer children in the family.

Table 7: Sample characteristics by parents' relationship status, B cohort, Wave 1

Families with 0–1 year-old children	Married or cohabiting parents	Single mothers	All families with 0–1 -year-olds	Compare partnered and single	Sample size
		%			
Mother's self-reported health (fair/poor)	7.5	15.9	8.3	***	4,236
Mother's employment status (employed)	50.4	21.6	47.3	***	5,007
Mother's education (more than secondary education)	49.4	17.6	46.0	***	5,015
Child with disability in the household	2.6	3.6	2.7		5,018
Child's grandparent or aunt /uncle in the household	5.7	30.3	8.3	***	5,018
Housing tenure (owned/mortgaged)	68.4	11.1	62.3	***	5,011
Region (ex-metropolitan)	32.8	39.3	33.5	**	5,018
		Mean			
Mother's age (years)	31.3	27.4	30.9	***	5,017
Mother's mental health (1 to 5, higher is better mental health)	4.43	4.18	4.40	***	4,243
Mother's income ($ per week, before tax)	313	429	326	***	4,516
Total parental income ($ per week, before tax)	1,191	429	1,109	***	4,703
Age of youngest child (years)	0.2	0.2	0.2		5,018
Number of children	2.0	2.0	2.0		5,018
Number of observations	**4,543**	**475**	**5,018**		

Note: Includes only children living with a biological mother. Significance of comparison between partnered and single families tested using chi-square for categorical variables and t-test for continuous variables. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 8: Sample characteristics by parents' relationship status, K cohort, Wave 1

Families with 0–1 year-old children	Married or cohabiting parents	Single mothers	All families with 0–1 -year-olds	Compare partnered and single	Sample size
		%			
Mother's self-reported health (fair/poor)	8.6	16.3	9.6	***	4,067
Mother's employment status (employed)	57.4	41.0	55.0	***	4,804
Mother's education (more than secondary education)	41.0	17.2	37.5	***	4,810
Child with disability in the household	5.0	12.7	6.1	***	4,814
Child's grandparent or aunt/uncle in the household	4.5	11.2	5.5	***	4,814
Housing tenure (owned/mortgaged)	75.4	26.4	68.2	***	4,806
Region (ex-metropolitan)	34.9	44.3	36.3	***	4,814
		Mean			
Mother's age (years)	34.8	32.4	34.5	***	4,812
Mother's mental health (1 to 5, higher is better mental health)	4.34	4.03	4.30	***	4,071
Mother's income ($ per week, before tax)	394	526	414	***	4,267
Total parental income ($ per week, before tax)	1,299	526	1,183	***	4,410
Age of youngest child (years)	2.9	3.4	2.9	***	4,814
Number of children	2.5	2.3	2.5	***	4,814
Number of observations	**4,159**	**655**	**4,814**		

Note: Includes only children living with a biological mother. Significance of comparison between partnered and single families tested using chi-square for categorical variables and t-test for continuous variables. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

3.4 New father figures, Waves 1 to 3

The three waves of LSAC are now used to examine to what extent children experience new father figures across these years of their childhood. Clearly, this is not the only transition that can occur within the family, with the more likely one being a parental separation that results, usually, in the father's leaving the family home. However, the focus here is on transitions into the home, to allow us to examine associations between such transitions and children's outcomes.

As discussed previously, a child was identified as having a new father figure when the mother lived with a partner in Wave 2 (or Wave 3) who had not been identified as her partner in the previous wave. This information is based on usual residence of the partner of Parent 1, so new non-residential partners (or boyfriends) are not counted as being new father figures.

Table 9 shows parental relationship status at each wave, in particular showing the proportions of children in Waves 2 and 3 who had a new father figure. For both cohorts, between Waves 1 and 2, and between Waves 2 and 3, 3 to 4 per cent of children had a new father figure move into the home. In the next section, we examine these families more closely, in particular to determine whether the presence of a new father figure represented a transition from a lone-parent family in the previous wave, or a change from one male partner to another in couple families.

Table 9: Parental relationship across waves, B and K cohorts, Waves 1 to 3

	B cohort			K cohort		
	Wave 1 0–1 year	Wave 2 2–3 years	Wave 3 4–5 years	Wave 1 4–5 years	Wave 2 6–7 years	Wave 3 8–9 years
	%			%		
Lives with two parents	91.7	89.7	85.7	87.4	86.8	84.2
Mother and father are the same as in previous wave	n.a	86.4	83.1	n.a	82.8	81.0
Same mother but new father figure since previous wave	n.a	3.3	2.6	n.a	4.0	3.2
Lives only with mother	8.3	10.3	14.2	12.6	13.2	15.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	**4,102**	**4,102**	**4,102**	**3,943**	**3,943**	**3,943**

Note: Includes only children present in all three waves of LSAC, and who lived with their biological mother at each wave. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding.

Focusing just on the 'new' partners, as identified in Table 9, Table 10 shows that, in the B cohort at Wave 2, more than half of these 'new' partners were actually the child's biological parent (54 per cent).[2] This may indicate that some mothers had maintained a non-live-in relationship with the child's father during the early part of the child's life, or that the parents separated for a period but had reconciled by Wave 2. Other new partners were reported to be a parent (a step-parent or unspecified parental relationship), bringing the total of these new father figures reporting to be a parent to 77 per cent. The remainder were reported to have a non-parental relationship with the child. This may indicate that mothers may prefer not to designate their new partners as the child's parent until the relationship is formalised by marriage or a longer term cohabiting relationship.

In the older K cohort at Wave 2, compared to the B cohort, fewer (22 per cent) of the mothers' new partners at Wave 2 were the child's biological parent, and, in total, 50 per cent of these new partners were said to be a parent. The remaining 50 per cent were said to have a non-parental relationship with the child.

For the mothers' new partners entering the family between Waves 2 and 3, the majority were actually reported to be a parent at Wave 3, with more than half reported to be stepfathers. A higher proportion of the 'new' fathers were the child's biological father in the B cohort, compared to the K cohort, while in the K cohort, a higher proportion were reported to be unrelated adults.

Table 10: New partner's relationship to child, B and K cohorts, Waves 2 and 3

	New father figure in Wave 2		New father figure in Wave 3	
	B cohort (2–3 years)	K cohort (6–7 years)	B cohort (4–5 years)	K cohort (8-9 years)
	%		%	
Parent	76.8	50.4	83.6	70.6
Biological father	53.7	21.7	29.9	13.9
Stepfather	11.4	22.0	53.7	56.7
Parent, relationship unidentified	11.7	6.7	n.a.	n.a.
Unrelated male	23.2	49.6	16.4	29.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	**109**	**136**	**89**	**102**

Note: Includes only children present in all three waves of LSAC and who lived with their biological mother at each wave. See footnote 2 for details about changes to the relationship codes between Waves 2 and 3. 'Unrelated male' includes those recorded to be a boarder/housemate to child, yet coded as being in a cohabiting relationship with, or married to, the mother.

Table 11 summarises the relationship status of mothers at each wave of LSAC, to allow identification of different types of transitions across these waves. This table shows that 86 per cent of mothers in the B cohort were partnered in all three waves, and 5 per cent were single in all three waves, with the balance (9 per cent) experiencing one or more transitions in relationship status. For the K cohort, somewhat fewer were partnered at all three waves (81 per cent), while more were single at all three waves (8 per cent). In this cohort, 11 per cent experienced one or more relationship transitions between single and partnered status.

Table 11: Parental relationship transitions across Waves 1 to 3

			B cohort		K cohort	
Wave 1	**Wave 2**	**Wave 3**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**
Partnered	Partnered	Partnered	85.6	3,513	80.7	3,230
Partnered	Partnered	Single	3.7	151	3.6	135
Partnered	Single	Partnered	1.1	45	0.7	24
Partnered	Single	Single	2.3	93	2.5	103
Single	Partnered	Partnered	1.6	67	2.8	100
Single	Partnered	Single	0.5	20	0.7	23
Single	Single	Partnered	0.6	25	1.6	58
Single	Single	Single	4.6	188	7.5	270
Total responding to three waves			100.0	4,102	100.0	3,943
New father figure Wave 1 to Wave 2 (single to partnered)			2.1	87	3.5	123
New father figure Wave 2 to Wave 3 (single to partnered)			1.7	70	2.3	82
Other partner to partner transitions from Waves 1 to 2 or Waves 2 to 3			0.5	22	0.5	20

Note: Includes only children present in all three waves of LSAC and who lived with their biological mother at each wave. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding.

The single-to-partnered transitions, either between Waves 1 and 2 or between Waves 2 and 3, are also shown in the table. This transition indicates that a new father figure moved into a previously single-parent family. In the B cohort, 2.1 per cent (87 mothers) had a new partner between Waves 1 and 2, and another 1.7 per cent (70 mothers) had a new partner between Waves 2 and 3. In the K cohort, this transition occurred for 3.5 per cent of mothers (123 mothers) between Waves 1 and 2, and 2.3 per cent of mothers (82 mothers) between Waves 2 and 3.

As shown in Table 10 and discussed above, some of the single-to-partnered transitions actually involved a new partnership with the child's father.

Another way for new father figures to enter the family is when mothers change partners between waves. These are not observed in the cross-wave transitions in Table 11, since they are a subset of those partnered in one wave and also partnered in the next wave. Additional analyses of these data reveal that just 22 B-cohort mothers and 20 K-cohort mothers changed partners, either between Waves 1 and 2 or between Waves 2 and 3 (shown in the final row in Table 11).

Do other family characteristics change with the presence of a new father figure? Possible categories include housing, income and the nature of relationships and style of parenting. Some of these changes are shown in Table 12 (B cohort) and Table 13 (K cohort). These tables compare characteristics at the wave before the father figure was in the family to characteristics when he was present. Of course, any changes evident are not necessarily due to the change in family composition, as some could have occurred merely through the ageing of family members (especially the children). Other changes may also have occurred over this time within the family, as well as in the broader societal context. For comparative purposes, Appendix Table A2 shows these characteristics for families who did not have a new father in the family (including those where mothers remained single or in the same relationship). The results in Table 12 and Table 13 can be contrasted against these results for other families.

Table 12: Change in family characteristics for families with new father figure from Waves 1 to 2 or Waves 2 to 3, B cohort

	New father figure between Waves 1 and 2			New father figure between Waves 2 and 3		
	Wave 1 (child aged 0–1 year)	Wave 2 (child aged 2–3 years)	Compare before and after	Wave 2 (child aged 2–3 years)	Wave 3 (child aged 4–5 years)	Compare before and after
	%			%		
Subjective financial wellbeing = 'just getting along', poor, or very poor	47.3	53.0		41.2	42.9	
Housing tenure = owned/mortgaged	16.2	23.8	*	31.5	38.7	
Moved house in last 2 years (or since child's birth for Wave 1)	n.a	67.2		59.2	60.8	
LSAC child has half or step-siblings in mother's household	26.8	26.1		30.4	47.4	***
Mother's self-reported health = fair or poor	19.6	15.9		12.2	24.1	
	Mean			Mean		
Mother's warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm parenting)	4.62	4.62		4.61	4.58	
Mother's mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)	4.21	4.23		4.25	4.16	
Sample size		**109**			**89**	

Note: Only includes respondents in the cross-wave sample who had a new father figure between Waves 1 and 2 or between Waves 2 and 3. Smaller sample sizes apply for some items. In each case, the first of each set of columns shows characteristics before the new father figure was included in the household, and the second shows characteristics when the father figure was included in the household. As these data were collected with respect to the same people at two different time points, the significance of the differences across time points, for binary variables was tested using McNemar's chi-square, and for continuous variables was testing using paired *t*-tests. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 13: Change in family characteristics for families with new father figure from Waves 1 to 2 or Waves 2 to 3, K cohort

	New father figure between Waves 1 and 2			New father figure between Waves 2 and 3		
	Wave 1 (child aged 4-5year)	Wave 2 (child aged 6-7 years)	Compare before and after	Wave 2 (child aged 6-7 years)	Wave 3 (child aged 8-9 years)	Compare before and after
	%			%		
Subjective financial wellbeing = 'just getting along', poor, or very poor	60.0	38.3	***	39.5	33.6	
Housing tenure = owned/mortgaged	30.0	45.1		37.3	41.5	
Moved house in last 2 years (or since child's birth for Wave 1)	n.a	62.6		51.4	53.2	
LSAC child has half- or step-siblings in mothers' household	16.0	23.1	**	27.9	42.5	***
Mother's self-reported health = fair or poor	11.5	6.3		8.6	8.6	
	Mean			Mean		
Mother's warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm parenting)	4.50	4.47		4.48	4.26	***
Mother's consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent parenting)	3.97	4.00		4.07	4.00	
Mother's angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry parenting)	2.21	2.24		2.24	2.26	
Mother's mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)	4.04	4.31	***	4.20	4.30	
Sample size		**136**			**102**	

Note Only includes respondents in the cross-wave sample who had a new father figure between Waves 1 and 2 or between Waves 2 and 3. Also see Table 12 table note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

In terms of change, there are not many consistent patterns when comparing 'before' and 'after' characteristics. One change is that of housing, with Waves 1 to 2 analyses showing that mothers of children in the B cohort were more likely to report they lived in a home that was owned or being purchased after they had partnered with a new father figure. Similar findings were apparent for Waves 2 to 3 and for transitions in the K cohort, although they were not statistically significant. These home ownership changes are quite possibly related to the relatively high rates of moving house for those with a new father figure. Some increase in home ownership was also apparent between Waves 1 and 2 in families without a new father figure, although rates of home ownership were higher in these families, and the increases over the waves were smaller in magnitude.

Another change is that, with a new father figure between Waves 2 and 3 for the B cohort and between Waves 1 and 2 or Waves 2 and 3 in the K cohort, the proportion of LSAC children with half or step-siblings was higher. This may indicate that the new partner had children of his own, or that the mother had had a new child with this new partner. These increases are not apparent at all in families with no change in father figures, and, in these families, fewer LSAC children had half or step-siblings.

The findings with regard to changes in mothers' reports of financial wellbeing, maternal parenting styles (warm parenting for the B and K cohorts, and consistent and angry parenting for the K cohort) and mental and physical health are that no consistent patterns emerge. This is particularly so when these results are examined in relation to those for families in which there was no new father figure. It may be that the sample size is too small to enable reliable estimates to be made of changes in family functioning in this way.

In summary, the analyses of cross-wave parental transitions show that a minority of children experienced a new father figure's move into the family between Waves 1 and 2 or between Waves 2 and 3. Most of these transitions, when they occurred, were associated with a new father figure moving into a lone-parent family. Some of these 'new' father figures, however, were actually the child's biological father. On the other hand, it is interesting to observe that some new father figures are described as stepfathers to the LSAC child, while others are reported to be unrelated to the child. In future analyses of these data, it may be useful to examine whether reporting of different relationships between the new father figure and the child are related to differences in parenting relationships and behaviour by this father figure or related to the longer term stability of the parental relationship. Gaining a greater understanding of the factors leading to the biological father moving into the family after a period of absence would also be of value. At this stage, however, the sample sizes are too small to support such analyses.

Family economic circumstances and functioning did not always change significantly with a new father figure, although there were more siblings, and families were increasingly home owners. Of course, these analyses did not capture all the possible changes that might have consequences for children's wellbeing—in particular, fathers' contributions to the parenting role.

In considering possible outcomes for children of having a new father figure, it is important to be mindful also that this is more likely to occur in lone-parent families than in couple families, and these analyses show that lone-parent families already include a relatively high proportion with characteristics generally considered to be risk factors for poorer child outcomes, such as having lower levels of education and lower parental income.

3.5 Factors predicting a new father figure moving into the family

Literature

The above analyses have shown that, in many instances, the experience of new father figures involves the transition from a lone-parent family to a couple family (rather than a change in father figure). Here we consider other maternal or family characteristics that might explain which mothers re-partner, or, in other words, which children are more likely to have a new father figure moving into the family.

The analysis presented here is informed by work on re-partnering and remarriage. In the context of this report, this is somewhat different to the experience of having new father figures, especially as some of the 'new' father figures are actually the biological father moving into the family. However, as sample size limitations do not allow us to examine these cases separately, and the majority of new father figures (across both cohorts) are not biological fathers, we will use the re-partnering or remarriage literature to guide the analyses.

Much research in this area focuses on the re-partnering of single men and women after divorce or separation and therefore includes those with and without children (for example, Anderson & Greene 2005; Hughes 2000; Lampard & Peggs 1999; Skew, Evans & Gray 2009). Such studies usually take into account the presence or age of children and, in this research, the quite consistent finding is that, for women, having children tends to be associated with a lower rate of re-partnering. Also, among mothers, re-partnering rates are lower when they have more children (Lampard & Peggs 1999) or younger children (Hughes 2000; Skew, Evans & Gray 2009).

Before turning to a description of other factors associated with re-partnering rates, we briefly consider the question of why mothers might re-partner, as this is relevant when considering these other factors. In a study of remarriage by de Graaf and Kalmijn (2003), the authors presented some ideas that are drawn upon below.

One is that remarriage (or re-partnering) may be sought out by an individual to improve wellbeing—either individual happiness (through an intimate relationship with another) or financial wellbeing (through possible

higher family income) (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003). Certainly, lone mothers may have this in mind when seeking a new partner, although their wellbeing is also likely to be linked to their role as a mother and the relationship they have with their children. These mother-child relationships may actually reduce the desire for intimate partner relationships (Smart & Neale 1999). The wellbeing of children and the potential relationship between children and a new partner are both likely to be taken into account when making decisions about re-partnering (Lampard & Peggs 1999). Improvements in financial wellbeing will depend on the mother's own financial resources, the income of the new partner, how that income is shared among family members and how it changes eligibility for income support.

Another factor in the likelihood of re-partnering is the attractiveness of the individual to new prospective partners in the 'marriage market' (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003). In this regard, to some prospective partners, women with children may be seen as less attractive than women who are without children, given the potential emotional difficulties and financial responsibilities that may come with forming a stepfamily. This may be especially true for mothers with more children or younger children.

The opportunity to meet a new partner is also a factor in re-partnering (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003). Some single mothers may be limited in these opportunities by financial constraints or by having little time to spend on social or leisure activities (Bumpass, Sweet & Costro-Martin 1990). Again, having more children and also having young children may increase these constraints, although it is true that some parenting activities and involvement at schools could provide more opportunities to meet new partners.

The factors considered in these analyses can often be related back to these possible reasons for re-partnering. However, the re-partnering and remarriage literature is usually focused on single men and women, and our analyses differ by including mothers who started out married or cohabiting. Compared to single mothers, married and cohabiting mothers are expected to have a relatively low likelihood of re-partnering. In fact, the descriptive analyses above showed that most of the transitions that involved re-partnering were for single mothers. However, cohabiting and married mothers are included here so that comparisons can be made between these two groups, to examine whether there is more instability apparent in cohabiting families.

In these data, single mothers are differentiated according to whether or not they have a non-live-in relationship with someone. This distinction captures what is expected to be a higher opportunity for those already in a relationship to re-partner. In addition, being already in a dating relationship may be an indicator of readiness to form a new relationship, although this will not always translate into a willingness by mothers to have a new father figure move into the home.

Mothers' age is also likely to be related to re-partnering rates, as older age is generally associated with a lower rate of re-partnering, which especially indicates that opportunities to find suitable partners decline with age, as the pool of single people becomes smaller (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Goldscheider & Sassler 2006; Skew, Evans & Gray 2009).

Mothers' mental and physical health may also matter for re-partnering, in that those with poorer mental or physical health may be less attractive to prospective partners and also may have fewer opportunities to find a new partner if these health issues are associated with less participation in social, work or leisure activities.

Participation in employment may provide mothers with more opportunities to meet potential partners (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003). However, it may also reduce mothers' available time to devote to personal interests, especially within the constraints of caring for young children. If employment increases income, this may also have different influences: it may reduce a lone mother's financial need to find a partner; conversely, it may improve the attractiveness of the mother as a potential partner and provide more opportunities to meet prospective partners in the workplace and during leisure or social activities (enabled by having increased financial resources).

Differences in re-partnering rates by mothers' education level could also be interpreted in a number of ways. Education could represent economic resources, and mothers with higher education may therefore have less need to seek a new partner. Also, in terms of opportunities, more highly educated women will have a smaller pool of potential partners to select from if they are seeking a partner with similar levels of education. Education could also reflect values or cultural beliefs, so that more highly educated women may value marriage less and prefer instead a cohabiting relationship or remaining single. Previous Australian re-partnering research has found that

more highly educated women are less likely to marry but more likely to form cohabiting unions, compared to other women (Hughes 2000). Other re-partnering research has not consistently found differences by education (for example, de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006).

The relevant literature refers to a range of other variables, for example: time since the last relationship ended; whether the last relationship was a marriage or cohabitation; duration of prior relationship; childhood experiences of family type; religion; and attitudes to marriage. These variables are not explored in these analyses, although the LSAC data offer the potential for further exploration of some of these in future work. In the work presented here, as the numbers of mothers re-partnering are relatively small, the set of variables chosen has been somewhat limited; however, some other variables are included that have not commonly been covered in analyses of re-partnering. These include whether a child with disability lives in the family (which has been associated with parental separation; see Reichman, Corman & Noonan 2004), whether the mother lives with the child's grandparents or uncles/aunts (see Goldscheider and Sassler (2006) for related items about household composition), type of housing tenure (included in analyses by Skew, Evans and Gray (2009), with some indication that re-partnering may be greater for renters than home owners), and region of residence (metropolitan or ex-metropolitan region; using a different classification, Australian regional differences were explored but not found by Skew, Evans and Gray (2009).

Method

To explore which families had a new father figure between LSAC waves, these analyses look at transitions in parental relationship status between Waves 1 (*time 1*) and 2 (*time 2*) and between Waves 2 (*time 1*) and 3 (*time 2*). Each cohort is examined separately.

The outcome of interest is whether there is a new father figure in the household at *time 2*. As this is in the form of 'Yes' or 'No', this can be classified as one (a new father figure) or zero (no new father figure). It is then appropriate to analyse the likelihood of this transition occurring using logit estimation. An additional estimation is included using a dataset that includes both the Waves 1 to 2 transitions and the Waves 2 to 3 transitions—referred to as the pooled data. These analyses also explore transitions from *time 1* to *time 2*, but, because this estimation is based on two records per person, a random effects logit specification was used, to take account of the non-independence of the records.[3] Results for estimations are presented as odds ratios, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals.

The range of explanatory variables included in the analyses is shown in Table 14 and Table 15. They include mother's relationship status, education level, employment status and self-reported health and mental health, and the family characteristics of age of youngest child, number of children, whether the family includes a child with a disability, whether the child's grandparents or uncles/aunts live in the household, housing tenure and region of residence. These variables are measured at *time 1* in each estimation.

These analyses are based on all respondents in the cross-wave sample and so include married and cohabiting mothers as well as single mothers. As transitions are most likely to occur for single mothers, other estimations were examined in which only single mothers were included. The findings were generally consistent with those reported here for all mothers, such that there were no other strong, significant associations that could be identified when focusing only on single mothers. These results are given in Appendix Tables A3 (B cohort) and A4 (K cohort).

The sample sizes are slightly smaller than those presented in Table 3 because of a small number of observations with missing data on the explanatory variables. Two variables had more extensive missing data—self-reported health and mental health—because they were based on the self-completion questionnaire rather than the interview. In those cases with missing data, the missing values were substituted with the overall sample means, and indicator variables to differentiate these cases were included in the estimations. These indicator variables were non-significant in the final models and have not been reported in the tables of results.

Table 14: Multivariate analyses of the likelihood of new father figure entering the family, odds ratio and 95 per cent confidence interval, B cohort

	New father figure, Waves 1 to 2	New father figure, Waves 2 to 3	New father figure, Waves *t* to *t*+1 (pooled data)
Mother's characteristics			
Relationship status			
Married	0.0*** (0.0,0.0)	0.0*** (0.0,0.0)	0.0*** (0.0,0.0)
Cohabiting	0.0*** (0.0,0.1)	0.1*** (0.0,0.1)	0.0*** (0.0,0.1)
Single but has non-live-in relationship	2.8** (1.6,5.1)	2.0* (1.1,3.7)	2.3*** (1.5,3.5)
Single with no live-in relationship (ref.)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Age (years)	0.9*** (0.9,1.0)	0.9* (0.9,1.0)	0.9*** (0.9,1.0)
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)	1.9* (1.1,3.3)	1.4 (0.8,2.3)	1.5* (1.1,2.2)
Education (1 = more than secondary education, 0 = secondary only or less than secondary)	1.2 (0.7,2.0)	1.2 (0.7,2.1)	1.1 (0.8,1.6)
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)	2.2* (1.1,4.6)	0.6 (0.2,1.6)	1.2 (0.7,2.2)
Mental health (higher = better mental health)	1.0 (0.7,1.5)	0.9 (0.7,1.3)	0.9 (0.7,1.2)
Family or household characteristics			
Age of youngest child (years)	1.9* (1.1,3.3)	1.4* (1.0,1.9)	1.4* (1.1,1.8)
Number of children	1.2 (0.9,1.5)	1.3* (1.0,1.6)	1.2* (1.0,1.4)
Child with disability in the household (1 = yes, 0 = no)	2.0 (0.7,6.1)	0.7 (0.2,2.6)	1.2 (0.6,2.7)
Child's grandparent or aunt/uncle in the household (1 = yes, 0 = no)	0.5* (0.2,0.9)	1.0 (0.5,1.9)	0.7 (0.4,1.0)
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rent/other)	0.5 (0.3,1.0)	1.5 (0.8,2.7)	0.9 (0.6,1.5)
Region (1 = ex-metropolitan, 0 = metropolitan)	1.1 (0.7,1.7)	1.4 (0.9,2.4)	1.3 (0.9,1.7)
Constant	2.6 (0.5,25.1)	0.4 (0.1,3.1)	2.3 (0.5,11.0)
Number of observations	**4,092**	**4,097**	**8,189**

Note: Values of missing self-reported health and mental health were replaced with the sample mean, and indicators for missing values on these variables were included in the estimations (results for these indicators not shown). The pooled data are based on Waves 1 to 2 as well as Waves 2 to 3 and are analysed using random effects analyses to take account of the multiple records per person. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 15: Multivariate analyses of the likelihood of new father figure entering the family, odds ratio and 95 per cent confidence interval, K cohort

	New father figure, Waves 1 to 2	New father figure, Waves 2 to 3	New father figure, Waves *t* to *t*+1 (pooled data)
Mother's characteristics			
Relationship status			
Married	0.0*** (0.0,0.0)	0.0*** (0.0,0.1)	0.0*** (0.0,0.0)
Cohabiting	0.0*** (0.0,0.1)	0.1*** (0.0,0.2)	0.0*** (0.0,0.1)
Single but has non-live-in relationship	3.4*** (2.1,5.5)	2.7*** (1.6,4.5)	2.8*** (2.0,4.0)
Single with no live-in relationship (ref.)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Age (years)	0.9*** (0.8,0.9)	1.0 (0.9,1.0)	0.9*** (0.9,0.9)
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)	1.2 (0.8,2.0)	1.7 (1.0,2.8)	1.4 (1.0,1.9)
Education (1 = more than secondary education, 0 = secondary only or less than secondary)	0.5* (0.3,1.0)	1.1 (0.6,1.8)	0.8 (0.5,1.1)
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)	0.5 (0.2,1.1)	1.1 (0.5,2.7)	0.8 (0.4,1.3)
Mental health (higher = better mental health)	0.7 (0.5,1.0)	0.9 (0.7,1.3)	0.8 (0.7,1.0)
Family or household characteristics			
Age of youngest child (years)	1.2* (1.0,1.4)	0.9 (0.8,1.0)	1.0 (0.9,1.1)
Number of children	1.2 (1.0,1.5)	1.0 (0.8,1.3)	1.1 (0.9,1.3)
Child with disability in the household (1 = yes, 0 = no)	1.5 (0.8,2.8)	1.3 (0.5,3.3)	1.4 (0.8,2.3)
Child's grandparent or aunt/uncle in the household (1 = yes, 0 = no)	0.6 (0.3,1.3)	1.3 (0.7,2.5)	0.9 (0.6,1.5)
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rent/other)	1.3 (0.8,2.3)	0.7 (0.4,1.2)	1.0 (0.7,1.4)
Region (1 = ex-metropolitan, 0 = metropolitan)	1.5 (0.9,2.2)	1.5 (1.0,2.4)	1.5** (1.1,2.0)
Constant	28.0** (3.2,246.4)	0.8 (0.1,7.4)	6.6* (1.6,27.9)
Number of observations	**3,931**	**3,936**	**7,867**

Note: Values of missing self-reported health and mental health were replaced with the sample mean, and indicators for missing values on these variables were included in the estimations (results for these indicators not shown). The pooled data are based on Waves 1 to 2 as well as Waves 2 to 3 and are analysed using random effects analyses to take account of the multiple records per person. *$p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Results: New father figure multivariate analyses

In both cohorts, the initial relationship status was, not surprisingly, a very strong predictor of there being a new father figure by the next wave, with married and cohabiting mothers much less likely to experience this than were single mothers. While it is not apparent in Table 14, in the B cohort analyses of pooled data there is a significant difference in the coefficients for married mothers (odds ratio = 0.015) versus cohabiting (odds ratio = 0.042), such that, for cohabiting mothers, there was a greater likelihood of there being a new father figure, compared to married mothers. The differences between these groups are not statistically significant in the K cohort estimations, although the odds ratios were always higher for cohabiting than for married mothers. More apparent in both cohorts was that mothers who were already in a non-live-in relationship at *time 1* were more likely than those who were not to have a new father figure in the family by *time 2*.

Having a new father figure was more likely to occur in families with younger mothers in both cohorts, although this was not statistically significant for Waves 2 to 3 in the K cohort. No other variables were consistently significant in their associations in predicting a new father figure in the family. The findings from these analyses are summarised below.

- In the B cohort families, children whose mothers were employed were more likely to have a new father figure. Effects of mothers' employment were statistically non-significant (although in the same direction) in the K cohort.
- In the K cohort, families with more highly educated mothers were somewhat less likely to have a new father figure between Waves 1 and 2, but not between Waves 2 and 3. Education was not statistically significant in the B cohort.
- In the B cohort, families of mothers with poorer self-reported health were more likely to have a new father figure between Waves 1 and 2, but not between Waves 2 and 3. This variable was not statistically significant in the K cohort.
- In the B cohort, families that included children's grandparents or uncles/aunts were less likely to have a new father figure between Waves 1 and 2, but not between Waves 2 and 3. This variable was not statistically significant in the K cohort.
- In the B cohort and the K cohort between Waves 1 and 2, having a younger child was associated with a lower rate of having a new father figure.
- Having more children was associated with a somewhat higher rate of there being a new father figure in the B cohort, based on the pooled data of Waves 1 to 2 and Waves 2 to 3 combined. It was not statistically significant for the K cohort.
- In the K cohort, families living in metropolitan regions were less likely to have a new father figure than were those living in ex-metropolitan regions, based on the pooled data of Waves 1 to 2 and Waves 2 to 3. No differences were apparent in the B cohort.
- No statistically significant associations were apparent for mental health, having a child with a disability in the household or housing tenure.

Given the inconsistencies in these findings, it is not easy to summarise which parents were likely to experience new father figures between waves. The only clear finding was that single mothers, especially those already in a relationship, were more likely than couple mothers to have a new father figure move into the home. The other fairly consistent finding (statistically significant in all but one estimation) was that families with younger mothers were more likely to have new father figures.

According to the previously cited literature, the expected direction of the effect of certain variables, such as maternal education and employment, was not certain. These results do not help to disentangle what these likely associations are, given the inconsistent and often non-significant findings.

These inconsistencies and lack of significance on many variables may simply indicate that re-partnering cannot easily be predicted by a set of sociodemographic characteristics such as these. The sample size may also be a factor, since re-partnering is most likely to occur for single parents, and in this sample of parents of quite young children, the majority of parents are in couple relationships. But, of course, these analyses did not just include re-partnering, with the focus instead being on new father figures. These new father figures actually included the child's father, and it may be that predicting the movement of these fathers into the home is related to quite different factors to those of completely new fathers moving into the home. Further, some new partners married into the family, while others were cohabiting. Sample numbers are insufficient for these new fathers to be treated as separate outcomes.

While we included a summary of the re-partnering literature above to help establish which families may be likely to have a new father figure, these results did not provide evidence of any particular reason for the presence of new father figures in the home. Whether these new father figures come about due to a desire to increase wellbeing (financial, family or personal), or whether they are related to opportunities or attractiveness of mothers, all remain questions that require further analyses.

The above analyses could be expanded in several ways: in particular, exploring the rate of re-partnering in single-parent families, taking into account certain characteristics that only apply to these families. Another future direction for this work could be the inclusion of information about the non-resident father's relationship and contact with the mother and with the child. This relationship might have implications for re-partnering and also for children's wellbeing, but we have not considered these associations here.

3.6 New father figures and children's outcomes

Literature

To provide background to the possible ways in which new father figures might matter to children's outcomes, it is necessary to refer to literature about related work on how children's outcomes vary with differences or transitions in parental relationships.

A considerable body of research has focused on differences in outcomes for children living in couple families, single-parent families and stepfamilies. Of particular relevance to this research is that children with stepfathers will have experienced a new father figure moving into the family at some time. The general conclusion from a broad range of studies of pre-primary, primary and adolescent children has been that children residing in stepfamilies have poorer outcomes, compared to those living in couple families that have never had a parental relationship transition. However, their outcomes are not as poor as those children living in single-parent families (Sweeney 2010). These findings have been consistent for children of all ages, across a diverse range of outcomes including verbal ability, school test scores, high school and university completion, years of schooling (Ginther & Pollak 2004), behavioural problems (Hofferth 2006; Najman et al. 1997), depression and suicidal ideation (Sweeney 2007), self-control (Artis 2007), peer competency (Cavanagh & Huston 2008), delinquency (Brown 2006), teenage pregnancy and early parenthood (Hofferth & Goldscheider 2010; Wu & Thomson 2001).

More recently, several studies have focused on differentiating between couple families and stepfamilies—by whether parents are cohabiting rather than married. Most studies have concluded that children living with step or intact cohabiting parents do worse than children living with step or intact married parents, although the evidence is stronger for educational and cognitive outcomes and inconsistent for externalising and internalising problems (Artis 2007; Brown 2006; Cavanagh & Huston 2006, 2008; Manning & Lamb, 2003; Osborne & McLanahan, 2007). However, recent Australian research using LSAC data showed that children's learning outcomes were actually better in families with cohabiting rather than married parents, after taking account of a range of family and child characteristics and measures of parental involvement. They also reported no significant differences for social-emotional outcomes (Baxter and Smart 2010).

Despite some evolutionary and economic theories suggesting that children who are the offspring of both parents should have better developmental outcomes than stepchildren, studies comparing children from the same family have found no differences in children's outcomes by biological relatedness of children to both parents. For example, using data from the US National Longitudinal Survey of Youth—Child and Child Development Supplement of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Ginther and Pollack (2004) found that there were no significant differences, between stepchildren and half-siblings who were the progeny of their step-parents and biological parents, on a variety of educational outcomes (years of schooling, high school and college graduation, reading and mathematics achievement). However, children from these blended families had worse educational outcomes than children in intact families. Baxter and Smart (2010) also found that children had poorer learning outcomes if they were living with a stepfather, compared to living with both biological parents, taking account of other differences in these families. They also had poorer social-emotional outcomes.

Hofferth and Anderson (2003) reported that there was little difference in the amount of parental involvement between step and biological children in the same household. Looking at fathers' involvement with children, Baxter and Smart (2010) found that differences between step and biological fathers' involvement with children were apparent on some, but not all, measures. For example, stepfathers, compared to biological fathers, spent no less time with children overall, but tended to be less involved in children's personal care activities. On most parenting styles, step and biological fathers were similar, but stepfathers tended to exhibit somewhat less warm parenting.

Another recent development that is relevant to these analyses is research on how children are affected by family instability. Cherlin (2008) and others have argued that it is the instability brought about by multiple family transitions, from the parent being partnered to single to partnered again, rather than family structure itself that undermines children's development. The idea is that adjustments or changes in the household structure are stressful, and that this explains the differences in children's outcomes by family structure. Many recent studies of younger and adolescent children have reported that the number of family transitions experienced by children is associated with poorer child outcomes (Brown 2006; Cavanagh & Huston 2006, 2008; Fomby & Cherlin 2007; Manning & Lamb 2003; Osborne & McLanahan 2007). As would be expected, there are more relationship transitions in non-intact family forms, such as step and blended families and single-parent families, especially those that involve cohabitation rather than marriage. However, family instability explains some, but not all, of the differences between children's outcomes by family structure.

Researchers trying to understand the implications of new father figures for children's outcomes find that there are some limitations to the family instability research methodology. In general, these studies count the number of relationship transitions that the parent of the child has had, and then test to see whether this is associated with children's outcomes. This means that a parental separation is given the same weight, in terms of potential impacts, as the formation of a new parental relationship. It may be that it is the separation or divorce of the parents that drives poorer outcomes, not the new relationship. Another limitation is that, by summing the transitions over a timescale such as early and middle childhood (for example, Cavanagh & Huston 2008) or middle childhood to adolescence (for example, Fomby & Cherlin 2007), they cannot identify the effects of timing of these transitions and whether a recent relationship transition is more or less important than one some years previously. However, Fomby and Cherlin did take account of whether there was a family transition in the last two years.

Brown (2006) extended this focus on counts of parental relationship transitions to take account of the types of transitions, using Waves 1 and 2 from the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Controlling for Wave 1 wellbeing, she found that moving from a single-mother family into a cohabiting stepfamily was associated with increased delinquent behaviour and decreased school engagement, although adolescents' depression levels were unaffected. Moving from a single-parent into a married stepfamily did not have any detrimental effects on adolescents. Moving from a cohabiting stepfamily to a different married stepfamily was associated with lower school engagement. For adolescents living with both biological parents, parental separation into a single-parent family was associated with higher levels of delinquency and depression. In contrast, there were no differences in adolescent outcomes when the family transition was from a married stepfamily to a single-parent family, while for the transition from a cohabiting stepfamily to a single-parent family, adolescents' school engagement actually increased. Transitions due to separation or divorce, such as moving from a two-parent family to a single-parent family, were associated with higher levels of depression (Brown 2006).

There are a number of possible explanations for why the presence of a new father figure might matter for children. Broadly, these include reasons related to economic resources, parental resources, stress and instability and selectivity, each discussed further below.

In terms of economic resources, married two-parent biological families generally have greater financial resources than single-parent families or stepfamilies. Separation or divorce has a large impact on family finances (de Vaus, Gray, Qu & Stanton 2007; Smyth & Weston 2000) and, although stepfamilies have more financial resources, they generally have lower household incomes than stable two-parent biological families. Earlier analyses of changes in family circumstances (Table 12 and Table 13) found some evidence (although only significant in the K cohort between Waves 1 and 2) that, when families had a new father figure, fewer mothers reported that they were poor ('just getting along', 'poor' or 'very poor'). Also, home ownership rates were generally higher (although not always statistically significant) at the time when new father figures were present. This might also be relevant to financial wellbeing.

The way in which parents—the mother and a new father figure—fulfil the parenting role can be important to children's outcomes. On the one hand, mothers' ability to parent effectively may be enhanced with the presence of a new father figure, if this partner is able to assist with everyday parenting activities. On the other hand, as discussed earlier in this report, the new father figure may not view himself, nor be viewed by the mother (or

perhaps the child) as a parental figure, and therefore may not provide such support. Comparisons of cohabiting stepfathers to married fathers suggest that cohabiting fathers are less involved once background variables are accounted for (Berger, Carlson, Bzostek & Osborne 2008; Hofferth & Anderson 2003). Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest that parental supervision of children is not increased by re-partnering (Wu & Thomson 2001). The analyses of changes in parenting styles presented in Table 12 and Table 13 did not provide consistent and conclusive evidence within this sample of changes in mothers' parenting styles associated with a new father figure. A mother's wellbeing could increase if she is in a new relationship, and this may flow through to better parenting or generally better wellbeing in the family. However, earlier analyses found better maternal mental health only for the K cohort with a new father figure between Waves 1 and 2.

As has been outlined previously, the stress and instability created by multiple family transitions is also a prominent explanation for why re-partnering may lead to poorer outcomes for children and youth (Fomby & Cherlin 2007). In this context, changes that have co-occurred with the new father figure might create some stress for families and children. For example, moving house, which occurred in the previous two years for a significant proportion of children with a new father figure, might create some stress within the family.

The final explanation for possible differences in child outcomes associated with the presence of a new father figure is that children and their parents who have such an experience differ in pre-existing ways to those in other family arrangements, such that the association between new father figures and poorer child outcomes is spurious. For example, the findings that step and biological children from the same family were no different in educational outcomes (Ginther & Pollak 2004) and parental involvement (Hofferth & Anderson 2003), but that there were differences for children's outcomes living in stepfamilies compared to stable married families, suggest that the types of parents who re-partner are fundamentally different. To really understand the influence of re-partnering on children in the Australian context, it is critical to take account of these pre-existing differences.

Method

This section investigates whether the presence of a new father figure influences children's wellbeing. These analyses use the K cohort only, because more than one wave of data on child outcomes is needed, with measures that are consistent over time. In the B cohort, most outcome measures change in nature across the waves, given the very different development stages of children from age 0 to 1 year through to 4 to 5 years.

The outcome measures examined are shown in Table 16. These include measures of social-emotional, cognitive and physical outcomes. The focus is on the social-emotional and cognitive outcomes, as several measures of development in these areas are available in LSAC.

Table 16: Description of child outcome measures

Domain	Outcome measure	Values	Notes
Social-emotional	Emotional and behavioural problems (Parent 1 report)	Scores from 0 to 40 (higher score = worse outcome)	Total problem score from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; mean of scores on hyperactivity, emotional problems, peer problems, and conduct problems sub-scales) Available at all three waves
	Emotional and behavioural problems (teacher report)	Scores from 0 to 40 (higher score = worse outcome)	Total problem score from the SDQ Available at all three waves
Cognitive	Receptive vocabulary	Scaled score (higher score = better outcome)	Measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) Available at all three waves
	Nonverbal intelligence	Standardised score (higher score = better outcome)	Measured by the Matrix Reasoning test Available at Waves 2 and 3 only
	Numeracy (teacher report)	Scale from 1 to 5 (5 = higher numeracy)	Teacher's ratings of child's numeracy skills in relation to other children of the same age known by the teacher Only available at Waves 2 and 3 Different underlying items in Waves 2 and 3
	Literacy (teacher report)	Scale from 1 to 5 (5 = higher literacy)	Teacher's ratings of child's language and literacy skills in relation to other children of the same age known by the teacher Only available at Waves 2 and 3 Different underlying items in Waves 2 and 3
	Approach to learning (teacher report)	Scale from 1 to 5 (5 = better approach to learning)	Teacher's ratings of child's approach to learning in relation to other children of the same age known by the teacher Only available at Waves 2 and 3
Physical	Injuries requiring medical attention	Continuous (count) (higher score = worse outcome)	Available at all three waves

The effect on children's outcomes of there being a new father figure is estimated using fixed effects (FE) models. FE models are used when there is more than one period of data from one person (that is, panel data). These models are useful for analysing how a change in some characteristic (for example, parental relationship status) is associated with a change in an outcome variable such as child wellbeing. FE models analyse changes in children's outcomes between waves, with respect to characteristics of children or families (such as parental relationships) that also change across waves. In analysing change in this way, effects of time-invariant characteristics that contribute to children's outcomes are swept out of the model. This means that unobserved characteristics that are time invariant are controlled, which is how these models address some aspects of selectivity. In other words, this approach takes account of the fact that children who are likely to have a new father figure may differ in pre-existing ways from those who do not have a new father figure, allowing us to come closer to estimating the causal effect of new father figures on children's outcomes. In these models, it is important to include key variables that capture factors that vary across the different periods of measurement, and we return to discuss those variables below.

The analyses only include those children who are 'at risk' of having a new father figure. While this could occur in couple-parent families, earlier sections of this report have shown that this is a rare event for two-parent households. Most new father figures move into a family that was a single-mother family in the previous wave. Therefore, among children in two-parent households who experienced a change in father figure, there were too few cases with non-missing outcome data at two or more time points to allow their inclusion in the analyses (for example, for the Waves 1 to 2 analyses, there were six to eight instances of new father figures, depending on the outcome examined). For these analyses, then, a limitation we imposed was only to consider children living with single mothers to be at risk of having a new father figure. The results then provide information about how children's outcomes vary, in single-parent families, if a new father figure moves into the family. The results do not allow a comparison of outcomes with children who remained in a couple-parent family over consecutive waves of LSAC. A further limitation of this approach is that characteristics that do not change over time, such as sex of the child, cannot be included in the models.

The FE models were first estimated on the Waves 1 to 2 changes in child outcomes and then the Waves 2 to 3 outcomes. For these analyses, there were always two values for each outcome measure per child, one before and one after the new father figure moved into the family. From these data, a pooled data set including Waves 1 to 2 and Waves 2 to 3 was created. This dataset has up to three values per outcome measure per child. Only two observations were used if the new father figure moved into the family at Wave 2, because, once this new father figure had moved in, the family was considered no longer at risk of having a new father figure at Wave 3. Also, if parents had separated between Waves 1 and 2, such that the child lived with a single mother at Wave 2, the Wave 1 data were not used (when they were an intact couple family), but the Waves 2 and 3 were used.

As discussed above, in order for these models to be used to examine how the presence of a new father figure is associated with changes in child outcomes, the models also need to include information about what else is changing that may be important to children's outcomes.

One fundamental change is that these children are growing older across waves of LSAC. To capture this, each model includes an indicator of whether the measure was taken at Wave 3 or Wave 2, as opposed to Wave 1. In terms of learning outcomes, in particular, it is expected that there will be positive values associated with these indicators. For each outcome measure, the first estimation presented (Model 1) therefore includes this wave indicator, as well as an indicator of there being a new father figure.

As families can change in other ways, whether or not there is a new father figure, additional models then introduce a broader set of variables, all of which may have some relevance to children's outcomes. Initially we included demographic information, including: whether living in a home that was owned or being purchased; number of children in the family; mothers' employment status; and whether parents report being 'just getting along', 'poor' or 'very poor'. These measures therefore cover some elements of the ways economic resources may affect changes in children's outcomes. These are included in Model 2. In the next model, Model 3, information about maternal wellbeing is added, including measures of maternal mental health and self-reported physical health. In Model 4, the parenting measures of parenting warmth, consistent parenting and angry parenting are added. These models are built in a stepwise approach to allow examination of whether any effects of there being a new father figure become apparent or changed with the more comprehensive inclusion of variables. This was important in helping to understand possible mechanisms by which children's outcomes might be affected.

For each set of analyses, Models 1 to 4 were estimated on the same sample by restricting each analysis to only those respondents with non-missing values on the full set of explanatory variables in Model 4. Sample counts vary across models because of non-response on particular outcome measures.

Results

This section presents results from the FE models used to investigate whether having a new father figure is associated with differences in children's development. Table 17 summarises the results from all the models (for each outcome measure, for Waves 1 to 2, Waves 2 to 3 and the pooled data), showing the coefficient for the indicator of there being a new father figure. The full estimation results are shown in Appendix Tables A5 to Table A12.

Table 17 shows that, between Wave 1 and Wave 2, having a new father figure resulted in a statistically significant association only for teacher-reported emotional and behavioural problems, after controlling for sociodemographic variables and mothers' mental and physical health, and also after controlling for parenting behaviour. We return to discuss these results further below. On this outcome measure, similar but non-significant results were obtained for Models 1 and 2 and in the pooled data.

This was the only instance of finding a statistically significant association between there being a new father figure and children's outcomes. There were no statistically significant associations with child outcomes between Waves 2 and 3, and none were significant when the data from Waves 1 to 2 and Waves 2 to 3 were pooled.

Table 17: Change in children's outcomes associated with new father figure, summary of fixed effects model results for children who had lived with a single mother at time 1, K cohort

Outcome measure	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
New father figure at 6–7 years (single mothers at 4–5 years)				
Parent report: Emotional and behavioural problems (SDQ)	0.65	0.76	0.86	0.88
Teacher report: Emotional and behavioural problems (SDQ)	2.05	2.58	2.78*	2.70*
Receptive vocabulary (PPVT)	–0.30	–0.72	–0.75	–0.74
Injuries requiring medical attention	–0.04	–0.05	–0.05	–0.05
New father figure at 8–9 years (single mothers at 6–7 years)				
Parent report: Emotional and behavioural problems (SDQ)	0.28	–0.09	0.03	–0.06
Teacher report: Emotional and behavioural problems (SDQ)	0.54	0.41	0.45	0.46
Receptive vocabulary (PPVT)	–0.09	–0.04	–0.01	–0.06
Nonverbal intelligence (Matrix reasoning)	–0.49	–0.29	–0.34	–0.42
Teacher report: Numeracy	0.07	0.16	0.15	0.16
Teacher report: Literacy	0.09	0.18	0.17	0.17
Teacher report: Approach to learning	0.08	0.14	0.13	0.13
Injuries requiring medical attention	–0.16	–0.14	–0.15	–0.16
New father figure at 6–7 years (single mothers at 4–5 years) **or at 8–9 years** (single mothers at 6–7 years) **—** Pooled data				
Parent report: Emotional and behavioural problems (SDQ)	0.21	0.18	0.37	0.32
Teacher report: Emotional and behavioural problems (SDQ)	0.85	0.80	1.02	0.92
Receptive vocabulary (PPVT)	–0.42	–0.52	–0.55	–0.57
Injuries requiring medical attention	–0.11	–0.09	–0.08	–0.08
For each of the above				
+ *Time 2* indicator (+ *time 3* in pooled data)	yes	yes	yes	yes
+ Sociodemographic variables		yes	yes	yes
+ Mental health of mother			yes	yes
+ Mother's parenting warmth, consistency and angry parenting				yes

Note: This table shows just the 'new father figure' coefficient from ordinary least squares (OLS) analyses of each outcome. Model 1 includes only re-partnering variables and an indicator of time, with no other variables taken into account; Model 2 includes all sociodemographic variables (mother's employment status, number of children in the household, housing tenure and subjective financial wellbeing); Model 3 includes all variables from Model 2 with the addition of mother's mental health and self-reported physical health; Model 4 includes all variables from Model 3 with the addition of three measures of maternal parenting behaviour (warmth, consistency and angry parenting). * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

We return now to consider the results for teacher reports of children's emotional and behavioural problems, which showed poorer outcomes between Waves 1 and 2 when children had a new father figure at Wave 2. This finding contrasted with that of parent reports on the same measures, which showed little change in reports about emotional and behavioural development when there was a new father figure. This interesting result highlights the importance of having multiple informants. While it is well known that teacher and parent ratings of children's behaviour do not have high levels of concordance (for example, Achenbach, Howell, McConaughy & Stanger 1995; Youngstrom, Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber 2000), one plausible explanation is that children who have a new father figure may not show any increase in emotional and behavioural problems at home, but that such problems may be observed by the children's teachers in the school setting. Recent conceptualisations of discrepancies in reporting on child emotional and behavioural problems highlight that the context in which the informant is reporting is an important factor (De Los Reyes & Kazdin 2006). Another explanation may be that parents are motivated (albeit unconsciously) to give their children's behaviour more favourable ratings—newly re-partnered parents want their new relationship to work and may be more accommodating or less able to acknowledge increases in the difficult behaviour of their children. Teachers would not be expected to have similar motivations, so, in this context, their ratings of emotional and behavioural problems could be considered to be more objective. If they are aware that children are experiencing changed family circumstances, teachers may also be more attuned to poor behaviour during this period.

Note that, in these analyses of teacher-reported emotional and behavioural outcomes between Waves 1 and 2, the association with the new father figure indicator was only statistically significant after controls for mothers' physical and mental health were included (in Model 3). However, the coefficients in Models 1 and 2, while not statistically significant at conventional levels of significance, were of the same magnitude as those in the other models. The variables added in Model 3, and subsequently the parenting items in Model 4, actually were not significantly associated with this outcome measure in the Waves 1 to 2 analyses.

In summary, among children who were living with a single mother, these analyses found very few differences in wellbeing between children that can be attributed to whether or not they have a new father figure at a later point in time. The use of fixed effects analyses allowed us to come close to estimating the causal effect on child outcomes of there being a new father figure, since these models remove the effects of unobserved characteristics of families that do not change across time. On most measures, there is no evidence of poorer outcomes for children who have a new father figure. According to one measure, however, there was some increase in emotional and behavioural problems if this new father figure joined the family between Waves 1 and 2. This finding merits further exploration.

To determine whether a new father figure affected children's outcomes through changes in other aspects of family functioning, these analyses included information about changes in maternal parenting, mental health and financial wellbeing, along with other characteristics of mothers and families. It is important to remember that these associations apply equally to children living in single-parent households and households with a new father figure. Of these variables, some effects were found for mental and physical health and parenting, consistent with the family stress models of how parental relationship transitions may affect children. More specifically, the following findings emerged.

- Mothers' improving mental health was associated with: (a) lower levels of parent-reported child emotional and behavioural problems between Waves 1 and 2, Waves 2 and 3 and in the pooled data (Appendix Table A5); (b) lower levels of teacher-reported child emotional and behavioural problems in the pooled data (Appendix Table A6); (c) better teacher-rated children's numeracy and literacy between Waves 2 and 3 (Appendix Table A9 and Appendix Table A10).
- Mothers' improving self-reported physical health was associated with lower levels of child injuries requiring attention between Waves 2 to 3 and the pooled data (Appendix Table A12).
- Mothers' more consistent parenting was associated with lower levels of parent-reported child emotional and behavioural problems between Waves 2 and 3 and in the pooled data (Appendix Table A5).
- Mothers' more angry parenting was associated with higher levels of parent-reported child emotional and behavioural problems between Waves 1 and 2, Waves 2 and 3 and in the pooled data (Appendix Table A5).
- Having a greater number of children in the family was associated with lower levels of teacher-reported child emotional and behavioural problems between Waves 1 and 2 (Appendix Table A6).

No statistically significant associations were apparent for the subjective measure of financial wellbeing and for housing tenure, despite the earlier findings (Table 12 and Table 13) that housing did quite often change with a new father figure. While this suggests that changes in the financial situation of the family do not contribute to changes in children's outcomes, this would need to be analysed using more precise measures of the family's finances for it to be able to be asserted with confidence.

Of course, these measures of family functioning do not capture all the ways in which families can change over time; in particular, we do not have measures in the model of just how involved the new father figure is in the family. In fact, throughout the earlier analyses of new father figures, we have seen that these fathers can include a biological father moving into the home, or a stepfather, or another new partner of the single mother who is not said to be a stepfather. In future analyses of these data, it will be worth examining whether children's outcomes differ according to the nature of the relationship between the child and this person. Of particular benefit would be the inclusion of information about the parenting by this new father figure, although this information is only collected in LSAC for those new partners who are said to have a parental role (that is, who are the child's biological or stepfather).

To isolate the influence of a new father figure on children and not confound it with separation or divorce, we limited our analyses to examining those children living in single-parent households, and therefore these analyses do not allow a comparison to the majority of children who are living in intact couple-parent families. Previous analyses of the LSAC data by Baxter and Smart (2010) showed that children living in stepfather families did tend to have somewhat poorer outcomes than children living in intact couple families, in terms of cognitive and emotional/behavioural outcomes. The poorer outcomes for children living in single-parent as opposed to couple-parent families have also been shown elsewhere (for example, Sweeney 2010).

3.7 Summary

In this section of the report, we have examined to what extent children experience a new father figure through the re-partnering of their mother, whether this is more likely to occur in certain family types, and whether this has implications for children's outcomes.

Overall, the analyses showed that quite a small proportion of children in this study had had a new father figure. In the K cohort, for example, fewer than 2 per cent (a sample size of 62) had had a new father figure by the age of 4 to 5 years, as collected in Wave 1. Between Waves 1 and 2, 3.5 per cent had a new father figure move into the family (N=123), and between Waves 2 and 3, 2.3 per cent had a new father figure move into the family (N=76). Of those who had a new father figure, this was most likely to have occurred in families in which mothers had previously been a lone parent. What the analyses also showed was that this new father figure could not always be assumed to represent a uniform change in family form. Some 'new' father figures were actually the child's father moving into the home, after having lived apart from the mother. Whether this represented a reconciliation or a joining of two previously separate households could not be ascertained with these data. Among the new fathers who had no biological relationship with the children, some were given the title of 'stepfather', while others were not. Some were married, and some were cohabiting. Further, although not considered new father figures, there were also other men in the lives of lone mothers, who were not named as usual residents but who were in a 'dating' relationship.

These different ways in which new father figures could enter the home may be relevant in consideration of how these men may potentially affect children's outcomes. Sample size limitations meant that we were unable to take these differences into account when examining associations with children's outcomes.

It was important in these analyses to acknowledge that having a new father figure is much more likely to occur in some families than in others. Not surprisingly, lone-mother families, especially mothers who are already in a non-live-in ('dating') relationship, have a much greater likelihood of having a new father figure than those in couple-parent families. The multivariate analyses predicting which families are likely to have a new father figure produced quite inconsistent findings on most variables other than mothers' initial relationship status. The exception was mothers' age, with older mothers being less likely to re-partner.

Lone mothers themselves often have different characteristics to those in more stable long-term relationships. Compared to couple mothers, single mothers have poorer physical and mental health, are less likely to be employed, have lower levels of education, are less likely to be home owners and are more likely to have the children's grandparents or aunts/uncles in the household. They actually have higher average personal incomes compared to partnered mothers, but the total parental income in their household is significantly lower.

Given these selection effects, an important question is how or why the presence of new father figures might affect children's outcomes. Does it result in children being lifted out of the relative disadvantage seen in lone-mother families? Or are new difficulties introduced, through new and changed family relationships? These analyses showed that there was not much evidence of change in families when there was a new father figure, in respect of the subjective measures of financial wellbeing, mothers' parenting behaviours (warm or consistent parenting) or mental health. The changes that were often apparent were a change in housing, to be more often living in a house that was owned or bought. Also, the re-partnering sometimes coincided with an increased number of step or half-siblings to the child.

These analyses of changes that occurred along with a new father figure suggest that possible associations with child wellbeing may not always be a result of changes in family circumstances or functioning, although moving to a new home and having new co-resident siblings may affect the wellbeing of children.

Making things more complex, of course, is, as discussed above, the fact that this new father figure is not the same thing for all families, with some of these 'new' partners actually being the child's biological father. Further, some new partners marry into the family, while others cohabit; some are named as stepfathers, while others are named as unrelated adults.

With respect to any implications for children's outcomes, our findings from the fixed effects (FE) models suggest that the majority of differences in child outcomes are not associated with having a new father figure per se. This suggests that findings of poorer outcomes for children in stepfamilies may not be due so much to the presence of the new father figure, but instead may be related to pre-existing differences that predispose parents to be a lone parent in the first place. There was one notable exception, with teachers indicating that children's emotional and behavioural problems increased between Waves 1 and 2, which is the crucial transition period to primary school (4 to 5 years to 6 to 7 years). This particular period in a child's life is accompanied by significant normative changes on the commencement of school, and the disruption of a new father figure entering the household may be difficult for children to accommodate. From our analyses in this report, it is unclear whether this particular group is vulnerable after this period, but this may be worthwhile pursuing in future research.

Overall, despite the many and complex changes highlighted in this report when a new father figure enters the home, children seem to cope well. The transition to primary school is a point of vulnerability and, given that teachers seem to be aware of it, there may be some role for the school system in facilitating support during a period of multiple changes in a child's life.

4 Fathers living elsewhere and father involvement

4.1 Introduction

Many Australian children live apart from their fathers, and families manage this situation in very many ways. Fathering by these fathers who live elsewhere, or non-resident fathers, varies widely across families, in the amounts and types of involvement with children and with the other parent. In this section, we explore some different aspects of fathering by non-resident fathers, examining relationships between aspects of fathering and variation by age of children and relationship history of the parents.

This section adds to the body of Australian literature on non-resident fathers (for example, Smyth & Ferro 2002; Smyth & Moloney 2008; Smyth, Qu & Weston 2004), with a focus in this report on families with relatively young children (0 to 1 to 8 to 9 years). The terms 'fathers living elsewhere' and 'non-resident fathers' are used interchangeably in these analyses.

For these analyses, LSAC is used to identify children who are living with their mother and who have a father living elsewhere. Of course, some parents arrange the care of children in such a way that children spend significant amounts of time with their father; for example, when parents have shared care arrangements. This report does not attempt to identify these types of parenting arrangements, and so all fathers who live apart from the child at the time of the study are referred to herein as fathers living elsewhere or non-resident fathers. Too few children were living with their biological father but not their biological mother to consider those situations in which the parent living elsewhere is the mother. For more information about the policy context with regard to separated families with children, refer in particular to the *Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms* (Kaspiew et al. 2009).

Research on non-resident fathers often relates to aspects of post-separation parenting (for example, Smyth & Ferro 2002; Smyth & Moloney 2008). A focus on separated parents is certainly important, given the proportion of children likely to experience their parents' separation as they are growing up. Other children, however, may have a father living elsewhere without having ever lived with him. Pregnancies that occur to women in an unstable or barely existent relationship might result in women becoming single parents, and fathers becoming non-resident fathers, without the breakdown of a cohabiting or marital relationship. This sets up a different context for fathers' involvement. Kiernan's (2006) analysis of the UK Millennium Cohort Study is one study that has more closely examined fathering, specifically in these families. LSAC does not include all the characteristics found by Kiernan to explain differences in fathering by these men (for example, whether the pregnancy was planned, whether the father was attendant at the birth, whether the father is named on the birth certificate). However, other information about parents' relationship history is used to include these fathers in the analyses and compare them to those who become non-resident fathers through separation or divorce.

The initial analyses in this section present some of the relationship history and family circumstances of children with fathers living elsewhere, to provide some understanding of the lives of children, mothers and fathers in this situation. Also included in this section are details of the sociodemographic characteristics of mothers and of fathers living elsewhere, compared to mothers and fathers in intact families—again, to help understand some of the issues faced by these families.

Different aspects of fathering are considered here, including fathers' involvement with children, their taking financial responsibility for children and their co-parenting with mothers. Specifically, fathering is examined firstly through measures of spending time with children, including having some contact with children, and the frequency of that contact and mothers' and fathers' satisfaction with the contact. Information on fathers' involvement in personal care and social activities, and also parenting styles, is included. Secondly, fathers' financial contributions, through child support and other informal means, are examined. Thirdly, parental relationship quality and the co-parental relationship are considered.

The issues faced by fathers who do not live all the time with their children in relation to their involvement with children are, of course, very different to those faced by fathers who live with their children all of the time. Non-resident fathers may not only have to address difficulties created simply by living away from their children, but they may also have complex relationships to negotiate.

We would like to be able to assess whether living apart from children results in different views of what being a good father entails. Such information is not, however, available in LSAC. Instead, we examine the parenting self-efficacy of resident fathers and fathers living elsewhere, to see whether fathers who live apart from their children feel any different to those who live all the time with the children, in terms of their own skills as parents. For non-resident fathers, relationships between parenting self-efficacy and aspects of fathering measured in this report are explored. This helps to consider whether there are certain aspects of fathering that might be more strongly linked to perceptions of being a good (non-resident) father.

Undertaking research about non-resident fathers' involvement with children is not straightforward for a range of reasons (Smyth 2004b). One problem is in identifying these fathers in surveys, as many surveys only collect details of resident children. It is not uncommon, then, for research to be based upon samples derived from targeted populations, such as non-resident fathers who have sought access to legal or other relationship services (for example, Hawthorne & Lennings 2008). These, however, are likely to be biased towards fathers who are unhappy with certain aspects of the relationship. Some population-based studies do capture information about children living elsewhere; for example, the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, which has been used for analyses of non-resident fathers' contact with children (for example, Cashmore et al. 2010; Smyth, Caruana & Ferro 2004; Smyth & Ferro 2002; Smyth, Qu and Weston 2004). A difficulty with these data is that non-resident fathers include fathers of children of any age up to 17 years, and the sample size becomes quite small if a focus on young children is preferred. Internationally, research about fathers' involvement is often based on the reports of mothers, with the advantage that these data can fairly easily be collected from all families in which children have fathers living elsewhere. The disadvantage is that mothers may not accurately report levels of father involvement. Given these data collection issues, LSAC provides a valuable opportunity to study non-resident fathers' involvement. Very detailed data on fathers' involvement are collected from the mothers, but also, as described below, in Wave 3 a 'parent living elsewhere' survey (with a good response rate) provided us with a large range of father-reported data, which added to that provided by mothers. With LSAC being a large, broadly nationally representative study, these data about the involvement by fathers living elsewhere contribute significantly to what is known about fathering in these families with young children.

4.2 Data

Data used here were sourced from Waves 1 to 3 of the B and K cohorts of LSAC (see Section 2).

To begin these analyses, to determine whether children had a father living elsewhere, the analyses were limited to families of a less complex nature, including only families in which children lived with their biological mother.[4] Families were excluded if children were adopted or fostered, had both biological parents living elsewhere or lived only with adults other than their parents. For these families, identifying biological parental relationships and relationships with current parents was complicated and represented families of such diverse situations that it made their inclusion unwarranted. Families in which a parent living elsewhere was a stepfather or another male relative were also excluded for similar reasons. Altogether, the numbers of children living in these situations were very small (see Table 18).

By applying these exclusions, we have by design excluded children who lived with their biological father but not their biological mother: that is, single fathers. The small sample size for such families (see Table 18) made them difficult to include in the analysis, although the number of children living with a single father increased among older children.

Families in which the child's father had died were included in the in-scope sample but were recorded as being without a father living elsewhere. The numbers of these children were small (for example, less than 10 at 0 to 1 years, up to 40 at 8 to 9 years).

Table 18: Sample counts of families with father living elsewhere

	B cohort			K cohort		
	0–1 year (Wave 1)	2–3 years (Wave 2)	4–5 years (Wave 3)	4–5 years (Wave 1)	6–7 years (Wave 2)	8–9 years (Wave 3)
	Number of observations			Number of observations		
Total families	5,107	4,606	4,386	4,983	4,464	4,331
Exclusions	25	40	50	80	84	108
Single fathers (mother living elsewhere)	11	22	22	48	49	60
In-scope families	5,082	4,566	4,336	4,903	4,380	4,223
Families in which child has a father living elsewhere (FLE)	470	482	537	745	684	743

Note: These data are unweighted, so they may vary from percentages presented in the results section.

Fathers living elsewhere

Based on the sample described above, children were then classified as having a father living elsewhere when they were reported to have a male biological parent living elsewhere. If fathers were recorded as temporarily living away from home (for example, for employment, in jail or a trial separation), these fathers were *not* included as fathers living elsewhere. A very small number of children were in this situation (for example, $N = 88$ for K cohort at Wave 1), and, for the majority of these children, the father was away for work-related reasons.

As will be shown in these analyses, having a father live elsewhere at the time of the survey does not mean this is a permanent arrangement. However, when this report refers to children with a father living elsewhere, these are children who, at that survey, had a male biological parent living elsewhere. Likewise, children living with a resident father may include those who had, at some time, lived apart from their father but were, at the time of the survey, in an intact family. Unlike Section 3 of this report, the primary concern here is not whether mothers have re-partnered, and so children with a father living elsewhere include those living with single mothers as well as those living with stepfathers or other related or unrelated adults.

To analyse fathering by fathers living elsewhere, we often disaggregate the sample according to whether fathers had or had not previously lived with the child. To derive this variable, information provided by mothers on their relationship history and history of living with the child's father was taken into account. In Waves 2 and 3, this information was used along with any indication of co-residency in previous waves of LSAC.

This analysis also includes information on the marital status of partnered parents and the previous marital status of parents who no longer live together but did at some stage. For parents not living together at Wave 1, mothers were asked if they had previously been married to the child's father, so this was used to differentiate between previously married and previously cohabiting. For parents living together at any wave, marital status at the time of the survey was used to ascertain marital status at that time and also used to derive marital status history if parents separated in a later wave.[5]

Comparisons are often made between the family characteristics of children with non-resident fathers and those who live with their father. This comparison group of resident fathers are biological fathers who also live with the child's mother.

Informants on father involvement

In LSAC, there are two possible informants on non-resident fathers' involvement with their children: the mothers and the fathers. The mothers' data are valuable, especially as quite detailed questions are asked about the extent and nature of the fathers' involvement in the child's life at each wave and are answered by the majority of eligible mothers.

In Wave 3, mothers were able to opt out of answering these questions, and this meant that, at this wave, about 20 per cent of mothers in families with a father living elsewhere did not provide any details about the father or arrangements about contact or co-parenting. In these analyses here, they have been included as 'not asked'.

Besides this form of non-response, for the mother-reported data, there was only a small amount of item non-response. In some cases, mothers were excluded from questions that would not apply to them. For example, mothers who stated that they did not know who the father was were not asked questions about any form of father involvement. Exclusions also applied if mothers stated they did not want the other parent to see the child or if the other parent did not know about the child. Across all cohorts/waves, this applied to a total of 72 mothers.

A particular strength of the LSAC data is the inclusion of non-resident fathers in the study. While locating and gaining the involvement of non-resident fathers can be a challenge (Cabrera et al. 2004; Smyth 2004b), it is seen as a priority in LSAC in order to have a more complete picture of the family environments within which children are being raised in Australia.

In Waves 2 and 3, when the child had a father living elsewhere whom the child had seen in the last year, the mother was asked if she would provide contact details for the father. (In Wave 3, contact details were only sought from those who answered questions about the non-resident parent.) When provided, in Wave 2 these contact details were used to send the father a mail-back questionnaire which captured various sociodemographic characteristics, as well as information about involvement with the study child and various aspects of co-parenting and child support. The response rate in Wave 2 was quite low (24 per cent for the B cohort and 33 per cent for the K cohort) (LSAC Project Operations Team 2009), and so these data have not been used. At Wave 3, computer-assisted telephone interviewing was used instead, in order to increase the response rate. The non-resident fathers who were contacted tended to be positive about being asked to be involved in LSAC, and this was reflected, in Wave 3, in a refusal rate of only 6 per cent of those contacted. The remainder of the non-response was due to an inability to make contact with the non-resident fathers (LSAC Project Operations Team 2009).

Almost 80 per cent of fathers for whom contact details were provided responded to this survey (a sample size of 254 for the B cohort and 368 for the K cohort), which represented just less than half of all families with fathers living elsewhere. A summary of the response information for Wave 3 is shown in Table 19.

Table 19: Mothers' and non-resident fathers' responses in families with fathers living elsewhere (FLE), Wave 3

	4–5 years (B cohort)	8–9 years (K cohort)
	Number of observations	
Families reporting to have FLE	537	743
Mothers did not report on FLE	95	117
Mothers reported about FLE	442	626
Mothers provided consent to contact FLE (excludes those with no contact with FLE at all or in last year)	325	461
FLE completed survey	254	368
	%	
FLE completed the survey, as percentage of all families with FLE	47.3	49.5
FLE completed the survey, as percentage of those whose details were provided	78.2	79.8

Survey attrition and bias

LSAC is a longitudinal study, and, as is common with studies of this design, a particular problem is survey attrition. LSAC has a good retention rate from one wave to the next; however, attrition has been more apparent in some groups than others. Of relevance to these analyses has been the greater attrition of those families in which it was reported that the child had a parent living elsewhere. Of the total 5,082 children in scope in the B cohort at Wave 1, 90 per cent remained at Wave 2, and 85 per cent remained at Wave 3. But for the 470 children with a father living elsewhere in the B cohort at Wave 1, 82 per cent of children remained in the sample in Wave 2, and 67 per cent in Wave 3. For the K cohort, of the total 4,903 in scope in Wave 1, 83 per cent remained in the sample in Wave 2, and 73 per cent in Wave 3. For the subsample of this cohort with a father living elsewhere at Wave 1 (745 children), 80 per cent remained in the sample at Wave 2 and 73 per cent in Wave 3.

Survey attrition is dealt with partly through the use of survey weights, so these weights have been adjusted in Waves 2 and 3 to take into account non-response bias, based on a large range of variables (Sipthorp & Misson 2009). Nevertheless, we draw attention to it here, as the survey weights may not correct fully for the selective attrition of children with non-resident fathers.

Appendix Table A13 tabulates some Wave 1 characteristics for families with a non-resident father, according to whether mothers later responded to Waves 2 and 3. These data show that, for both cohorts, those remaining in the survey to Wave 3 were more likely, in Wave 1, to be employed and to be home owners than those who did not respond to this wave. Interestingly, for the younger cohort, no significant differences in attrition were apparent according to the range of non-resident father items (contact, hostility, prior residence with child), as measured at Wave 1. For the older cohort, higher attrition was apparent for those families in which children had a weaker attachment to their father. That is, those who responded in Wave 3 had included a higher proportion of fathers living elsewhere who had been, in Wave 1, in contact with the child, and a higher proportion of children had lived with their father at some time prior to Wave 1.

These data suggest that the Wave 3 data that are used for the analyses of fathers living elsewhere may have some biases, perhaps more so for the older cohort. Further biases in the Wave 3 fathers living elsewhere sample were introduced. Firstly, some mothers did not respond to 'parent living elsewhere' questions. Secondly, some mothers were not asked for contact details of fathers (that is, when fathers had had no contact in the last year or at all) or did not provide contact details. Thirdly, some fathers did not respond.

Looking firstly at mothers' responses to the 'parent living elsewhere' questions, Appendix Table A14 shows that mothers were less likely to answer these questions when fathers had, in the previous wave, been reported to have less frequent contact with children, or when mothers reported that they and the fathers had more difficulties getting along.

Appendix Table A15 includes other Wave 3 characteristics and further classifies the responding mothers according to whether or not the fathers living elsewhere were respondents. By design, all the father respondents had had some contact with their child, compared to around two-thirds of those fathers who were either 'non-contacts' or for whom contact details were not requested or provided (we will just call these fathers 'non-contacts' for simplicity). Among mother non-respondents and father non-contacts, fathers had more often not lived with their child, compared to father respondents. There was no difference in rates of father contact according to mothers' reports of the frequency of hostility between parents. Looking at other maternal characteristics, the main differences across these groups were that, for 'fathers living elsewhere' respondent families, resident mothers were more often employed (in the B cohort) and more often home owners (in the K cohort), when compared to father non-contacts.

So again, some biases are apparent and need to be taken into account before any generalisation is made from these findings to all families with fathers living elsewhere.

Methods

The analyses presented in this section are descriptive only, to provide information about the prevalence of certain family characteristics, the sociodemographic characteristics of different family types and different aspects of father involvement. Survey weights were applied in all calculations of percentages and means.

Statistical tests were used on unweighted data to compare distributions or means across groups, as indicated in the table notes. Chi-square tests were used to compare distributions across groups. *T*-tests were used to compare two means, using paired *t*-tests to compare the means across two groups. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to assess whether means varied across more than two groups.

4.3 Proportions of children with a father living elsewhere

Of the children in LSAC, the proportion with a biological father living elsewhere was just over 10 per cent for children aged 0 to 1 year, increasing gradually for children of older ages, with 21 per cent of children aged 8 to 9 years having a father living elsewhere. These figures compare to those published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2008), in which an estimated 11 per cent of children aged 0 to 4 years, and 18 per cent of children aged 5 to 9 years, had a natural father living elsewhere in 2006–07.[6]

The increased incidence of children from 0 to 1 year to 8 to 9 years having a father living elsewhere is not surprising, as it is expected that, as children grow up, there will be an increasing percentage who experience their parents' separation.

Note that any analyses of changes over the waves, within each cohort, are potentially affected by attrition. In Table 20, non-respondents to Waves 2 and 3 are excluded from calculations, which effectively assumes respondents and non-respondents have similar distributions with regard to the proportion having a father living elsewhere. In the previous section, we saw that attrition is actually greater for children with fathers living elsewhere, so these estimates of proportions with fathers living elsewhere may therefore underestimate the true percentage in the population.

Table 20: Proportion of children with a father living elsewhere, by cohort/wave, mothers' reports

	B cohort			K cohort		
	0–1 year (Wave 1)	2–3 years (Wave 2)	4–5 years (Wave 3)	4–5 years (Wave 1)	6–7 years (Wave 2)	8–9 years (Wave 3)
	%			%		
Father living elsewhere	10.4	12.8	15.7	16.5	17.9	21.0
Father does not live elsewhere	89.6	87.2	84.3	83.5	82.1	79.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	**5,082**	**4,566**	**4,336**	**4,903**	**4,380**	**4,223**

Generally, the most common events leading to children having a father living elsewhere are breakdown of marital or cohabiting relationships involving children, and births to single women, perhaps following an unplanned pregnancy or a casual or broken relationship (Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner & Williams 1999). The role of fathers in these different situations will vary considerably, and indeed, in the latter case, some fathers may not even be aware of their fatherhood. For some fathers, a non-existent or very unstable relationship around or leading up to the birth may actually evolve into a collaborative partnership or relationship after the birth, while the opposite may be true in the case of cohabiting or marital relationships ending amidst significant levels of conflict. These different pathways into non-residency of fathers are important considerations and are likely to be reflected in different patterns of fathering as children grow (Carlson, McLanahan & Brooks-Gunn 2005; Seltzer 1991; Walter 2000). We will examine this throughout these analyses.

In these data, the different pathways leading to having a father living elsewhere are apparent by looking at the relationship history of the parents. Table 21 shows that the pathways into the non-residency of fathers differ, depending upon the age of children. The youngest children in LSAC with a father living elsewhere were considerably more likely never to have lived with their father than were older children; of the children aged 0

to 1 year-old with a father living elsewhere, about three-quarters (77 per cent) had never lived with their father, including 41 per cent of children having parents who had never lived together and 36 per cent with parents who had lived together but separated prior to the child's birth. As children grow, they are increasingly likely to experience their parents' separation, and, therefore, older children were more likely to have spent some time living with their father. For example, only 18 per cent of children aged 8 to 9 years with a father living elsewhere had never lived with their father.

Table 21 also shows, for children who had lived with their father, the parents' previous marital status. The younger the child, the more likely it was that the parents were previously cohabiting but not married. This in part indicates that, among all families, the proportion of children living with cohabiting fathers declines as children grow, as cohabiting parents marry or separate (see Appendix Table A16: at age 0 to 1 year, 18 per cent of children lived with a cohabiting father, compared to 7 per cent at age 8 to 9 years).

Table 21: Prior parental relationship for children with a father living elsewhere, by cohort/wave, mothers' reports

	B cohort			K cohort		
	0–1 year (Wave 1)	2–3 years (Wave 2)	4–5 years (Wave 3)	4–5 years (Wave 1)	6–7 years (Wave 2)	8–9 years (Wave 3)
	%			%		
Child had not lived with father	77.2	51.1	37.2	28.0	21.0	18.3
Parents never lived together	40.8	27.1	20.3	16.8	12.4	11.3
Parents separated before birth	36.4	24.0	17.0	11.1	8.6	7.1
Child had lived with father	22.8	48.9	62.8	72.0	79.0	81.7
Parents were married	5.5	17.6	31.3	37.3	45.9	49.4
Parents were not married	17.3	31.4	31.5	34.7	33.1	32.3
All children with father living elsewhere	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	**470**	**482**	**537**	**744**	**680**	**740**

Note: Excludes a small number of children whose parental relationship history could not be determined.

Having a father living elsewhere is not necessarily permanent, given that some separated parents may reconcile, while other couples may generally have a less stable relationship. Among the children in the three waves of LSAC, the majority lived with their father in all three waves, but 15 per cent of the B cohort and 20 per cent of the K cohort had a father living elsewhere in at least one of those waves (Table 22). Some had a father living elsewhere for all three waves (6 per cent of the B cohort and 12 per cent of the K cohort), while others experienced a father leaving or returning to the family over these waves.

Table 22: Incidence of children having a father living elsewhere across three waves of LSAC, by cohort, mothers' reports

Father lives elsewhere (Yes/No)			B cohort	K cohort
Wave 1	**Wave 2**	**Wave 3**	**%**	**%**
Yes	Yes	Yes	5.5	12.0
Yes	Yes	No	0.6	0.3
Yes	No	No	1.4	1.0
Yes	No	Yes	0.2	0.2
No	Yes	Yes	3.3	3.1
No	Yes	No	0.5	0.3
No	No	Yes	3.9	3.2
No	No	No	84.6	80.1
Total			**100.0**	**100.0**
Has father living elsewhere at one or more wave			**15.4**	**19.9**
Sample size			**4,191**	**4,065**

Note: Includes children from households responding at each wave. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding.

Children of cohabiting rather than married parents may be at greater risk of experiencing periods of temporary separation, as well as permanent separation (Binstock & Thornton 2003), although some cohabiting parents marry, and marital separations are certainly not uncommon, as is evident in Table 21. The fluid nature of relationships within some families is apparent if we examine how the parental relationship details change over two waves of data, two years apart. For example, Table 23 shows, for the B cohort, that the children who were the most likely to experience change were those with a resident cohabiting father at Wave 1, with 14 per cent of these fathers no longer resident at Wave 2 and 16 per cent having married between Waves 1 and 2. Similarly, for the K cohort, of cohabiting fathers, 12 per cent were no longer resident at Wave 2, and 8 per cent had married. In the B cohort, there was also considerable change for families in which parents had separated between the birth and the Wave 1 interview, as, by Wave 2, 22 per cent had reconciled (either married or cohabiting). This was also apparent, although to a lesser extent, for the K cohort. (As we will see below, this in part reflects the fact that some single parents had a 'living apart together' (LAT) relationship with the child's father at Wave 1.)

Table 23: Residency of father and parental relationship characteristics for children, mothers' reports, Waves 1 to 2 transitions

	Wave 2 residency of father and parental characteristics				
	Father living elsewhere		Resident biological father (couples)		
Wave 1 residency of father and parental characteristics	Child had not lived with father	Child had lived with father	Married	Cohabiting	Sample size
	B cohort				
Child has:	%				*N*
Father living elsewhere					
Child had not lived with father	83.7	n.a	6.5	9.8	289
Child had lived with father (parents married or cohabiting)	n.a	77.7	10.1	12.3	86
Resident biological father (couples)					
Married	n.a	2.6	97.3	0.0	3,398
Cohabiting	n.a	14.4	15.7	70.0	787
Sample size	**242**	**262**	**3,467**	**589**	**4,560**
	K cohort				
Child has:	%				*N*
Father living elsewhere					
Child had not lived with father	98.5	0.0	0.0	1.5	149
Child had lived with father (parents married)	n.a	94.6	4.9	0.5	249
Child did live with father (parents cohabiting)	n.a	91.2	0.9	7.9	209
Resident biological father (couples)					
Married	n.a	3.6	96.4	0.0	3,391
Cohabiting	n.a	11.9	7.9	80.2	362
Sample size	**147**	**583**	**3,323**	**307**	**4,360**

Note: 'Father living elsewhere' and 'resident father' refer to the residency of the biological father. Includes children from households responding at Wave 1 and Wave 2. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

This instability in parental relationships means that family relationships quite often change as children grow older, and this is even before the introduction of new relationships between separated parents and others are considered. In the next section, we examine some of these details of family relationships. While we have seen here that some fathers move into and out of non-residency, in subsequent analyses the residency status at the time of the survey is used to determine whether or not fathers were non-resident. For some, this non-residency may be a temporary event.

4.4 Characteristics of mothers' homes for children with fathers living elsewhere

Table 24 shows that, at any age, most children with a father living elsewhere lived with their mother and no stepfather (99 per cent of 0 to 1-year-olds through to 81 per cent of 8 to 9-year-olds). This means that the proportion living with stepfathers increased as children grew older, such that, at 8 to 9 years, almost one in five children with fathers living elsewhere also had co-resident stepfathers. Mothers and stepfathers in these families were more likely to be cohabiting than to be legally married.

Table 24: Mother's family characteristics of children with a father living elsewhere, by cohort/wave, mothers' reports

	B cohort			K cohort		
	0–1 year (Wave 1)	2–3 years (Wave 2)	4–5 years (Wave 3)	4–5 years (Wave 1)	6–7 years (Wave 2)	8–9 years (Wave 3)
	%			%		
Child lives with biological mother and stepfather	1.4	3.3	11.6	13.1	14.2	18.7
Mother and stepfather are married	1.0	0.2	1.3	5.3	4.6	6.9
Child lives with biological mother and no stepfather	98.6	96.7	88.4	87.9	85.8	81.3
Mother has resident partner who is not recorded as stepfather	0.8	5.0	4.8	2.8	10.6	11.4
Mother has a committed non-live-in partner (living apart together or dating)	27.2	19.6	19.3	20.6	19.3	12.9
Non-live-in partner is child's father	21.6	n.a	n.a	5.3	n.a	n.a
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Child lives with biological mother and grandparent or uncle/aunt	30.3	20.5	13.3	11.4	9. 0	10.9
Siblings co-resident in mother's home						
Child has no siblings	44.6	42.3	30.1	26.8	22.6	18.4
Child has one or more siblings	55.4	57.7	69.9	73.2	77.4	81.6
Has full siblings	36.1	42.9	52.5	59.9	63.5	67.7
Has half-siblings	24.5	19.6	27.2	27.2	25.9	28.9
Has step-siblings	0.0	0.1	1.4	0.9	2.0	2.5
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Sample size	**470**	**482**	**537**	**745**	**684**	**743**

Note: All percentages are calculated as a percentage of the sample of children with fathers living elsewhere. Children can have any combination of full, half and step-siblings, and so these categories summed to a number higher than the total percentage with one or more siblings. Children may also have siblings in their non-resident fathers' homes.

As discussed in Section 3 of this report, some children live with 'father figures' who are not named as stepfathers but who are partners of their mother. They are usually described as 'unrelated males' in their relationship to the LSAC study child. Of 8 to 9-year-olds with a father living elsewhere, 11 per cent of children lived in families of this type, with their mother and with a 'father figure' who was not listed as a stepfather. That is, the 19 per cent

of 8 to 9-year-olds reported to be living with a stepfather underestimates the proportion of children who have another man living in the household. Proportions of children with such men living in their family were smaller at younger ages.

For children with a father living elsewhere, a reasonable proportion of their mothers had a committed relationship with someone with whom they did not live (for example, 27 per cent for 0 to 1-year-olds, 13 per cent for 8 to 9-year-olds). These mothers with a non-resident partner could represent a relationship form that has been observed throughout the developed world—that of couples 'living apart together' (de Jong Gierveld 2004; Levin 2004; Reimondos, Evans & Gray 2011), although to what extent mothers viewed these relationship as permanent, as opposed to dating, is not available in these data.

For the youngest children with fathers living elsewhere, about one in five had mothers who had a committed relationship with the child's father, who lived elsewhere. Throughout these analyses, these fathers living elsewhere are included with other fathers living elsewhere. No doubt these fathers could have greater levels of involvement with children than other fathers living elsewhere, and they are likely to have a more collaborative parenting arrangement when compared to other fathers living elsewhere. However, we expect that this non-residential arrangement is likely to mean that patterns of fathering by these fathers will have some similarities to other fathers who live apart from their children, and they are therefore included with these other fathers in the analyses presented here.[7]

It is relatively common for single mothers to co-reside with another adult family member— a finding that has been reported previously for Australia (Brandon 2004) and elsewhere (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan 2002). Table 24 shows that, among those with a father living elsewhere, co-residency with a child's grandparent or uncle/aunt is especially likely when children are very young. When children with fathers living elsewhere were aged 0 to 1 years, 30 per cent lived with single mothers and another adult family member. This was still quite common for children aged 2 to 3 years, but, at older ages, the proportions of children living with other adults declined, although they were still around 10 per cent. It appears that this often indicates that mother and child are living in the home of other adult relatives, rather than that these adult relatives have moved into the home of mother and child. While exact data on this are not available in LSAC, an indication is that, out of the families with 0 to 1 year-old children where residence was shared with another adult family member, 60 per cent of the infants' mothers were not renting or purchasing their home, but either had no housing costs, or paid rent or board to another household member. Living with relatives at this time is quite possibly a strategy to address financial insecurity (Mutchler & Baker 2009).

Table 24 also shows whether children with fathers living elsewhere had siblings living with them in their mother's home. (Later, the presence of siblings in their father's home is examined.) The youngest children were least likely to have any siblings (45 per cent had no siblings at age 0 to 1 year, compared to 18 per cent with no siblings at age 8 to 9 years). Children were more likely to have full siblings than half or step-siblings at any age. The older the children, the more likely they were to have full siblings. This pattern was evident also for half-siblings and step-siblings, although at lower levels. It is interesting to note that one in four of the youngest children with a father living elsewhere had a sibling born to another father. This may include a father who is the current partner, but, as the vast majority of mothers do not have a co-resident partner, a significant proportion of half-siblings are likely to have been fathered by a different non-resident father. This no doubt has implications for the involvement of fathers in these families, as mothers potentially need to coordinate the involvement of different fathers, meaning that children in the one family may have quite different fathering experiences.

4.5 Sociodemographic characteristics of mothers and non-residency of fathers

Families in which children have a father living elsewhere are likely to differ on a range of characteristics when compared with intact families. In particular, children with fathers living elsewhere are more likely to experience socioeconomic disadvantage (Robinson 2009). Children with fathers living elsewhere either live in single-parent families, for whom socioeconomic disadvantage is often reported (ABS 2007; Baxter et al. 2006; Bray 2003), or, if parents have re-partnered, in stepfamilies, who have also been shown to be disadvantaged relative to intact couple families (Brandon 2004; Manning & Brown 2006). In part, the relative disadvantage of these groups reflects the fact that parental separation and births to single women occur more often in families with socioeconomic disadvantage than those with greater socioeconomic advantage (Bradbury & Norris 2005; Butterworth, Oz, Rodgers & Berry 2008; Miller-Lewis, Wade & Lee 2005). For some families, financial hardship may be the result of a parental separation. Of course, for single parents, the risk of financial disadvantage is much more likely than for couple parents, since couple-parent families have the opportunity to increase their income to higher levels through the earnings of two adults.

In Table 25 and Table 26, we examine whether there is evidence of differences in socioeconomic and other demographic characteristics of mothers' families according to whether children have a father living elsewhere, using Wave 1 of LSAC. For children with fathers living elsewhere, comparisons are also made between those families in which children had lived with their father and those families in which children had never lived with their father.

In both cohorts, children with fathers living elsewhere were more likely than those living with their father (and mother) to be also living with a grandparent, aunt or uncle. In the youngest cohort, this did not vary according to whether fathers had previously lived with the child, but in the older cohort, those who had never lived with their father were significantly more likely to be living with a relative compared to those who had lived with their father.

Children who were living with their father more often had full siblings living with them, compared to those not living with their father. However, children with a father living elsewhere were more likely to have co-resident (with the mother) half-siblings, even in the youngest cohort. At age 4 to 5 years, children who had never lived with their non-resident father were less likely to have full siblings but more likely to have half-siblings than those who had previously lived with their father, showing the complex family histories in these families.

In both cohorts, when children had a father living elsewhere, compared to when they did not, mothers were, on average, younger, had lower educational attainment, had poorer physical and mental health, were less likely to be employed and were less likely to be home owners.

For these characteristics, there were few significant differences according to the prior residency of fathers living elsewhere. When fathers had lived with the child, mothers had somewhat higher levels of education and were more likely to be employed, although these differences were significant only in the older cohort. Small differences for physical and mental health were observed in the B cohort, with poorer maternal wellbeing being reported for those families in which the child had lived with the father.

Equivalent data for Waves 2 and 3 are given in Appendix Table A17 and Appendix Table A18, in which similar patterns are observed.

The characteristics of the fathers living elsewhere are available in Wave 3, for the subset of responding fathers living elsewhere. These are examined when focusing on families in which fathers living elsewhere had some contact with mothers or children.

Table 25: Sociodemographic characteristics of mother's family, by residency of father, B cohort, Wave 1

	Child with father living elsewhere			
	Child had lived with father	Child never lived with father [a]	All children with father living elsewhere	Child with resident father (couples) [b]
	%			
Child has no siblings co-resident in mothers' home	48.9	43.3	44.6	38.4**
Child has one or more siblings co-resident in mothers' home	51.1	56.7	55.4	61.6**
Has full siblings	33.1	37.0	36.1	57.0***
Has half-siblings	20.2	25.8	24.5	8.2***
Has step-siblings	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Child lives with a grandparent or uncle/aunt	29.2	30.1	29.9	5.7***
Mother's education = more than secondary education	18.7	16.4	16.9	47.1***
Mother's self-reported health = fair or poor	19.1	9.2*	11.4	6.6***
Mother employed	27.1	20.5	16.8	38.0***
Housing tenure = own/mortgaged	15.4	9.3	10.7	68.5***
Financial wellbeing with respect to needs = 'just getting along', poor, or very poor	53.7	53.4	53.5	36.7***
	Mean			
Age of mother (years)	27.2	27.1	27.1	31.3***
Mother's mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)	3.99	4.24*	4.18	4.42***
Sample size	**105**	**365**	**470**	**4,599**

a Significance values refer to difference between values for 'Child had lived with father' and 'Child never lived with father'.

b Significance values refer to difference between values for 'Child with resident father' and 'Child with father living elsewhere'.

Note: Data for Waves 2 and 3 are given in Appendix Table A17 and Appendix Table A18. For continuous measures (age and mental health), t-tests were used to compare groups. Other distributions were tested using chi-square. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Non-significant results ($p \geq 0.05$) are left blank.

Table 26: Sociodemographic characteristics of mother's family, by residency of father, K cohort, Wave 1

	Child with father living elsewhere			
	Child had lived with father	Child never lived with father [a]	All children with father living elsewhere	Child with resident father (couples) [b]
	%			
Child has no siblings co-resident in mothers' home	48.9	43.3	44.6	38.4**
Child has no siblings co-resident in mothers' home	23.8	34.2**	26.8	7.9***
Child has one or more siblings co-resident in mothers' home	76.2	65.8**	73.2	92.1***
Has full siblings	66.1	44.3***	59.9	89.2***
Has half-siblings	24.1	35.2**	27.2	8.0***
Has step-siblings	0.5	1.9	0.9	0.9***
Child lives with a grandparent or uncle/aunt	7.6	17.1***	10.3	4.5***
Mother's education = more than secondary education	19.7	12.7*	17.8	39.1***
Mother's self-reported health = fair or poor	10.6	16.4	12.2	7.2***
Mother employed	46.6	30.2***	38.3	58.2***
Housing tenure = own/mortgaged	30.3	23.9	28.6	76.4***
Financial wellbeing with respect to needs = 'just getting along', poor, or very poor	56.5	54.9	56.0	33.9***
	Mean			
Age of mother (years)	32.0	31.7	31.9	35.0***
Mother's mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)	4.08	3.97	4.05	4.34***
Sample size	**546**	**198**	**745**	**4,133**

a Significance values refer to difference between values for 'Child had lived with father' and 'Child never lived with father'.

b Significance values refer to difference between values for 'Child with resident father' and 'Children with father living elsewhere'.

Note: Data for Waves 2 and 3 are given in Appendix Table A17 and Appendix Table A18. For continuous measures (age and mental health), t-tests were used to compare groups. Other distributions were tested using chi-square. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Non-significant results ($p \geq 0.05$) are left blank.

4.6 Contact between children and fathers living elsewhere

This section begins the analyses of fathering by fathers living elsewhere by examining whether fathers living elsewhere have some contact with their child, then expanding on that to examine the frequency of contact. These measures of contact provide an initial picture of fathers' involvement with their child, although in later sub-sections other aspects of fathering are considered.

Measures of non-resident fathers' contact with children capture father involvement in terms of their accessibility, which is one of the ways in which fathering more generally has been conceptualised. This accessibility provides potential for engagement with children, and with greater accessibility or engagement comes the potential for more involved fathering and closer father–child relationships (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine 1987; Ryan, Kalil & Ziol-Guest 2008).

This section initially uses mothers' reports on fathers' contact with children. While mothers may under-report the extent of fathers' involvement with children (Coley & Morris 2002), these reports are available for most mothers and therefore provide an initial perspective on father involvement. Some Wave 3 data on fathers' own reports on contact with children are also included, although they are limited to a subset of fathers who have some contact with their child.

Mothers' reports on non-resident fathers' contact

Table 27 first shows mothers' reports on whether children have at least yearly contact with their fathers living elsewhere. By 'contact', this item refers to fathers seeing their child face-to-face, as opposed to other forms of communication. Mothers were asked how often the child usually saw their parent living elsewhere. Those not counted as having yearly contact include those who had never seen their fathers living elsewhere, as well as those whose contact was less frequent than yearly.

Table 27: Children who had at least yearly contact with father living elsewhere, by prior parental relationship and cohort/wave, mothers' reports

	B cohort			K cohort		
	0–1 year (Wave 1)	2–3 years (Wave 2)	4–5 years (Wave 3)	4–5 years (Wave 1)	6–7 years (Wave 2)	8–9 years (Wave 3)
	%			%		
Child never lived with father	71.7	60.4	65.7	50.7	58.4	66.9
Parents never lived together	66.3	57.9	60.8	44.3	53.8	64.2
Parents separated before birth	77.8	63.3	69.8	60.4	65.2	70.5
Child had lived with father	93.1	92.0	90.1	86.5	85.6	84.8
Parents were married	95.8	93.7	94.9	91.9	90.6	90.7
Parents were not married	92.4	90.8	94.4	80.7	80.3	84.8
All children with father living elsewhere	76.4	75.8	84.7	76.5	80.5	85.3
Sample size	**459**	**482**	**442**	**740**	**684**	**626**

Note: Excludes a small number of respondents with missing details regarding contact between fathers living elsewhere and child. Wave 3 excludes mothers who elected not to answer questions about the non-resident parent.

Here we have some difficulty in analysing the Wave 3 data (that is, for ages 4 to 5 years in the B cohort and 8 to 9 years in the K cohort), as mothers were able, in this wave, to decline to answer questions about the fathers living elsewhere. As discussed in Section 4.2, mothers who declined were more often those with no or minimal contact with fathers in previous waves, and so this affects the distributions of all Wave 3 responses. The mothers who declined to answer have been excluded altogether from Table 27, but this inflates the estimates of proportions of children with at least yearly contact with their father.

Around 76 to 81 per cent of children (85 per cent in the inflated Wave 3 estimates) had at least yearly contact with their father living elsewhere.

Additional data on fathers' communication with children reveal that some of the fathers who never saw their child had kept in contact by phone, letter or other means in the previous 12 months (or since the father left the home). These data are shown, for Waves 1 and 2, in Appendix Table A19. For the 0-1 year-old children, 53 per cent of fathers who never saw their child had communicated in this way, compared to 34 per cent for children aged 2-3 years, 28 per cent for children aged 4-5 years and 21 per cent for children aged 6-7 years. There was considerable variation in the frequency of this communication, some being very frequent while other

fathers communicated around once a year. In particular, of the 53 per cent of fathers of 0- 1-year-olds who communicated in this way but did not usually see their child, 33 per cent had communicated less often than monthly.

Discerning differences in contact over the ages of children in LSAC is not straightforward, even if only Waves 1 and 2 are used, in part because these data are affected by survey attrition. Also, differences by age of children reflect changing patterns of contact between fathers living elsewhere and children over time as well as changes in the pool of children with non-resident fathers, due to parental separation or reconciliation. Overall, it appears that the proportions of children with yearly or more frequent contact with their father did not change a great deal from the youngest to the oldest children, according to these three waves of LSAC. The proportion having yearly or more frequent contact with their father was actually the same at ages 0 to 1 year and 4 to 5 years, based on Wave 1 (76-77 per cent). Using Wave 2 data, rates of contact were marginally higher at age 6 to 7 years (81 per cent).

Table 27 shows that children who had previously lived with their father more often had contact with him at least on a yearly basis, compared to children who had never lived with their father. Also, when parents had been married, as opposed to cohabiting, children more often had at least yearly contact with their father. These findings are similar to those of other studies (including Lerman & Sorensen 2000; Seltzer 1991; Walter 2000).

When fathers were reported to have had no contact with their child, mothers were asked why this was the case. Around 30 to 40 per cent (varying across cohorts/waves) of mothers said the father did not want to see the child, and this was the reason most commonly reported. However, there was a diverse range of other reasons given, including not knowing the identity of the father, and the father not knowing about the child. Some mothers said they did not want fathers to see the child. In some cases, fathers lived too far away (including overseas).[8]

It is important to note that we only have the reports of mothers in regard to reasons for fathers' non-contact with children, so are unable to confirm if these views align with those of the fathers. Previous research has shown quite different perceptions of mothers and fathers in these situations, with mothers referring to the lack of interest of fathers, but fathers themselves citing difficulties in maintaining contact in the face of maternal obstruction (Smyth, Caruana & Ferro 2004). This other research stresses the complexity of factors involved in many of these families, with barriers of distance, new relationships, conflict between parents and financial disadvantage often being part of the story. As discussed by Smyth and Moloney (2008), it is not clear how much of the non-contact reflects mothers 'gate-keeping' access to children in order to avoid conflict or difficult issues with the children's fathers. Other US research by Sano, Richards and Zvonkovic (2008) stressed, however, that gate-keeping cannot be attributed to all father non-contact, given their findings that father contact sometimes remains low even when mothers attempt to encourage greater levels of father involvement.

Looking at the frequency of non-resident fathers' contact in more detail, Table 28 shows how often fathers saw their child. The 'not asked' Wave 3 responses are shown in this table. Very young children with fathers living elsewhere were the most likely to have weekly contact with their father. As children grew older, they were less likely to have weekly contact, but more likely to have contact every fortnight. Whether this points to lower levels of contact with older children is not clear; however, survey attrition and the changing pool of children with fathers living elsewhere make analyses of trends somewhat problematic.

Table 28: Frequency of child's contact with father living elsewhere, by cohort/wave, mothers' reports

	B cohort			K cohort		
Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child	**0–1 year (Wave 1)**	**2–3 years (Wave 2)**	**4–5 years (Wave 3)**	**4–5 years (Wave 1)**	**6–7 years (Wave 2)**	**8–9 years (Wave 3)**
		%			%	
Weekly	53.2	44.7	37.1	37.9	38.5	32.8
Fortnightly	8.5	12.6	15.6	20.0	21.7	20.1
Monthly	6.1	5.9	4.7	5.4	4.7	4.8
Up to yearly	8.7	12.6	10.7	13.2	15.5	13.3
Less often than yearly, or never	23.6	24.2	12.3	23.5	19.6	12.4
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a	n.a	19.6	n.a	n.a	16.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	**459**	**482**	**537**	**740**	**684**	**743**

Note: 'Not asked, Wave 3' are those mothers who elected to not answer questions about the father living elsewhere in Wave 3. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding.

Research based on LSAC (Cashmore et al. 2010; Losoncz 2008), as well as other studies (see review by Marsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb (2000); Seltzer, (1991)), provide some evidence of a decline in contact between children and non-resident parents as time passes from the time of parental separation, and of more frequent contact (although not overnight stays) being more common for the youngest children (Qu 2004). While this reflects the average trajectory, the review by Smyth and Moloney (2008) showed that some children appear to have quite stable patterns of contact with their non-resident father, with the most stable contact patterns evident for children who live only, or predominantly, with one of their parents. Likewise, Cheadle, Amato and King (2010), using mother-reported US data, found that 38 per cent of non-resident fathers fit a pattern of having high and stable levels of contact with children over a 12-year period. Fathers who started out with high contact, but whose contact declined over 12 years, represented about 18 per cent of non-resident fathers. The largest other group (34 per cent) was those who had consistently low contact over this time. The important contribution of this work was the recognition that average declines in non-resident father involvement in the years following a parental separation conceal quite different patterns at the individual level. (See also Cashmore et al. (2010) for analyses of changes in contact patterns within the LSAC sample, from Waves 1 to 2.)

Certainly, considerable variability in contact patterns over time is apparent at the individual level (Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner & Williams 1999; Carlson, McLanahan & Brooks-Gunn 2008; Coley & Chase-Lansdale 1999; Lerman & Sorensen 2000). Further, contact arrangements may alter because of changes in parents' employment, financial situation or location of residence, or in the quality of parents' relationship with each other, with new relationships or with new births. Also, as children grow, they may communicate with fathers living elsewhere in different ways, for example, possibly increasing their contact by phone (Cooksey & Craig 1998).

Note that these analyses just differentiate fathers living elsewhere according to frequency of contact. This misses out on dimensions such as whether this contact includes overnight stays or not, the duration of periods of contact, and whether contact arrangements are different in school holidays. Smyth, Caruana and Ferro (2004) analysed non-resident fathers' contact with children, incorporating some of these perspectives, and future analyses of these LSAC data can pursue these differences in contact arrangements. Analysis below includes a measure of the frequency of overnight stays.

When mothers reported that fathers had not seen their child in the last month, they were asked why this was so. The most often reported reason given was that the fathers did not want to see their child (27 to 33 per cent, varying across cohorts/waves). The next most common reason given was that the fathers lived too far away (17 to 27 per cent, varying across cohorts/waves). As discussed previously, these reflect views of mothers only.

Distance is often reported to be a significant factor in explaining variation in frequency of contact between non-resident fathers and children, but this is one of many important factors (Braver & O'Connell 1998; Lerman & Sorensen 2000; Parkinson & Smyth, 2004; Smyth, Qu & Weston 2004). In particular, the nature of the relationship between mother and father is expected to be particularly influential in respect of whether it is a hostile or collaborative relationship. As discussed previously, the recentness of the separation may also be relevant for separated parents. New relationships for the mother and/or the father may also make a difference to contact arrangements, as might the numbers or ages of children and the existence of children to new (or perhaps previous) partners. Associations between variables such as these and patterns of contact between non-resident fathers and children can be explored in further work with these data. In Table 29, one factor is examined: whether children had previously lived with their father. Research from the US and the UK has shown that this is likely to have a strong association with non-resident fathers' contact with children (Argys & Peters 2001; Kendler, Sham & MacLean 1997; McKenry, McKelvey, Leigh & Wark 1996). This table shows that, at all ages, weekly contact was more common for children who had lived with their father. It is interesting to note, however, the extent to which children who had never lived with their father saw him on a weekly basis.

Table 29: Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child, by prior parental relationship and cohort/wave, mothers' reports, Waves 1 and 2

	B cohort				K cohort			
	0–1 year (Wave 1)		2–3 years (Wave 2)		4–5 years (Wave 1)		6–7 years (Wave 2)	
Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child	**Never lived with**	**Had lived with**	**Never lived with**	**Had lived with**	**Never lived with**	**Had lived with**	**Never lived with**	**Had lived with**
	%				%			
Weekly	48.2	70.7	34.4	56.7	22.6	43.8	23.1	36.1
Fortnightly	7.1	13.2	7.1	16.0	8.5	24.5	8.9	26.9
Monthly	6.3	5.3	8.2	5.7	6.3	5.1	3.9	5.6
Up to yearly	10.1	3.8	10.8	13.7	13.3	13.2	22.5	17.1
Less often than yearly, or never	28.3	6.9	39.6	8.0	49.3	13.5	41.6	14.4
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Compare frequency of contact by prior residency of father		***		***		***		***
Sample size	**359**	**100**	**226**	**256**	**173**	**543**	**122**	**558**

Note: Chi-square tests compared the frequency of contact for those who never lived with their father to those who had lived with their father, within each cohort/wave. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding. Wave 3 is not shown, as these data are more difficult to interpret given the relatively high proportion of in-scope mothers who did not provide responses to these questions. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Non-resident fathers' reports on contact with children

Prior analyses have shown that reports of contact patterns by mothers and by non-resident fathers do not necessarily agree (Coley & Morris 2002), and so, where possible, it is important also to examine fathers' perspectives.

In Wave 3, fathers living elsewhere also reported on their frequency of contact with their children when they were asked: 'How often do you usually see the child?' (Table 30). The table also shows mothers' responses for those children for whom non-resident fathers' responses were available (the paired sample). Once limited to

these respondents, fathers' and mothers' responses were actually quite similar, with no statistically significant difference in the distributions. Note, though, that these analyses do not examine individual couples to determine how similar or dissimilar responses were within each pair. This is a possible future direction for research with these data.

Comparing these data to Table 28, based on mothers' reports, the responding fathers living elsewhere had more regular contact with their children, compared to all fathers living elsewhere. For example, in the B cohort at age 4 to 5 years, 37 per cent of mothers (of children with fathers living elsewhere) said that fathers had weekly contact with their child (Table 28). This compares with 56 per cent of mothers reporting this for the fathers living elsewhere sample (Table 30). Clearly, the fathers living elsewhere sample does not represent the views and fathering of those who see their children less frequently (see also Section 4.2).

Table 30: Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child, fathers' and mothers' reports by cohort, paired sample, Wave 3

	4–5 years (B cohort)		8–9 years (K cohort)	
	Non-resident fathers' report	Mothers' reports (paired sample)	Non-resident fathers' report	Mothers' reports (paired sample)
	%		%	
Weekly	64.1	56.1	51.5	52.2
Fortnightly	24.5	25.7	31.7	27.3
Monthly up to yearly	11.4	18.2	16.8	20.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	**254**	**254**	**368**	**368**

Note: Based on those families in which data were provided by both resident mother and father living elsewhere. Chi-square tests compared the father-reported distribution to the mother-reported distribution (both non-significant).

4.7 Characteristics of fathers living elsewhere who have some contact with their child

We noted previously that, based on their mothers' details, families in which children have fathers living elsewhere were disadvantaged in respect to certain socioeconomic characteristics. Here we explore whether fathers living elsewhere also appear to be disadvantaged in these respects. Previous analyses of the characteristics of non-resident fathers in Australia (Smyth, Qu and Weston 2004; Smyth & Weston 2000) and overseas (Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner & Williams 1999; Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Taylor & Dickson 2001) lead to expectations that these fathers will be relatively disadvantaged.

Of course, we only have this information for responding fathers, and this sample will be especially biased for the fathers living elsewhere and so will perhaps underestimate the extent of disadvantage within this subgroup. (The analysis of fathers living elsewhere non-response in Appendix Table A15 also confirms this.)

Table 31 compares the non-resident father respondents with resident father (couple) respondents of LSAC on a range of sociodemographic measures. These data show that, compared to resident fathers, non-resident fathers are on average younger and have lower levels of educational attainment and poorer mental and self-reported physical health; they are less likely to be employed, very much less likely to be home owners and more likely to be experiencing some financial difficulty.

Table 31: Selected sociodemographic characteristics of fathers, by residency and cohort, Wave 3

	4–5 years (B cohort)		8–9 years (K cohort)	
Characteristics of fathers	**Resident Non-resident fathers**	**fathers (couples)**	**Resident Non-resident fathers**	**fathers (couples)**
	%		**%**	
Father's education = more than secondary education	15.3	46.9***	15.2	41.4***
Father's self-reported health = fair or poor	13.1	8.6**	16.7	9.1***
Father employed	86.5	89.8	91.0	90.6
Housing tenure = own/mortgaged	28.6	75.3***	38.7	81.1***
Financial wellbeing with respect to needs = 'just getting along', poor, or very poor	43.1	26.5***	41.1	24.4***
	Mean		**Mean**	
Age of father (years)	36.1	38.1**	40.4	41.7*
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)	4.40	4.49**	4.29	4.47***
Sample size	**254**	**3,766**	**368**	**3,423**

Note: Significance tested using chi-square and t-tests to compare characteristics of fathers living elsewhere and resident fathers (couples). * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Non-significant results ($p \geq .05$) are left blank.

Baxter and Smart (2010) found that partnered fathers with lower levels of paternal education and mental and physical health tended to be less involved with their resident children, compared to other partnered fathers, although this was not consistent across all measures of involvement. It is possible that these attributes are also associated with lower levels of contact by non-resident fathers, although this would need further analyses of these data to confirm. Poorer financial wellbeing and somewhat higher levels of non-employment are also of relevance to fathers' ability to meet financial obligations for child support or to provide other informal financial assistance.

Table 32 shows the family characteristics of the responding fathers living elsewhere. This is particularly relevant, as fathers may have less contact with their non-resident children when they have invested in new relationships, particularly if there are new children in these relationships (Cooksey & Craig 1998). The majority of fathers living elsewhere were single, although some were in a committed relationship with someone who was not co-resident ('living apart together' or dating relationships). One-quarter of fathers living elsewhere of 4 to 5-year-olds and one-third of fathers living elsewhere of 8 to 9-year-olds were living with a partner, with the more common relationship being a cohabiting one rather than marriage.

Most fathers living elsewhere did not have other children living with them full-time. Only 21 per cent of the younger children and 26 per cent of the older children had siblings (full, step or half) living with their father full-time. Fathers living elsewhere, however, did often have their children's full siblings living with them part-time, no doubt reflecting that they sometimes took care of all their children from that relationship.

Table 32: Family characteristics of fathers living elsewhere, by cohort, fathers' reports, Wave 3

	4–5 years (B cohort)	8–9 years (K cohort)
	%	
Father's relationship status		
Single	75.1	66.9
In a committed relationship (living apart together or dating)	17.9	14.7
Partnered	24.9	33.1
Married	6.6	12.1
Cohabiting	18.3	21.0
Total	100.0	100.0
Siblings and other children		
Child has no siblings full-time or part-time co-resident in father's home	12.9	9.8
Child has siblings full-time or part-time co-resident in father's home	87.1	90.2
Other children are full-time resident with father living elsewhere	20.8	26.3
Including full siblings of study child	4.1	6.4
Including step-siblings of study child	6.0	9.2
Including half-siblings of study child	8.8	9.7
Other children are part-time resident with father living elsewhere	54.8	67.3
Including full siblings of study child	47.1	62.2
Including step-siblings of study child	4.0	2.9
Including half-siblings of study child	4.7	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0
Sample size	**254**	**368**

Note: All percentages are calculated as a percentage of the sample of responding fathers living elsewhere, among children with fathers living elsewhere. A small percentage reported having other children full or part-time resident, but did not specify their relationship to the study child.

4.8 Parenting activities of fathers living elsewhere

Frequency of contact does not in itself tell us about what fathers and children do during the times they are together. Using the Wave 3 'parent living elsewhere' questionnaire, we can examine more specifically fathers' involvement in personal care and social activities. These data are the only data collected in LSAC from fathers living elsewhere that help in exploring how these fathers spend time with their children. Unfortunately, no data are available on the nature of leisure time shared between fathers living elsewhere and children; this would have been useful to allow for more comprehensive analyses of non-resident fathers' time with children (Jenkins 2006; Stewart 1999; Swinton, Freeman, Zabriskie & Fields 2008). This section also incorporates information on fathers' 'warm' parenting behaviour, as a further way of exploring the nature of fathers' time with children.[9]

Fathers living elsewhere were asked how often they undertook each one of a list of activities with their child, with response categories of 'often', 'sometimes', 'rarely' and 'not at all'. Table 33 shows that the majority of fathers living elsewhere reported that they often helped with bathing their child, getting him or her ready for bed and supervising dental care. A large majority often ate an evening meal with their child and talked to the

child about his or her day. Fewer fathers reported that they helped their child get ready for school (preschool or child care). This is most likely to be related to the fact that, when children do stay overnight with a non-resident father, they most often do so on the weekend (Smyth, Caruana & Ferro 2004), when getting ready for child care, preschool or school is not required.

Table 33: Fathers living elsewhere and resident fathers' frequency of involvement in children's personal care and social activities, fathers' reports, by cohort, Wave 3

	Fathers living elsewhere: frequency of involvement in activity				Resident fathers (couples): frequency of involvement in activity			
	Often	Some-times	Rarely or not at all	Total	A few times a week or daily	A few times a month	Rarely or not at all	Total
	%				%			
4–5 years								
Give child a bath or shower	72.1	17.6	10.3	100.0	66.8	18.1	15.1	100.0
Get child ready for bed or put him/her to bed	78.5	11.9	9.6	100.0	82.0	11.1	7.0	100.0
Help child brush his/her teeth	64.7	19.5	15.8	100.0	64.5	15.4	20.1	100.0
Help child get ready for preschool, child care or school	28.6	12.1	59.3	100.0	44.1	16.8	39.1	100.0
Eat an evening meal with child	80.7	12.8	6.5	100.0	90.6	6.2	3.2	100.0
Talk to child about his/her day	83.7	12.7	3.6	100.0	84.8	7.6	7.6	100.0
8–9 years								
Help child brush his/her teeth	46.2	24.6	29.2	100.0	45.5	17.5	37.0	100.0
Help child get ready for school	25.9	9.4	64.7	100.0	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
Eat an evening meal with child	86.4	8.7	4.9	100.0	93.0	4.3	2.7	100.0
Talk to child about his/her day	86.3	11.8	1.9	100.0	89.0	8.2	2.8	100.0

Note: Statistical tests of differences in distributions for resident versus non-resident fathers were not conducted because of the differences in response categories for each group. Resident fathers' involvement in helping children get ready for school was not asked for 8 to 9-year-olds. Sample size for non-resident fathers was 254 for the B cohort and 368 for the K cohort. For resident fathers (couples), sample sizes were approximately 2,688 and 2,419 respectively, although there was some item non-response for non-resident and resident fathers. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding.

By way of comparison, this table also shows equivalent data collected from resident fathers. The question, however, was somewhat different, as these fathers were asked how often they had engaged in these activities in the previous month, and response categories included 'daily', 'a few times a week', 'a few times a month', as well as 'rarely' or 'not at all'. While comparisons are difficult, it appears that the main difference between the groups does relate to fathers' involvement in helping their child get ready for preschool, child care or school. Nevertheless, with the non-resident fathers' details captured using the more subjective measures of time, it is not possible to say whether there are actual differences in the frequency of their involvement in other activities.

We expect that more frequent involvement in these activities would be reported for fathers living elsewhere who see their child more often. Before exploring this, we introduce another indicator, that of whether children sometimes (at least monthly) stay overnight with their fathers, as this provides some indication of whether certain of these activities are likely to be applicable (Table 34). This information is as reported by fathers. Overall, 82 per cent of children aged 4 to 5 years, and 80 per cent of children aged 8 to 9 years, of responding fathers living elsewhere, stayed overnight with their father living elsewhere at least once a month.[10] In both cohorts, having an overnight stay was equally common for those who saw their father at least once a week or once a fortnight. The high frequency of overnight stays for those with fortnightly contact perhaps reflects staying with fathers every second weekend, one of the common schedules of care post-separation (Smyth 2004a).

Table 34: Percentage of children staying overnight with their father living elsewhere at least once a month by cohort and frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child, fathers' reports, Wave 3

	Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child			All children with responding father living elsewhere	Compare by frequency of contact
	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly up to yearly		
	%			%	
4–5-year-olds					
Child stays overnight at least once a month	88.6	91.4	24.0	81.9	***
Sample size	164	60	30	254	
8–9-year-olds					
Child stays overnight at least once a month	91.4	91.1	23.5	79.8	***
Sample size	**190**	**118**	**60**	**368**	

Note: Significance tested using chi-square. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 35 now examines whether fathers living elsewhere more often engage in personal care and social activities when they see their child more frequently. Given the findings regarding overnight stays, it is not surprising to see that, when the 4 to 5 year-old children had weekly or fortnightly contact, fathers most often helped them get ready for bed and gave them a bath or shower. But these children were least likely to have fathers help them get ready for school or preschool, suggesting overnight stays occurred over the weekend, possibly with children going back to their mother before the start of the school week. The same was true in the older cohort.

Fathers' likelihood of often eating an evening meal with their child and talking to them about their day did not differ by frequency of contact for the younger cohort, and only the latter varied by frequency of contact for the older cohort.

Table 35: Involvement by father living elsewhere in children's personal care and social activities, by cohort and frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child, fathers' reports, Wave 3

	Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child			All children with responding fathers living elsewhere	
	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly up to yearly		
	% fathers often undertake activity			% fathers often undertake activity	Compare by frequency of contact
4–5-year-olds					
Get ready or put to bed	75.2	89.2	73.6	78.5	*
Give a bath or shower	68.2	85.8	64.2	72.1	*
Help brush his/her teeth	80.7	85.7	70.6	80.7	
Help child get ready for preschool, child care or school	34.5	15.0	25.1	28.6	**
Eat an evening meal with child	64.9	66.8	59.3	64.7	
Talk to child about his/her day	83.6	85.7	69.1	82.4	
Sample size	**162**	**60**	**30**	**252**	
8–9-year-olds					
Help brush his/her teeth	49.4	44.3	39.5	46.1	
Help get ready for school	39.4	14.6	6.1	25.9	***
Eat an evening meal with child	87.4	84.7	86.3	86.3	
Talk to child about his/her day	89.6	85.3	78.1	86.3	*
Sample size	**189**	**118**	**59**	**366**	

Note: Significance tested using chi-square. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Non-significant results ($p \geq 0.05$) are left blank.

Another view of fathers' time with children can be gained by examining the style of parenting that fathers exhibit when they are with their children. Here we look at just one aspect—the degree of warm parenting. Parental warmth in LSAC is measured by asking parents about how often they display warm affectionate behaviour towards their child; for example, 'How often do you enjoy doing things with this child?' and 'How often do you express affection by hugging, kissing and holding this child?' Other items refer to how often they have warm encounters with their child, enjoy doing things with them, and feel close to them when they are happy or upset. Responses are aggregated to derive a scale of warm parenting (values between one and five), with a higher score equating to warmer parenting.

Relevant questions are asked in LSAC of both resident and non-resident fathers, so warm parenting can be compared between these groups and then, for fathers living elsewhere, compared according to frequency of contact. Table 36 shows that the average warm parenting score was higher for non-resident than resident fathers, although scores are toward the upper end of the scale for both groups. Before concluding that non-resident fathers, in general, have a warmer parenting style than resident fathers, it is important to reflect on the sample biases of the 'fathers living elsewhere sample', which excludes the less engaged fathers. While there are also some biases in the sample of responding couple-parent fathers (see the analyses in Baxter & Smart (2010)), this bias is perhaps not as extreme as that of the fathers living elsewhere sample. It may also be that non-resident fathers are more likely to voice appreciation for the time they share with their non-resident children (to the children or to the interviewer), compared to those fathers who are able to spend time with their children every day. Of course, another point to remember is that these data are based on self-reports by fathers, who may be reluctant to report negatively against the particular items contributing to this scale.

Table 36: Fathers' warm parenting, by residency and cohort, fathers' reports, Wave 3

	Fathers living elsewhere	Resident fathers (couples)	Compare resident fathers and fathers living elsewhere
	Mean parental warmth		
4–5 years (B cohort)	4.33	4.23	**
8–9 years (K cohort)	4.23	4.06	***

Note: Parental warmth is measured on a scale of 1 to 5, where higher = more parental warmth. Significance tested using t-tests. Sample size for fathers living elsewhere was 252 for the B cohort and 366 for the K cohort. For resident fathers (couples), sample sizes were 2,681 and 2,524 respectively. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 37 shows whether fathers engaged in warmer parenting styles when they saw their child more frequently. No statistically significant differences were found, suggesting that more frequent contact was not always associated with a warmer parenting style. These data will be interesting to explore further, to ascertain whether other characteristics of fathers living elsewhere were associated with different approaches to parenting.

Table 37: Warm parenting of fathers living elsewhere, by cohort and frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child, fathers' reports, Wave 3

Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child	4–5 years (B cohort)	8–9 years (K cohort)
	Mean parental warmth	
Weekly	4.32	4.20
Fortnightly	4.39	4.31
Monthly up to yearly	4.23	4.19
All fathers living elsewhere	4.33	4.23
Sample size	**252**	**366**

Note: Parental warmth is measured on a scale of 1 to 5, where higher = more parental warmth. ANOVA was used to test for significance of difference in warm parenting across frequency of contact. No significant differences were found.

4.9 Satisfaction with involvement by father living elsewhere

The extent to which fathers living elsewhere spend time with children can be the result of complicated negotiations between parents. It may be quite difficult, therefore, for mothers and fathers to agree on what is the 'right' level of contact, and this may lead to dissatisfaction in these contact arrangements. Parkinson and Smyth (2004), using a representative sample of Australians, reported that separated mothers were more satisfied with the amount of contact between non-resident fathers and children than were separated fathers, with non-resident fathers more often reporting that they had nowhere near enough contact with their children.

Here we explore parents' satisfaction with the level of non-resident fathers' involvement with their child. To examine parents' satisfaction with fathers' involvement, we use a question asked of mothers: 'How involved do you think the parent living elsewhere should be in the study child's life?', and of fathers: 'Thinking about the role that you have in the child's life, how involved would you like to be?' The advantage of using these data to examine this issue is that the mothers and fathers living elsewhere can be matched to compare the views of each.

These data have also been related to the frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child. While 'involvement', as asked about in the question, is a broader concept than the narrower issue of how frequent the father to child contact is, we expect that frequency of contact will be an indicator of involvement.

Table 38 shows that about half the mothers thought fathers' level of involvement was 'about right', when focusing on the subsample in which responses were available for mothers and fathers living elsewhere. The fathers living elsewhere were much more likely than mothers to say they preferred a lot or a little more involvement (75 per cent). These different views of mothers and fathers may reflect the fact that it is more often mothers than fathers who shape children's living arrangements after a separation (Smyth 2004b; Smyth, Sheehan & Fehlberg 2001). For example, Australian research on a sample of non-resident father Family Court applicants found that almost half the fathers said that the mother alone decided on where their child was to live after separation, and almost one-third said that the mother had determined the contact the child was to have with them. Many fathers expressed unhappiness with these decisions (Hawthorne & Lennings 2008). As many children live predominantly with their mother post-separation, mothers are likely to have a greater say in children's schedules and in facilitating contact with fathers, compared to non-resident fathers.

Table 38: Preferences for more or less involvement by father living elsewhere, by frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child, fathers' and mothers' reports, paired sample, Wave 3

	Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child			All with at least yearly contact with child	Sample size
	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly up to yearly		
Preference for father to be...		%			*N*
Mothers' reports					
A lot more involved	11.7	27.4	48.7	23.2	139
A little more involved	20.1	26.7	17.4	21.3	133
Level of involvement about right	61.9	41.6	30.2	50.2	315
Less involved	6.3	4.3	3.8	5.3	31
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	618
Non-resident fathers' reports					
A lot more involved	34.6	56.3	74.7	46.7	286
A little more involved	32.2	24.5	21.5	28.4	187
Level of involvement about right	33.2	19.3	3.9	24.9	145
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	618
Combining mother and non-resident fathers' reports					
Mother and father want father more involved	23.6	42.0	61.8	36.1	226
Mother wants father more involved; father says about right	8.1	12.1	4.3	8.4	46
Mother says involvement about right/too much; father wants more involvement	43.6	35.1	32.2	39.1	247
Mother and father say involvement of father about right (or too much, for mothers)	24.6	10.9	1.7	16.5	99
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**618**

Note: Sourced from Wave 3, both cohorts combined. Sample restricted to those in which both mother and father reported on level of child's contact (small non-response to the preferred involvement questions explained the different sample numbers). 'Less involved' includes those who responded 'a little less involved' or 'much less involved'. No fathers chose these response categories. Frequency of contact is based on the report of mothers in the first panel and non-resident fathers in the second panel. The final section uses mothers' reports of frequency but combines mothers' and fathers' reports of satisfaction. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding.

Associations between frequency of contact and satisfaction with involvement are apparent in Table 38, as has been reported in other studies when examining satisfaction with frequency of contact with children (Parkinson & Smyth 2004). Generally, when fathers had less frequent contact with children, mothers were more likely to say they preferred the father to have more involvement. However, even when contact between fathers living elsewhere and their children occurred less frequently than monthly (but up to once a year), around one-third of mothers thought their involvement was about right. While fathers living elsewhere were more likely than mothers to say they preferred more involvement, as for mothers' reports, associations between the frequency of fathers' contact with their child and their satisfaction with their level of involvement were also apparent.

Because this table is based on those families in which fathers living elsewhere responded at Wave 3, it does not represent all families with fathers living elsewhere; it especially excludes fathers with no or very little contact with their child. Table 39 shows these data, for Wave 1 (both cohorts combined), for all families in which the LSAC study child had a father living elsewhere.[11] About half (53 per cent) of the mothers thought that the father should be more involved, either a lot more (32 per cent) or a little more (21 per cent), and another 41 per cent thought the level of involvement was about right. As was evident in Table 38, preferences for more involvement increased as actual levels of contact declined from weekly to fortnightly to monthly/up to yearly. However, the families in which fathers had less frequent or no contact were somewhat different, with mothers in these families less likely than those with monthly/up to yearly contact to prefer more father involvement. In fact, 11 per cent preferred even less father involvement than they had. The information given by mothers on reasons for no or little contact with these fathers showed that a number reported that lack of contact was due to drugs, alcohol or violence problems or because the father did not want involvement with the child.

Table 39: Preferences for more or less involvement by father living elsewhere, by frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child, mothers' reports, Wave 1

	Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child				All with father living elsewhere
	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly up to yearly	less often or never	
Preference for father to be...			%		
A lot more involved	19.4	32.4	53.1	42.3	32.1
A little more involved	20.5	28.3	19.5	18.2	21.1
Level of involvement about right	56.0	33.2	21.1	28.3	40.5
Less involved	4.1	6.1	6.4	11.2	6.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	**523**	**184**	**207**	**230**	**1,144**

Note: Sourced from Wave 1, both cohorts combined. Excludes 60 respondents with missing information on satisfaction with fathers' involvement. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding.

In the survey of fathers living elsewhere, those who preferred more involvement were asked what the barriers were to their having more involvement. A summary of these data is shown in Appendix Table A20. Overall, the three most common reasons given related to job demands (40 per cent), child's other parent (29 per cent) and living too far away (25 per cent). These data suggest that maternal gate-keeping may be a barrier to some fathers' involvement, although this is not an issue for all responding fathers. Reasons for insufficient involvement differed for those who saw their child more frequently, compared to those who saw their child infrequently. Among fathers who saw their child weekly, job-related reasons were most common (47 per cent gave this reason), followed by the child's other parent (30 per cent), while among those who saw their child monthly or less frequently, distance was by far the most common barrier cited (68 per cent gave this reason).

4.10 Child support and other financial and in kind contributions

Another key indicator of non-resident fathers' involvement in their children's lives is the financial contribution made to the costs of raising their child or children. Such contributions are further measures of fathering, in that they indicate an element of taking responsibility for children (Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson 1998; Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley & Buehler 1993; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine 1987).

For many fathers, contributing financially involves payment of child support, although some fathers do this through less formal means and, for some fathers, in kind contributions can be significant. For example, Greene and Moore (2000) studied the provision of support by non-resident fathers to mothers on welfare in one US state, and they found the provision of informal support by these fathers to be far greater than the provision of formal child support.

In Australia, the formal Child Support Scheme is in place to ensure parents, rather than the government, take primary responsibility for the costs of raising children. Complex formulae determine how much financial support one parent is to give the other when they live separately. Calculations take account of ages and numbers of children, incomes of each parent and the number of nights children stay with each parent. In most families, non-resident fathers will have an obligation to pay mothers some child support, and this is covered by legislation. The payment of this child support can be done privately or through the Child Support Agency. As discussed above, some parents do not use the formal Child Support Scheme, but instead make their own arrangements. For a discussion of the Child Support Scheme in Australia, refer in particular to Smyth and Henman (2010).

In this section, we firstly examine mothers' reports of financial and in kind contributions made by fathers living elsewhere. Fathers' reports are examined and compared to mothers' reports a little later. Note that these data were not collected of mothers in particular circumstances, including those who reported that they did not know who the father was or reported that the father did not know about the child.

We look only briefly at child support. For more extensive analyses of child support using LSAC, refer, for example, to Losoncz and Talevich (2007) and Taylor and Gray (2010). Three different indicators relating to child support are included in Table 40. Note that, for the Wave 3 data, mothers who did not report on the father living elsewhere are included as 'not asked', such that these mothers are included as if they have no child support agreements in place. Some of these mothers may in fact have had child support arrangements, which would mean that the Wave 3 percentages for child support agreements and payments are higher than those given.

The first indicator is whether mothers report that they have a child support agreement with the child's non-resident parent (data only available in Waves 1 and 3). Secondly, Table 40 shows the proportion of mothers who *expected* to receive some child support in the previous month, and then the proportion who *did* receive some child support. Each measure gives a different picture, and percentages vary somewhat over the waves of LSAC. Generally, these data show that around two-thirds (more in Wave 1 of the K cohort) had a child support agreement, while just over half (more in Wave 2 of the B cohort) received child support in the previous month.[12] The percentage of mothers expecting child support was always somewhat higher than the percentage who actually received child support.

Table 40: Indicators of child support agreements and payments, mothers' reports, by cohort/wave

	B cohort			K cohort		
	0–1 year (Wave 1)	2–3 years (Wave 2)	4–5 years (Wave 3)	4–5 years (Wave 1)	6–7 years (Wave 2)	8–9 years (Wave 3)
	%			%		
Has child support agreement with father living elsewhere	67.7	n.a	66.6	73.6	n.a	67.9
Expected to receive child support from father living elsewhere last month	62.7	70.4	55.8	72.3	70.6	55.5
Received child support from father living elsewhere last month	51.3	62.0	53.5	57.2	57.4	51.5
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a	n.a	19.6	n.a	n.a	16.7
Sample size	**450**	**471**	**537**	**729**	**679**	**743**

Note: Parents were not asked whether they had a child support agreement at Wave 2. 'Not asked, Wave 3' are those mothers who elected to not answer questions about the father living elsewhere in Wave 3. Excludes a small number of respondents with missing data on these items (around 20 per cohort/wave).

Wave 3 included some information about those parents who did not have a child support agreement. These data (combining the cohorts due to sample size limitations) showed that, of those with no agreement, 14 per cent were having discussions about an agreement at the time of the survey. For other mothers, when asked, a diverse range of reasons was given for why no child support agreement was in place, with 'other reason' being the most commonly selected category (56 per cent). The next most commonly cited reason for not having an agreement was 'other parent does not work' (25 per cent). The balance (19 per cent), with small sample sizes in each cell, selected the categories of 'unable to locate other parent' or 'can't discuss due to safety concerns'.

As discussed previously, some fathers may contribute to the costs of raising their child by purchasing items themselves or contributing to particular aspects of children's upbringing, such as paying school fees or costs of medical treatments. Information about these contributions is available in Waves 1 to 3 of LSAC, although we do not know if these contributions are part of a formal agreement between the parents.[13]

Table 41 shows mothers' reports of other ways in which fathers contributed financially or in kind. Again, the 'not asked' mothers at Wave 3 are shown in the table, and it is possible that some of these mothers received financial help or in kind support from these fathers, which should be taken into account when examining the Wave 3 data. We refer largely to Waves 1 and 2 results because of the difficulties in interpreting the Wave 3 data.

This table shows that some fathers living elsewhere often contributed in ways beyond the payment of child support; for example, around 20 per cent often buying clothes, toys or presents for their child (for example, 21 per cent for 0 to 1-year-olds and 19 per cent for 6 to 7-year-olds), and around 25 per cent doing so sometimes (for example, 26 per cent for 0 to 1-year-olds and 29 per cent for 6 to 7-year-olds). Paying for their child's medical or dental bills, health insurance or medicines was less common, with fewer than 10 per cent doing so often (for example, 9 per cent for 0 to 1-year-olds and 8 per cent for 6 to 7-year-olds), and slightly more doing so sometimes (for example, 15 per cent for 0 to 1-year-olds and 9 per cent for 6 to 7-year-olds). Somewhat lower percentages reported that the fathers living elsewhere often or sometimes gave extra money for their children's child care, preschool or school expenses and to help out with other expenses, like paying the rent, household bills or car repairs. For all these items, the mothers most often reported that fathers living elsewhere rarely or never contributed in these ways.

Table 41: Financial and in kind contributions made by fathers living elsewhere, mothers' reports by cohort/wave

	B cohort			K cohort		
	0–1 year (Wave 1)	2–3 years (Wave 2)	4–5 years (Wave 3)	4–5 years (Wave 1)	6–7 years (Wave 2)	8–9 years (Wave 3)
How often father living elsewhere...		%			%	
Buys clothes, toys or presents for child						
Often	20.9	23.3	17.1	18.3	19.1	14.9
Sometimes	25.6	24.3	27.2	28.8	28.7	26.8
Rarely or never	53.5	52.4	35.6	52.9	52.2	41.5
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a.	n.a.	20.1	n.a.	n.a.	16.8
Pays for child's medical or dental bills, health insurance or medicines						
Often	8.7	8.4	6.8	5.8	7.8	8.3
Sometimes	15.1	11.9	11.4	10.2	9.1	6.9
Rarely or never	76.2	79.8	61.0	84.0	83.1	67.6
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a.	n.a.	20.7	n.a.	n.a.	17.2
Gives extra money for child's child care, preschool or school expenses						
Often	6.8	6.8	4.8	8.2	8.4	7.2
Sometimes	10.9	8.3	6.1	8.7	11.0	11.1
Rarely or never	82.3	84.9	68.4	83.1	80.6	64.9
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a.	n.a.	20.7	n.a.	n.a.	16.9
Gives extra money to help out, like pay the rent, household bills or car repairs						
Often	7.8	4.2	2.6	5.1	4.4	2.5
Sometimes	19.9	14.2	6.9	8.4	5.4	4.4
Rarely or never	72.4	81.5	70.0	86.5	90.2	76.0
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a.	n.a.	20.5	n.a.	n.a.	17.1
Looks after the child while you work, study or attend appointments						
Often	17.4	12.6	6.8	12.7	10.9	9.4
Sometimes	19.8	21.5	13.4	15.1	14.5	13.5
Rarely or never	62.8	65.8	59.6	72.2	74.6	60.0
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a.	n.a.	20.3	n.a.	n.a.	17.1
Often contributes on at least one of the above	31.4	30.2	22.5	28.4	26.8	23.2
Sample size	**445**	**470**	**533**	**724**	**674**	**740**

Notes: Frequency counts differ slightly across items due to small numbers of mothers reporting 'not needed' or 'don't know' to the questions. 'Not asked, Wave 3' are those mothers who elected to not answer questions about the father living elsewhere in Wave 3. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding.

The final item in Table 41 reports on whether fathers looked after the child while mothers were at work, studying or attending appointments. Again, the majority of fathers living elsewhere were reported as rarely or never doing this (in Waves 1 and 2, between 63 per cent and 75 per cent), although, for fathers living elsewhere of 0 to 1-year-olds, 17 per cent reported that fathers often provided this help.

Using Waves 1 and 2 to examine how these contributions change by age of child does not reveal very large differences. However, buying clothes, toys or presents for the child appears to occur more often for the children

aged 0 to 1 or 2 to 3 years; the same is true of paying for children's health-related costs. For the 0 to 1 year-old children, compared to older children, fathers are more likely to contribute to living costs such as rent and other bills and are also considerably more likely to look after the child while the mother attends to other obligations such as work.

Putting these data on financial and in kind contributions together (but not including child support), across the cohorts/waves, up to 31 per cent of fathers were reported to contribute often in at least one of these ways. This figure was highest for fathers of 0 to 1-year-olds (31 per cent) and 2 to 3-year-olds (30 per cent), with lower percentages for 4 to 5-year-olds (Wave 1, 28 per cent) and 6 to 7-year-olds (27 per cent). (Wave 3 data are affected by the 'not asked' category and so are not reported here.)

Are these fathers who often make financial/in kind contributions the same, or different, non-resident fathers to those who pay child support? Table 42 combines information reported by mothers on whether they had received child support in the previous month and whether the father living elsewhere often made other financial or in kind contributions. Overall, around 20 per cent of children with a father living elsewhere had financial/in kind support provided both through child support and through the informal contributions (22 per cent of 0 to 1-year-olds and 2 to 3-year-olds, 19 per cent of 4 to 5-year-olds, and 17 per cent of 6 to 7-year-olds). Between 30 and 40 per cent of fathers were reported to neither pay child support nor often contribute in other financial or in kind ways. These data show that making informal financial or in kind contributions was more likely from fathers who also paid child support rather than those who did not. For example, for mothers of 0 to 1-year-olds, 43 per cent of those mothers who received child support also reported that the father often makes another in kind/financial contribution. At other ages, the percentages were somewhat lower, at 36 per cent for 2 to 3-year-olds, 34 per cent for 4 to 5-year-olds and 30 per cent for 6 to 7-year-olds. Among those who do not receive child support, the proportion was near to 20 per cent across these ages of children (19 per cent for 0 to 1-year-olds, 21 per cent for 2 to 3-year-olds and 4 to 5-year-olds and 22 per cent for 6 to 7-year-olds).

Table 42: Combinations of child support payment and in kind contributions made by fathers living elsewhere, mothers' reports, Waves 1 and 2

	B cohort		K cohort	
	0–1 year (Wave 1)	2–3 years (Wave 2)	4–5 years (Wave 1)	6–7 years (Wave 2)
	%		%	
Received child support last month				
Father often contributes financially or in kind	22.4	22.1	19.3	17.4
Father does not often contribute financially or in kind	29.6	39.9	38.1	40.3
Total	52.0	62.0	57.4	57.7
Did not receive child support last month				
Father often contributes in kind	9.0	8.1	9.1	9.4
Father does not often contribute in kind	39.0	29.9	33.5	32.9
Total	48.0	38.0	42.6	42.4
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Of those who received child support, % father often contributes financially or in kind	43.0	35.7	33.6	30.1
Of those who did not receive child support, % father often contributes financially or in kind	18.8	21.4	21.4	22.2
Sample size	**445**	**470**	**724**	**674**

Notes: Whether father often contributes financially or in kind was derived from mothers' responses regarding the frequency of father helping with the costs of raising children, or helping to care for the child, as detailed in Table 41. If the father was reported to 'often' help with any of these listed costs/activities, he is said to 'often' contribute in this table. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding. Wave 3 is not shown, as these data are more difficult to interpret given the relatively high proportion of in-scope mothers who did not provide responses to these questions.

Similar questions about child support and financial and in kind contributions were asked of the fathers living elsewhere in Wave 3, and these data are shown, again compared to mothers' responses, in Table 43.

These 'fathers living elsewhere' respondents were more likely to be paying child support than the overall sample, which can be seen when considering that, according to mothers' or fathers' reports, around 90 per cent of fathers living elsewhere had a child support agreement, in about three-quarters of families it was expected that the fathers living elsewhere would pay child support, and just slightly less than this reported that child support was paid by the fathers living elsewhere. These figures are considerably higher than those reported by all mothers for whom the child has a father living elsewhere. Note that, while the percentages on these items were similar for mothers and fathers, we have not attempted to analyse the similarity or dissimilarity of responses at the couple level.

Table 43: Indicators of child support agreements and payments, and other financial and in kind contributions made by fathers living elsewhere, fathers' and mothers' reports, by cohort, paired sample, Wave 3

	4–5 years (B cohort)		8–9 years (K cohort)	
	Non-resident fathers' report	Mothers' reports (paired sample)	Non-resident fathers' report	Mothers' reports (paired sample)
	%		%	
Has child support agreement	90.1	88.0	87.0	87.1
Father expected to pay child support last month	74.3	73.5	74.6	71.9
Father paid child support last month	73.5	72.5	73.6	68.0
How often father living elsewhere…				
Buys clothes, toys or presents for child				
Often	61.9	26.5	57.4	23.8
Sometimes	34.7	40.1	38.7	37.8
Rarely or never	3.4	33.4 ***	3.9	38.4 ***
Pays for child's medical or dental bills, health insurance or medicines				
Often	33.1	11.2	30.4	14.7
Sometimes	28.6	18.0	25.9	10.9
Rarely or never	38.3	70.8 ***	43.7	74.4 ***
Gives extra money for child's child care, preschool or school expenses				
Often	24.4	6.9	35.1	9.7
Sometimes	30.1	8.1	29.6	18.1
Rarely or never	45.6	85.1 ***	35.2	72.2 ***
Gives extra money to help out, like pay the rent, household bills or car repairs				
Often	10.4	3.0	11.1	4.1
Sometimes	21.7	9.1	16.5	4.8
Rarely or never	67.8	87.9***	72.5	91.1 ***
Looks after the child while mother at work, study or attend appointments				
Often	31.2	9.8	32.9	14.5
Sometimes	32.2	22.8	30.5	23.3
Rarely or never	36.6	67.4 ***	36.6	62.2 ***
Often contributes on at least one of these (not including child support)	78.2	36.4***	78.7	37.0***
Sample size	**250**	**250**	**365**	**365**

Notes: Mother distribution in this table refers to those mothers for whom fathers living elsewhere also responded. There was some item non-response, so there may be slightly different sample sizes across items. Sample sizes refer to numbers providing child support information. Chi-square tests compare the father-reported distribution to the mother-reported distribution. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Non-significant results ($p \geq 0.05$) are left blank.

On the other measures of financial or in kind contributions, the reports of mothers and fathers diverged considerably. Table 40 showed quite low levels of contributions by fathers, as reported by mothers, and this is repeated in the mothers' reports as given for the 'fathers living elsewhere' sample in Table 43. The fathers, however, painted a picture of much greater involvement. This is especially so for buying clothes, toys or presents but is apparent across the range of items. Aggregating these father-reported data, 76 to 78 per cent reported they often contributed on one of these, compared to estimates of 36 to 37 per cent based on the mother-reported data from the same sample. Clearly, these perspectives are providing quite different estimates of levels of contributions. There are various possible explanations for this. One reason might be that mothers are unaware of the various contributions fathers make, if those contributions occur while the child is in his care. As such, the mother may be under-reporting the fathers' contributions. Another factor is that these subjective measures of 'often' and so on may have quite different meanings for mothers and non-resident fathers. While we are unable to disentangle the reasons for these very different perspectives, these results confirm the need to consider that mothers and fathers may not always have the same views about father involvement in these separated families.

These data offer the potential to examine the characteristics of fathers who contribute more financially, whether through child support or less formal means, but, for now, we focus on two aspects. Firstly, making a financial contribution may vary according to whether children previously lived with their father, and secondly, contributing financially may vary according to the frequency of fathers' contact with children. We return to use the mother-reported data for these analyses, since they are available for all mothers (at Waves 1 and 2), although, given the findings above, this means the in kind contributions of fathers may be underestimated.

Previous Australian research by Walter (2000) highlighted differences in attitudes to child support according to whether non-resident fathers had been previously married.[14] Those who had previously not been married tended to have more negative attitudes toward child support than those who had previously been married. For example, previously unmarried fathers were more likely to agree that they should not have to pay child support because they had no say in how the money was spent, and to feel that they had no obligation to support their children. While not the same variable considered here ('unmarried' in Walter's analyses included previously cohabiting couples as well as those who had never lived together), they suggest that fathers who had never lived with their child might demonstrate lower levels of child support payment and perhaps lower levels of in kind support. Table 44 shows that, in terms of child support payment, differences according to whether fathers had lived with their child were not statistically significant in the younger cohort, but they were in the older cohort, with higher percentages making child support payments among fathers who had lived with their child. For more informal means of support, significant differences were apparent for all cohorts/waves, with higher rates of informal financial or in kind support being provided by fathers who had lived with their children. These results are therefore consistent with Walter's findings.

Table 44: Child support payments and other financial and in kind contributions made by fathers living elsewhere, by cohort, prior residence and frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child, mothers' reports, Waves 1 and 2

	Received child support from father living elsewhere last month				Father living elsewhere often contributes financially or in kind			
	0–1 year (B)	2–3 years (B)	4–5 years (K)	6–7 years (K)	0–1 year (B)	2–3 years (B)	4–5 years (K)	6–7 years (K)
	%				%			
Prior residency of father living elsewhere								
Child had lived with father	47.8	66.0	63.3	59.8	40.8	36.2	32.9	28.6
Child never lived with father	52.4	57.8	40.0	47.6	28.5	24.1	15.6	19.2
Compare by prior residency			***	*	***	***	***	***
Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child								
Weekly	68.6	72.6	67.7	58.2	49.7	56.7	51.8	47.1
Fortnightly	63.8	84.2	70.3	73.1	26.2	14.2	26.3	25.8
Monthly up to yearly	33.6	57.9	45.8	50.2	10.8	12.0	13.9	12.5
Less often or none	17.3	30.1	36.9	45.4	0.9	0.0	1.6	1.2
Compare by frequency of contact	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Sample size	**439**	**471**	**724**	**679**	**445**	**470**	**723**	**670**

Notes: Whether father often contributes financially or in kind was derived from mothers' responses regarding the frequency of father helping with the costs of raising children, or helping to care for the child, as detailed in Table 41. If the father was reported to 'often' help with any of these listed costs/activities, he is said to 'often' contribute in this table. Chi-square tests compare the father-reported distribution to the mother-reported distribution. Wave 3 is not shown, as these data are more difficult to interpret given the relatively high proportion of in-scope mothers who did not provide responses to these questions. *$p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Non-significant results ($p \geq 0.05$) are left blank.

Under the Australian Child Support Scheme, non-resident fathers may be liable to pay less child support if their child stays more nights with them; accordingly, we expect a greater frequency of contact may be associated with less financial support by fathers. However, this only takes account of formal child support. As frequency of contact increases, fathers' informal financial support may increase.

Despite the link between payment of child support and father to child contact that is embedded in the formulae determining the amount of child support payable, in reality, the relationship between the two may not be straightforward, as discussed by Huang (2009) in his review of the recent studies in this area (also see Fehlberg and Smyth 2000). A positive relationship may be apparent if the more involved fathers are more inclined to make financial contributions, if the payment of child support encourages fathers to be more involved with children, if mothers make payment of child support a prerequisite for contact with children, or if there are common characteristics associated with both the payment of child support and the frequency of contact. This association would also reflect those families in which the parental relationship was high conflict or so distant that payment of child support and contact with children were both at a minimum. However, for some fathers, making financial contributions may substitute for involvement, or conversely, high levels of involvement may substitute for financial contributions paid to the mother, perhaps because these fathers meet many child-related costs themselves. Overall, though, most findings point to the positive relationship between child support and frequency of contact (Ryan, Kalil & Ziol-Guest 2008).

These data show a strong association between the frequency of contact and the payment of child support, with low rates of child support payments being made when fathers had very infrequent or no contact with children.

However, there is a non-linear relationship between frequency of contact and payment of child support, with the highest payment rates being for those with fortnightly contact (except for the youngest children). The explanation for this is apparent when examining the proportions making other financial or in kind contributions, which are considerably higher for those fathers living elsewhere with weekly contact. This is apparent even when using these mother-reported data, which may underestimate fathers' contributions. That is, when fathers have weekly contact, mothers may not always need to rely on child support arrangements to facilitate the sharing of the costs of children. Fathers' financial and in kind contributions, other than child support, declined very significantly as their frequency of contact declined.

4.11 Parental relationship quality and the co-parental relationship

This section examines the quality of the parental relationship and the co-parental relationship between resident mothers and fathers living elsewhere. Where possible, reports of mothers as well as fathers living elsewhere have been incorporated.

To assess relationship quality, we consider the degree of conflict between parents and how well they report getting along with each other. Co-parenting captures more information about whether parents have a cooperative approach to parenting. Relationship quality and co-parenting are distinct concepts, as even parents with poor or high-conflict relationships can find effective ways of parenting together, such that parental relationship quality does not always predict the quality of the co-parenting relationship (McHale et al. 2002). Nevertheless, an association between the two is expected, with parents in poorer quality or high-conflict relationships being more likely to experience more difficulty in their co-parental relationship.

The nature of the co-parental relationship is particularly important in understanding the involvement of non-resident fathers (Ryan, Kalil & Ziol-Guest 2008) and in considering children's experiences of a parental separation (Carlson, McLanahan & Brooks-Gunn 2008; Leite & McKenry 2002; McBride & Rane 1998; Sobolewski & King 2005). Having a poorer co-parental relationship can be associated with poorer outcomes for children—for example, when parents exhibit hostility toward each other or involve children in disagreements between parents (Amato & Keith 1991).

In this section, we first look at some indicators of relationship quality and co-parenting, as reported by mothers (Table 45). Note that in particular circumstances these data were not collected of mothers, including when they reported that they did not know who the father was or that the father did not know about the child. The data do, however, include families in which children never saw their father, since it is still possible that mothers can report on the quality of their relationship with the fathers living elsewhere.

While there is considerable diversity, there is also evidence that many parents manage to get along very well or well and rarely experience anger or hostility toward each other. In particular, of the mothers of the youngest children, more than half said they get along well or very well, and just under half say they rarely, almost never or never experience anger or hostility between themselves and the father living elsewhere. Nevertheless, around 19 to 24 per cent get along poorly, and 14 to 19 per cent say there is often, almost always or always anger or hostility between them. Some mothers, of course, have no relationship and/or no contact with the child's father living elsewhere.[15]

As with other analyses, the 'not asked' mothers in Wave 3 are shown separately. It is likely they include a disproportionate number of mothers with non-existent or relatively poor co-parental relationships, as mothers who reported that they had poor or no relationships with the father living elsewhere at Wave 2 were more likely to be in this 'not asked' group than were mothers who had reported in Wave 2 that they either got on well or got on 'neither well nor poorly' (Appendix Table A14).

Table 45: Aspects of parental relationship quality and the co-parental relationship with the father living elsewhere, mothers' reports, by cohort/wave

	B cohort			K cohort		
	0–1 year (Wave 1)	2–3 years (Wave 2)	4–5 years (Wave 3)	4–5 years (Wave 1)	6–7 years (Wave 2)	8–9 years (Wave 3)
	%			%		
How well gets along with other parent						
Very well or well	57.4	46.1	35.6	45.6	41.3	37.4
Neither well nor poorly	16.9	22.1	22.2	22.0	27.7	20.7
Poorly, very poorly or badly	19.2	23.3	18.8	24.4	23.7	21.6
No relationship	6.4	8.5	3.8	8.1	7.3	3.6
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a.	n.a.	19.7	n.a.	n.a.	16.7
How often there is anger or hostility between parents						
Often, always or almost always	13.8	18.9	16.1	18.0	15.0	15.3
Sometimes	23.6	21.5	22.2	26.2	23.3	22.2
Rarely, almost never or never	48.6	41.9	33.3	39.8	45.2	36.8
No contact	14.1	17.7	8.6	16.0	16.6	8.6
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a.	n.a.	19.8	n.a.	n.a.	17.1
How often disagree with other parent about basic child rearing issues						
Rarely, almost never or never	36.6	23.6	20.6	31.1	30.0	23.7
Sometimes	21.2	21.1	21.7	20.3	21.6	20.0
Often, always or almost always	21.1	24.9	20.7	26.2	22.1	20.9
Don't discuss	21.1	30.3	17.3	22.4	26.4	18.3
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a.	n.a.	19.8	n.a.	n.a.	17.1
How often consult father over major decisions						
Often, always or almost always	30.3	27.2	23.0	26.8	28.8	23.6
Sometimes	10.9	12.2	9.8	9.1	9.5	10.6
Rarely, almost never or never	58.8	60.7	47.4	64.1	61.7	48.7
Not asked, Wave 3	n.a.	n.a.	19.8	n.a.	n.a.	17.1
Sample size	**436**	**450**	**535**	**694**	**648**	**744**

Note: Mothers who rarely or never had contact with the father living elsewhere were included in this table even if they did not respond to the questions, by including them in the category representing least contact. For the question about how well they get along with the other parent, they were included in 'no relationship'; for the question about anger or hostility they were included in 'no contact'; for the question about disagreements they were included in 'don't discuss'; and for the question about consulting with the other parent, they were included in 'rarely, almost never or never'. 'Not asked, Wave 3' are those mothers who elected to not answer questions about the father living elsewhere in Wave 3.

When examining to what extent there were disagreements between parents about basic child rearing issues, the sample was quite heterogeneous, including those who did not discuss child rearing issues at all (for example, 30 per cent for 2 to 3-year-olds), frequently had disagreements about basic child rearing issues (for example, 25 per cent often, always or almost always for 2 to 3-year-olds), sometimes had disagreements (for example, 21 per cent for 2 to 3-year-olds), and infrequently had disagreements (for example, 24 per cent rarely, almost never or never for 2 to 3-year-olds). Clearly, there is much diversity in this aspect of co-parenting.

Another related measure of non-resident fathers' involvement in children's lives, and in co-parenting, is the extent to which they are consulted when it comes to major decisions about the child (for example, about medical

treatment or choice of child care). We have seen, above, that some mothers report that they do not discuss basic child rearing issues with the father, so we expect to find this here also. In fact, Table 45 shows mothers most often reported that they rarely, almost never or never consulted the father living elsewhere about major decisions (47 to 64 per cent), although 23 to 30 per cent reported that they often, always or almost always did so.

The fathers' own views about co-parenting, compared to mothers in these same families, for Wave 3, are shown in Table 46. Note that fathers were not asked about their being consulted over major child rearing matters.

Table 46: Aspects of parental relationship quality and the co-parental relationship, non-resident fathers' and mothers' reports, paired sample, Wave 3

	4–5 years (B cohort)		8–9 years (K cohort)	
	Non-resident fathers' report	Mothers' reports (paired sample)	Non-resident fathers' report	Mothers' reports (paired sample)
	%		%	
How well gets along with other parent				
Very well or well	60.0	52.3	58.8	53.7
Neither well nor poorly	20.2	28.7	22.1	26.6
Poorly, very poorly or badly	19.8	19.0	19.1	19.7
How often there is anger or hostility with other parent				
Often, always or almost always	14.1	20.4	13.0	19.5
Sometimes	19.9	30.0	26.0	29.7
Rarely	38.9	28.3	34.0	26.1
Almost never or never	27.1	21.3**	27.0	24.7**
How often disagree with other parent about basic child rearing issues				
Rarely, almost never or never	43.9	33.0	45.6	35.0
Sometimes	34.4	31.0	32.5	30.3
Often, always or almost always	15.0	28.9	15.3	25.4
Don't discuss	6.7	7.5***	6.6	9.3***
Sample size	**253**	**253**	**366**	**366**

Notes: Mother distribution in this table refers to those mothers for whom fathers living elsewhere also responded. There was some item non-response, so there may be slightly different sample sizes across items. Chi-square tests compare the father-reported distribution to the mother-reported distribution. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Non-significant results ($p \geq 0.05$) are left blank.

These data show that 19 to 20 per cent of fathers and mothers in this paired sample said they got along poorly, or worse, and 13 to 14 per cent of fathers and 20 per cent of mothers said there was often, always or almost always anger or hostility between them. These percentages are not very different to those reported by mothers in the more complete sample, which is consistent with the analyses of sample bias in the father living elsewhere sample (see Appendix Table A15).

In this paired sample, mothers were a little more negative about the co-parental relationship than were fathers, when assessed on the frequency of anger or hostility. Also, mothers reported more frequent arguments about child rearing issues than did fathers. So again, this suggests there is value in considering that the views of each parent may be different, and it will be particularly interesting to examine these data to determine to what extent pairs of mothers and fathers living elsewhere have similar or dissimilar perspectives about the quality of their relationship.

A range of factors is likely to explain differences in co-parenting across families (see, for example, Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz 2010). A comprehensive analysis of these relationships is possible with these LSAC data, but, as with earlier analyses, we focus on associations with parental relationship history and frequency of fathers' contact, using two measures of co-parenting: mothers' reports of parents getting along well, and consulting about major decisions.

Table 47 shows mothers' reports of whether or not parents frequently (often, almost always or always) got along well, firstly by whether the child had previously lived with their father. Mothers generally were more likely to report frequently getting along well with the father when the child had previously lived with the father, although it was not uncommon for mothers to report getting along well with the fathers who had never lived with their children. Differences were more apparent on this item when it is examined according to the frequency of fathers' contact with the child. Parents were more likely to get along well when fathers had more frequent contact (which, of course, could indicate that fathers had more frequent contact when parents had a better relationship).

Table 47: Aspects of the co-parental relationship, by cohort/wave, prior residency of father living elsewhere and frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child, mothers' reports, Waves 1 and 2

	% often, almost always or always get along well				% often, almost always or always consult father over major decisions			
	0–1 year (B)	2–3 years (B)	4–5 years (K)	6–7 years (K)	0–1 year (B)	2–3 years (B)	4–5 years (K)	6–7 years (K)
	%				%			
Prior residency of father living elsewhere								
Child had lived with father	66.5	52.9	49.0	42.9	39.6	38.1	32.4	32.4
Child never lived with father	57.6	41.9	39.9	35.0	29.0	18.1	13.0	15.8
Compare co-parenting by prior residency of father	*	*	*		*	***	***	**
Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child								
Weekly	81.4	65.0	63.9	60.2	50.8	46.8	46.4	51.5
Fortnightly	47.9	43.8	49.9	40.7	18.7	35.6	27.6	25.2
Monthly up to yearly	47.1	46.3	46.8	38.4	6.7	9.3	15.4	17.0
Less often or none	18.5	13.8	13.0	8.3	3.0	1.1	4.1	0.7
Compare co-parenting by frequency of contact	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Sample size	**438**	**468**	**720**	**675**	**438**	**452**	**724**	**639**

Notes: Mother distribution in this table refers to those mothers for whom fathers living elsewhere also responded. There was some item non-response, so there may be slightly different sample sizes across items. Chi-square tests compare the father-reported distribution to the mother-reported distribution. Wave 3 is not shown, as these data are more difficult to interpret given the relatively high proportion of in-scope mothers who did not provide responses to these questions. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Non-significant results ($p \geq 0.05$) are left blank.

Whether or not fathers were frequently consulted about major decisions about the child differed significantly according to whether fathers had previously lived with the child, although differences were smaller for the youngest children, as rates of consulting the father were somewhat higher at this age for fathers who had never lived with the child. Differences by fathers' prior residence are consistent with work reported by Walter (2000), that non-resident fathers who were previously unmarried had far lower levels of influence in their children's lives than did previously married fathers.[16]

Differences in the likelihood of fathers living elsewhere being consulted over major child rearing matters were also significantly related to the frequency of fathers' contact, with around half of the fathers with weekly contact with their child being frequently consulted by mothers over major child-related decisions. This positive association between fathers' contact with children and with the quality of the co-parental relationship has been established in other studies (Carlson, McLanahan & Brooks-Gunn 2008; Sobolewski & King 2005).

4.12 Parenting self-efficacy of fathers living elsewhere

Here we explore an important aspect of fathering—the degree to which fathers living elsewhere perceive themselves to be good parents—through analyses of reports of self-efficacy in parenting. Parenting self-efficacy incorporates parents' views of whether they possess the knowledge or skills to fulfil the role of being a 'good parent', and how confident they feel in this role (Bandura 1989; Coleman & Karraker 1998). It is explored here using a question, asked of resident fathers as well as fathers living elsewhere, which captures their own global rating of themselves as a parent.

Fathers' self-efficacy is important, as being confident and happy in the parental role is likely to 'feed back' into greater parental involvement by fathers, and perhaps to the establishment of better relationships between fathers and mothers as well as fathers and children and to better wellbeing in a more general sense (Beitel & Parke 1998; Coleman & Karraker 2000; Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston & McHale 1987; Jacobs & Kelley 2006; Sanderson & Thompson Sanders 2002). Prior research, especially on mothers, has established links between self-efficacy, parenting and children's outcomes (Junttila, Vauras & Laakkonen 2007; Sanders & Woolley 2005; Teti & Gelfand 1991). This research is based on resident fathers and mothers, but the parenting self-efficacy of non-resident fathers is also of interest.

How fathers decide whether or not they are good parents will relate to their perceptions of what defines a good parent or, perhaps more specifically, a good father. Morman and Floyd (2006) found that the most commonly cited aspects of being a good father, as reported by fathers, were those relating to emotional and relational qualities, including 'love', 'availability', 'involvement' and 'role model'. 'Provider' was also near to the top of the list of qualities nominated by fathers. Other research has shown that fathers see simply 'being there' for children as being important (Forste, Bartkowski & Jackson 2009; Howard, McBride & Hardy 2003).

For fathers who do not live with their children, the role of father is less clearly defined than it is for fathers who do (Seltzer 1991), and fathers who have transitioned from resident to non-resident fathers must shift their expectation of how they can fulfil their roles as fathers. This new role has to be negotiated within the complexity of changed relationships between family members, which may add further to fathers' difficulties in managing this role (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley & Buehler 1993; Leite & McKenry 2002). Given the different roles played by resident and non-resident fathers, it is not clear if they would hold different ideals about what constitutes a good father, although the role of non-resident father is commonly associated with contributing financially, spending time with children and having input to parenting decisions (Seltzer 1991).

For non-resident fathers, difficulties due to living apart from children may mean they have a low self-perception of their parenting self-efficacy. However, some small-scale (and qualitative) research from overseas has shown that non-resident fathers who have some contact with their child quite often think of themselves as good fathers (Corcoran 2005).

In this section, we use the LSAC data to explore non-resident fathers' parenting self-efficacy, as this is a subject about which little is known. Further, the data are used to explore whether particular aspects of non-resident fathers' fathering are related to their reported parenting self-efficacy. This helps us to understand whether particular aspects of fathering are salient to non-resident fathers when they are thinking about how well they fulfil the role of father.

Using the LSAC data, Table 48 shows that the parenting self-efficacy of fathers living elsewhere actually looks very similar to that of resident fathers, which is interesting given the very different circumstances under which they 'father' and also given their quite different sociodemographic characteristics (Table 31). A majority of non-resident and resident fathers (65 to 70 per cent) think that they are better than average or very good parents. Of course, the 'father living elsewhere' sample is a biased one and may over-represent fathers living elsewhere who are confident in their parenting skills.

Table 48: Fathers' self-reported parenting self-efficacy, reports of fathers living elsewhere and resident, fathers Wave 3, by cohort

	4–5 years (B cohort)		8–9 years (K cohort)	
	Fathers living elsewhere	Resident fathers (couples)	Fathers living elsewhere	Resident fathers (couples)
	%		%	
Not very good at being a parent	0.9	0.2	0.5	0.6
A person who has some trouble parenting	3.3	2.0	3.5	2.9
An average parent	29.4	27.7	28.0	31.2
A better than average parent	41.8	43.2	43.2	40.9
A very good parent	24.7	26.9	24.8	24.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	**252**	**2,667**	**366**	**2,497**

Note: Within cohort, chi-square-tests compared parental self-efficacy by whether or not father was resident. Both were non-significant ($p > 0.05$). Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding.

We considered next whether fathers who had previously lived with their child felt more confident in their skills as parents. Table 49 shows that fathers living elsewhere who had previously lived with their child were no different in their parenting self-efficacy ratings than fathers who had not previously lived with their child. More detailed analyses of these data for fathers who have previously lived with their children, incorporating time since separation, or using the longitudinal data, may prove useful for examining how parenting self-efficacy changes following a parental separation.

These data were also used to examine whether fathers had higher self-efficacy if they saw their child more often. Table 49 also shows that, among these fathers living elsewhere, parenting self-efficacy did not vary significantly by the fathers' frequency of contact with this child. For example, many of the fathers with weekly contact with children saw themselves as no better than average parents, while many of those with relatively infrequent contact saw themselves as very good parents.

Table 49: Parenting self-efficacy of fathers living elsewhere, by cohort, prior residency of fathers living elsewhere, and frequency of contact between fathers living elsewhere and child, Wave 3

	Self-reported parenting self-efficacy 4–5 years (B cohort)				Self-reported parenting self-efficacy 8–9 years (K cohort)			
	Up to average	Better than average	Very good	Total	Up to average	Better than average	Very good	Total
	%				%			
Prior residency of father living elsewhere								
Child had lived with father	30.8	42.1	27.1	100.0	32.3	42.7	25.0	100.0
Child never lived with father	44.5	40.2	15.3	100.0	22.6	52.7	24.7	100.0
Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child								
Weekly	30.2	44.2	25.5	100.0	27.4	43.9	28.8	100.0
Fortnightly	37.9	38.8	23.2	100.0	37.1	41.3	21.6	100.0
Monthly or less often	42.3	34.3	23.4	100.0	36.3	44.7	19.0	100.0
Sample size	**83**	**102**	**67**	**252**	**109**	**171**	**85**	**365**

Notes: Within each cohort, chi-square tests compare the self-efficacy distributions by (a) whether child had lived with father and (b) frequency of contact. All were non-significant ($p \geq 0.05$).

In Table 50, further aspects of fathering are explored according to the parenting self-efficacy of fathers living elsewhere. Here, the analyses include other measures of fathers' involvement with their children (whether the child sometimes stayed overnight; whether the father often talked to the child about his/her day; the warmth of the parenting style), indicators of whether financial contributions are made by the father (whether he pays child support, whether he contributes in other informal ways, financially or in kind) and indicators of the quality of the co-parental relationship. These are all taken from fathers' own reports.

Associations were different in the younger and older cohorts. In the younger cohort, when children were aged 4 to 5 years, most of the fathering measures were unrelated to fathers' parenting self-efficacy. Frequency of contact, making formal or informal financial contributions and co-parenting did not vary across the different ratings of parenting self-efficacy. The only significant association was for the measure of warm parenting, which showed that fathers with greater parenting self-efficacy had a warmer parenting style.

For the 8 to 9-year-olds, the measures of involvement were related to parenting self-efficacy, with 'very good' fathers more likely than 'up to average' fathers to often talk to them about their day and to have a warmer parenting style. Significant associations were not apparent for the payment of formal child support, but the 'up to average' fathers were less likely than others to often contribute in other financial or in kind ways. There was also an association with fathers' reports of often or always having a hostile relationship with the mother, although this is difficult to interpret, as those with the least hostility were the middle group, those who said they were 'better than average' as opposed to the lower or higher ratings.

From these analyses, with inconsistent findings for the cohorts, the associations between parenting self-efficacy and fathering indicate that other characteristics may be more important in explaining variation in self-efficacy. In analyses of resident fathers' self-efficacy using LSAC, associations between measures of fathering and self-efficacy were apparent, but other important factors were fathers' education, mental health and the perceived parental relationship quality (Baxter & Smart 2010). It may be that the relatively small sample size of 'fathers living elsewhere' respondents has hampered our ability to detect associations.

Table 50: Selected measures of involvement, financial contributions and co-parenting of fathers living elsewhere, by parenting self-efficacy and cohort, fathers' reports, Wave 3

	Self-reported parenting self-efficacy				
	Up to average	Better than average	Very good	All fathers living elsewhere	Compare by self-efficacy
4–5 years (B cohort)					
Child stays overnight at least once a month (%)	73.3	85.3	86.9	81.7	
Often talks to child about his/her day (%)	76.2	83.4	89.4	82.4	
Warm parenting (mean, 1 to 5, higher = warmer)	4.17	4.30	4.59	4.33	***
Pays child support at least once a month (%)	70.5	73.9	71.6	72.2	
Often contributes informally, financially or in kind (%)	75.2	75.7	85.7	78.0	
Gets along with other parent well or very well (%)	64.8	62.2	49.7	60.0	
Often/always hostile (%)	10.5	14.1	19.2	14.1	
Often/always disagreements (%)	15.9	18.1	12.8	16.1	
Sample size (N)	**83**	**102**	**67**	**252**	
8–9 years (K cohort)					
Child stays overnight at least once a month (%)	78.2	78.5	86.1	80.0	
Often talks to child about his/her day (%)	77.7	89.4	92.1	86.3	*
Warm parenting (mean, 1 to 5, higher = warmer)	4.01	4.27	4.57	4.24	***
Pays child support at least once a month (%)	68.7	72.2	59.8	68.0	
Often contributes informally, financially or in kind (%)	67.6	86.7	79.4	78.8	**
Gets along with other parent well or very well (%)	59.2	64.7	47.9	58.8	
Often/always hostile (%)	14.4	7.4	21.2	13.0	*
Often/always disagreements (%)	16.9	12.7	22.6	16.4	
Sample size (N)	**110**	**171**	**85**	**366**	

Notes: Within cohort, indicator of fathers' involvement, financial contributions and co-parenting are compared by self-efficacy using chi-square tests, if percentages, and ANOVA for means. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Non-significant results ($p \geq 0.05$) are left blank.

4.13 Summary of father involvement

This section has used data on those LSAC children with a father living elsewhere to provide an overview of some of the ways in which these fathers are involved with their children, directly through shared time together, financially or through the co-parental relationship. These data are combined here to illustrate the multiplicity of ways in which these fathers may be involved with their children. Table 51 presents these different types of involvement, dichotomised to represent more and less involvement, and then combined to show the proportions with the least and the most involvement, as well as all combinations in between. We return to use mothers' reports, since they are available for the majority of children, but focus on just Waves 1 and 2, given that the relatively high percentage of mothers not answering questions at Wave 3 would pose additional challenges were these data to be included.

While these dichotomies are vast simplifications of each possible measure of involvement, they give some indication of how complex and varied the involvement by fathers living elsewhere can be. For example, these data show that between 19 per cent (at age 6 to 7 years) and 28 per cent (at age 0 to 1 years) of fathers living elsewhere did not see their child at least fortnightly, did not contribute financially and were not often consulted over child rearing issues. On the other hand, between 21 per cent (at ages 4 to 5 and 6 to 7 years) and 25 per

cent (at age 0 to 1 years) saw their child at least fortnightly, contributed financially and were often consulted over child rearing issues. Another 25 to 27 per cent saw their child fortnightly and contributed financially but were not often consulted about child rearing issues. The next largest group, as identified here, were those who only contributed financially (8 to 18 per cent).

Table 51: Combinations of involvement by fathers living elsewhere: contact, financial contributions and co-parenting, mothers' reports, Waves 1 and 2

See child at least fortnightly	Contributes financially (child support received or often financial or in kind support)	Often consulted over child rearing issues	0–1 year (B cohort)	2–3 years (B cohort)	4–5 years (K cohort)	6–7 years (K cohort)
					%	
No	No	No	28.2	24.8	22.8	19.1
No	No	Yes	0.5	0.7	1.6	1.4
No	Yes	No	8.4	16.4	15.6	17.6
No	Yes	Yes	1.0	1.2	2.1	2.0
Yes	No	No	8.5	4.5	8.1	8.4
Yes	No	Yes	3.5	2.1	2.6	4.5
Yes	Yes	No	24.7	27.1	26.7	26.1
Yes	Yes	Yes	25.2	23.2	20.5	21.0
Total			100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size			**458**	**463**	**740**	**644**

Note: 'Child support received' is based on whether mother received child support from the father living elsewhere in the last month. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding. Wave 3 is not shown, as these data are more difficult to interpret given the relatively high proportion of in-scope mothers who did not provide responses to these questions.

As seen and discussed throughout these analyses, various factors are likely to explain this variation in non-resident fathers' involvement with children. Making use of the LSAC data to explore these relationships more fully is an obvious future direction for research on this topic.

4.14 Summary

These analyses have presented an overview of the involvement by fathers living elsewhere with children in Australia. The summary above highlights the variation in this involvement, from no involvement at all, through to involvement on all dimensions captured. Most fathers living elsewhere, however, are involved in some way, including seeing their child regularly and contributing financially. Nevertheless, these analyses clearly demonstrate that these fathers are not a homogeneous group with respect to their fathering behaviour. Some of the heterogeneity reflects different pathways into being a father living elsewhere—in particular, with some fathers living elsewhere having always been completely removed from the role of father.

One goal of these analyses was to explore the characteristics of families with fathers living elsewhere in order to contextualise their potential involvement with their children. These analyses have shown the relative socioeconomic disadvantages of the family situations of both the mothers and the fathers living elsewhere. In both, families are more likely to be faced with financial disadvantage and also more likely to include parents who have health problems, are relatively young and have low education levels. This will in part indicate that parental separation or births among single mothers are more often associated with these characteristics. These characteristics are also relevant in consideration of fathers' involvement with children, whether measured as time with children, financially contributing or co-parenting, as previous work on fathering in couple families has shown links between various sociodemographic variables and different aspects of father involvement (Baxter & Smart 2010).

As many studies of fathering by non-resident fathers include children of a broad age range, the ability in this study to focus on young children, some of them very young, enables us to see the different circumstances for non-resident fathers by age of children. This has highlighted the fact that, for the youngest children with fathers living elsewhere, the majority had never lived with their father. However, it is interesting that one in five of the fathers living elsewhere of these 0 to 1-year-olds had a relationship of some sort with the child's mother.

Non-resident fathers' involvement with their children did appear to vary somewhat as the children grew older, especially since we observed some different patterns of contact among the older, compared to the younger, children. For example, the youngest children were the most likely to have weekly contact with their father living elsewhere, although this remained a common frequency of contact for older children also. Fortnightly contact for school-age children was often associated with overnight stays and quite possibly reflects staying alternate weekends with their father.

Generally (although not universally), mothers and fathers living elsewhere wished for more involvement by fathers. This was more often apparent in the responses of non-resident fathers than of mothers. While relationship difficulties between parents appeared to constitute part of the difficulties in allowing greater levels of involvement, other factors, such as distance between parents' residences and fathers' job demands, also contributed to the inability of fathers to increase the involvement they had with children.

Throughout these analyses, one aspect explored was whether fathers living elsewhere who had never lived with their child differed in their fathering from those who had lived with their child. This was of interest with these data, as a relatively high proportion of children with fathers living elsewhere had never lived with them. The older the children were, the more likely they were to have lived with their father, which reflects the outcome of relationship separations (marriages or cohabiting relationships) as children grow older. Children who had lived with their father did tend to have more contact with him after separation and, compared to children who had never lived with their father, only a small proportion had very infrequent or no contact with him. For children who had never lived with their father, the proportion very rarely or never seeing him was especially high for children aged two or more years.

A particular strength of these analyses is the inclusion of information provided by the fathers living elsewhere themselves. While the sample of fathers living elsewhere is biased toward fathers with more contact with their children, it nevertheless is useful to examine some of the details of fathering from these fathers' perspectives. Here we have seen that, in particular, the fathers' views on their informal financial contributions to their children were quite divergent to those of the mothers. On many other measures of fathers' involvement, mothers and fathers were more consistent in their views, at least at the aggregate level.

While these data are a valuable source of information on non-resident fathers, they have some limitations. The most apparent of these is the bias in the sample, such that these analyses are unlikely to include or represent the least involved non-resident fathers. In fact, they are likely to over-represent the more involved fathers and. therefore, may not provide a picture of fathering that should be generalised to all non-resident fathers. Despite this limitation, it is still useful to further our understanding of fathering in these families, given the limited information on non-resident fathers' involvement with children, especially as reported by fathers themselves.

Clearly, these analyses of fathers living elsewhere could be extended in a number of ways. Some possibilities are to explore associations between various sociodemographic characteristics and fathering, examine which fathers are more involved, explore links between non-resident father involvement and children's outcomes, and take advantage of the longitudinal data to analyse changes in non-resident fathers' involvement. Of particular interest is the potential to analyse the responses of the paired mothers and the fathers living elsewhere to items about their relationships and fathers' involvement, in order to explore whether certain individual or couple-level characteristics predict a greater likelihood of parents' presenting a more consistent view of these items. From a policy perspective, the LSAC data provide opportunities to undertake further examination of shared parenting and child support, from both mothers' and fathers' perspectives.

This section contributes to the Australian literature on non-resident fathers by looking into the circumstances of these families, the pathways into non-residency of fathers and various aspects of father involvement. These LSAC data have proven to be extremely valuable for furthering our understanding of families with fathers living elsewhere, and we hope that future analyses can expand on this work to take full advantage of the rich set of data in the study.

5 Conclusions

In the introduction to this report, we noted that some children experience more complex parental relationships than others, and we therefore set out to explore these complexities for children who experienced a new father figure or had a father living elsewhere. Overall, it is apparent that having a father living elsewhere was more widespread among young children than was having a new father figure move into the home. For example, at age 4 to 5 years (K cohort), fewer than 2 per cent of children had lived with a new father figure, while at this same age, 17 per cent of children had a father living elsewhere.

Such experiences, of course, come about when the relationship between the biological mother and father is not established or breaks down, and children in these families may therefore face having a father living elsewhere, as well as having a new father figure. In the analyses presented in this report, we have not considered these two factors together, and therefore these analyses understate the complexity of some children's lives. Nevertheless, these analyses present a picture of considerable diversity across children's arrangements, both in terms of relationships with a new father figure, who may be a biological father moving into the family, a stepfather or another male who is not attributed a parent title, and also across the degree and nature of contact with non-resident fathers.

That there are different meanings of what a new father figure is, offers an important insight to family functioning and reminds us of the complexity of relationship formation (and dissolution) that is not always a straightforward, neatly defined process. The longitudinal nature of these data is particularly useful for taking account of how children's experiences of family forms can change as they grow. Clearly, family form is not a fixed characteristic, with relationships with resident as well as non-resident family all subject to change.

These analyses have shown that children experiencing new father figures or fathers living elsewhere live in families with somewhat different characteristics to those living in intact families. For example, these children are more likely to live with mothers with a lower level of education, poorer financial wellbeing and poorer mental health. Such findings are consistent with what is commonly reported for children living in single-parent or stepfamilies (for example, ABS 2007; Baxter et al. 2006; Brandon 2004; Bray 2003; Manning & Brown 2006). These different family circumstances are likely to be important for the wellbeing of children who have new father figures or fathers living elsewhere.

This report did not compare children's wellbeing for those with and without non-resident fathers. In relation to new father figures, the analyses considered whether children's wellbeing was different for those who had a new father figure, but were only based on children who were initially in a single-parent household. They therefore do not compare the circumstances of these children to those living in intact families. Clearly, the richness of the LSAC data allows for future analyses of these data to explore outcomes for children across different family forms and transitions. Previous (and ongoing) analyses of LSAC have begun to explore these issues (for example, Baxter, Qu & Weston 2009; Cashmore et al. 2010).

The exploration of how children's outcomes vary when new father figures move into the home yielded very little by way of significant associations. While the non-significant findings may reflect the relatively small numbers of children experiencing a new father figure, they may also indicate that there is great diversity in the nature of the relationship between this new father figure and the child. As discussed above, some of these new father figures were the child's biological father, and some were said to be stepfathers to the child, while others were not. Some new father figures had married the child's mother, while others were in less formally defined relationships. Such a wide range of circumstances in which these new father figures entered the home might explain why simple associations between indicators of the presence of these men and children's outcomes were not apparent.

These analyses concentrated on children who were initially living in a single-parent household and whether or not there was a new father figure. This meant that the results were not confounded by any immediate effects of the parental separation that might have led to the creation of this single-parent household. The fact that we found little difference in outcomes for children with new father figures suggests that the finding of poorer wellbeing for children of stepfathers reported elsewhere (for example, Sweeney 2010; Hofferth 2006; Najman et al. 1997; Brown 2006) may be related to the characteristics of these families and perhaps to the experience of parental separation that leads to the formation of a single-parent family.

Even so, there was one significant finding in these analyses, with teachers' reports of children's behavioural or emotional problems suggesting that children living in households with new father figures struggled, in social-emotional terms, in the transition to school. This suggests that there may be some role for the provision of additional supports for children who are undergoing changes in family circumstances while also making this important transition to school.

As with the circumstances surrounding new father figures, considerable complexity and diversity was apparent when examining fathers living elsewhere. Some fathers are quite often involved in children's lives; at the other end of the spectrum, some fathers are completely removed from their lives. In between, of course, are varying levels and patterns of contact. Adding to this complexity is the notion that 'involvement' can be examined from different perspectives, with some fathers spending time with children and being involved in their activities, others instead contributing financially, and others contributing a mix of time and money to help raise their child. On these issues, not only do these somewhat objective measures of involvement matter, but also, for children, the quality of parental relationships is likely to matter. As with measures of involvement, with measures of parental relationship quality, there were some parents who appeared to have a good, collaborative parental relationship, while at the other extreme were those who had hostile or non-existent relationships.

The analysis of fathers living elsewhere was made richer through the inclusion in LSAC of fathers who live apart from their children. Even though the fathers living elsewhere who participated in the study were not likely to include the more distant fathers, the information gained allows for analyses of how mothers and fathers in these families view their circumstances. The analyses presented here only begin to make use of these data. Understanding factors affecting children's wellbeing in these families, in particular, will benefit from having mothers' as well as fathers' perspectives on parenting issues.

To conclude, this report set out to explore the circumstances of children's lives when they have new father figures or fathers living elsewhere. Two main things stand out from these analyses. The first is that children who have these experiences, on average, are more likely to be living in socioeconomically disadvantaged families, when compared to children living in intact families. This is likely to be important for children's outcomes in these families. The second is that there is very great diversity in how these families look—not only in their socioeconomic characteristics, but in the structure of family relationships and, where applicable, in relationships with fathers living elsewhere. Recognition of this diversity is particularly important in considering how such families can best be supported to achieve optimal outcomes for children and their families.

Appendix: Supplementary tables

Table A1: Characteristics of Wave 1 and cross-wave sample for analyses of relationship transitions, B and K cohort

	B cohort		K cohort	
Characteristics at Wave 1	**All Wave 1**	**Cross-wave sample**	**All Wave 1**	**Cross-wave sample**
	%		**%**	
Mother's relationship status				
Married	70.6	74.7	73.9	77.7
Cohabiting	18.8	17.0	11.4	9.8
Single but has non-live-in relationship	2.9	2.2	3.6	3.5
Single with no live-in relationship	7.8	6.1	11.1	9.1
Mother's employment status (employed)	47.3	50.4	55.0	57.8
Mother's education (more than secondary education)	46.0	49.5	37.5	40.6
Mother's self-reported health (fair/poor)	8.3	7.4	9.6	9.0
Child with disability in the household	2.7	2.5	6.1	5.9
Grandparent, aunt/uncle in the household	8.3	7.1	5.9	5.2
Housing tenure (owned/mortgaged)	62.3	67.0	68.2	72.2
Region (ex-metropolitan)	33.5	33.4	36.2	37.0
	Mean		**Mean**	
Mother's age (years)	30.9	31.4	34.5	34.8
Mother's mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)	4.40	4.42	4.30	4.32
Mother's income ($ per week before tax)	326	324	414	418
Total parental income ($ per week before tax)	1,109	1,160	1,183	1,232
Age of youngest child (years)	0.2	0.2	2.9	2.9
Number of children	2.0	2.0	2.5	2.5
Sample size	**5,018**	**4,102**	**4,818**	**3,948**

Note: The first column for each cohort shows the characteristics for the whole in-scope sample. The second column shows the characteristics of those who were in all three waves of LSAC, in the cross-wave sample.

Table A2: Change in family characteristics among those who did not have new father figure, Waves 1 to 2 and Waves 2 to 3, B and K cohorts

	Waves 1 to 2		Waves 2 to 3	
	Wave 1 characteristics	Wave 2 characteristics	Wave 2 characteristics	Wave 3 characteristics
	%		%	
B cohort				
Subjective wellbeing = 'just getting along', poor, or very poor	37.3	25.7***	26.3	29.3***
Housing tenure = owned/mortgaged	68.5	69.4***	68.8	68.6*
Moved house in last 2 years (or since child's birth for Wave 1)	n.a	34.3	34.8	30.7***
LSAC child has half or step siblings in household	8.1	8.4	8.5	9.0
Marital status = married (compared to cohabiting, couples only)	81.6	85.9***	84.1	87.5**
Mother's self-reported health = fair or poor	7.0	6.5	6.7	8.7*
Lone parent	6.1	10.7***	8.6	14.6***
	Mean		Mean	
Mother's warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm parenting)	4.55	4.61***	4.61	4.51***
Mother's mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)	4.43	4.51***	4.50	4.45***
Sample size		**3,993**		**4,013**
K cohort				
Subjective wellbeing = 'just getting along', poor, or very poor	34.4	26.4***	26.4	29.8***
Housing tenure = owned/mortgaged	73.9	74.3***	74.3	73.0
Moved house in last 2 years	n.a	25.8	26.5	23.2***
LSAC child has half or step siblings in household	9.8	10.0	10.0	10.7
Marital status = married (compared to cohabiting, couples only)	89.5	91.5***	88.0	90.1***
Mother's self-reported health = fair or poor	8.9	7.6**	7.5	9.4
Lone parent 9.5	13.7***	11.1	16.3***	
	Mean		Mean	
Mother's warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm parenting)	4.44	4.46	4.46	4.34***
Mother's consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent parenting)	4.07	4.13***	4.13	4.15
Mother's angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry parenting)	2.17	2.18	2.18	2.14*
Mother's mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)	4.33	4.46***	4.46	4.39***
Sample size		**3,807**		**3,841**

Notes: Includes parents whose relationship was unchanged between waves. Sample sizes are smaller than stated for some items. Significance tests compare Wave 2 to Wave 1 characteristics and Wave 3 to Wave 2 characteristics. As these data were collected of the same people at two different time points, the significance of the differences, across time points, for binary variables was tested using McNemar's chi-square, and for continuous variables was testing using paired t-tests. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A3: Multivariate analyses of the likelihood of new father figure entering a single mother family, odds ratio and 95 per cent confidence interval, B cohort

	New father figure, Waves 1 to 2	New father figure, Waves 2 to 3	New father figure, Waves t to *t*+1 (pooled data)
Mother's characteristics			
Relationship status			
Single but has non-live-in relationship	3.0*** (1.6,5.5)	3.5*** (1.9,6.7)	29.0*** (6.5,128.8)
Single with no live-in relationship (ref.)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Age (years)	0.9** (0.9,1.0)	1.0 (0.9,1.0)	0.8*** (0.7,0.9)
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)	1.6 (0.8,3.2)	1.2 (0.6,2.2)	1.8 (0.5,6.2)
Education (1 = more than secondary education, 0 = secondary only or less than secondary)	2.0 (1.0,4.0)	1.3 (0.7,2.6)	2.2 (0.6,8.4)
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)	1.5 (0.6,3.6)	0.8 (0.3,2.6)	2.5 (0.4,17.1)
Mental health (higher = better mental health)	1.1 (0.7,1.7)	1.0 (0.7,1.5)	1.4 (0.6,3.3)
Family or household characteristics			
Age of youngest child (years)	2.2* (1.1,4.2)	1.2 (0.9,1.8)	1.6 (1.0,2.8)
Number of children	1.3 (1.0,1.7)	1.3 (1.0,1.6)	1.9* (1.0,3.3)
Child with disability in the household (1 = yes, 0 = no)	1.1 (0.3,4.4)	0.7 (0.2,2.7)	0.6 (0.1,5.7)
Child's grandparent or aunt/uncle in the household (1 = yes, 0 = no)	0.4* (0.2,0.9)	0.9 (0.4,1.9)	0.3 (0.1,1.1)
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)	0.8 (0.3,2.0)	1.8 (0.9,3.7)	1.9 (0.4,9.4)
Region (1 = ex-metropolitan, 0 = metropolitan)	1.0 (0.6,1.8)	1.3 (0.7,2.3)	1.2 (0.3,4.9)
Constant	1.5 (0.1,19.3)	0.2 (0.1,1.8)	0.4 (0.0,55.8)
Number of observations	**298**	**347**	**645**
Rho	**n.a**	**n.a**	**0.90**

Notes: Values of missing self-reported health and mental health were replaced with the sample mean, and indicators for missing values on these variables were included in the estimations (results for these indicators not shown). The pooled data are based on Wave 1 to 2 as well as Wave 2 to 3 using random effects analyses to take account of the multiple records per person.
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A4: Multivariate analyses of the likelihood of new father figure entering a single mother family, odds ratio and 95 per cent confidence interval, K cohort

	New father figure, Waves 1 to 2	New father figure, Waves 2 to 3	New father figure, Waves t to *t*+1 (pooled data)
Mother's characteristics			
Relationship status			
Single but has non-live-in relationship	3.3*** (2.0,5.4)	7.1*** (3.8,13.2)	4.4*** (3.0,6.5)
Single with no live-in relationship (ref.)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Age (years)	0.9*** (0.8,0.9)	0.9* (0.9,1.0)	0.9*** (0.9,0.9)
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)	1.1 (0.6,1.8)	1.6 (1.0,3.0)	1.2 (0.8,1.8)
Education (1 = more than secondary education, 0 = secondary only or less than secondary)	0.6 (0.3,1.1)	1.1 (0.6,2.2)	0.8 (0.5,1.2)
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)	0.5 (0.2,1.1)	1.0 (0.3,2.8)	0.6 (0.3,1.2)
Mental health (higher = better mental health)	0.8 (0.5,1.1)	0.8 (0.6,1.2)	0.8 (0.6,1.1)
Family or household characteristics			
Age of youngest child (years)	1.2 (0.9,1.4)	0.9 (0.8,1.1)	1.0 (0.9,1.1)
Number of children	1.3 (1.0,1.7)	1.1 (0.8,1.4)	1.2 (1.0,1.4)
Child with disability in the household (1 = yes, 0 = no)	1.8 (0.9,3.6)	1.7 (0.6,5.1)	1.7 (1.0,3.0)
Child's grandparent or aunt/uncle in the household (1 = yes, 0 = no)	0.6 (0.3,1.4)	1.3 (0.6,2.9)	0.9 (0.5,1.5)
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)	1.7 (0.9,3.0)	1.1 (0.6,2.0)	1.4 (0.9,2.1)
Region (1 = ex-metropolitan, 0 = metropolitan)	1.4 (0.8,2.2)	1.9* (1.1,3.3)	1.6** (1.1,2.3)
Constant	41.3** (3.8,447.4)	3.0 (0.2,39.6)	11.7** (2.3,60.0)
Number of observations	**3,931**	**3,936**	**7,867**

Notes: Values of missing self-reported health and mental health were replaced with the sample mean, and indicators for missing values on these variables were included in the estimations (results for these indicators not shown). The pooled data are based on Waves 1 to 2 as well as Waves 2 to 3, using random effects analyses to take account of the multiple records per person.
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A5: Fixed Effects analyses of parent-rated child emotional and behavioural problems (SDQ), for children who had lived with a single mother at time 1, K cohort

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
New father figure Waves 1 to 2 (*N* = 707 observations, 422 children)				
New father figure	0.65	0.76	0.86	0.88
Wave 2 (compared to Wave 1)	–1.42***	–1.46***	–1.28***	–1.17***
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		–0.24	–0.24	0.26
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		–0.01	0.06	0.23
Number of children		–0.78	–0.82	–0.94
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		0.20	0.32	0.36
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			–0.89*	–0.86*
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			0.87	0.67
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.17
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				–0.85*
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				2.20***
Constant	10.69***	12.44***	15.93***	14.91***
New father figure Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 703 observations, 422 children)				
New father figure	0.28	–0.09	0.03	–0.06
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 2)	–0.19	–0.27	–0.24	–0.24
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		–0.42	–0.45	–0.35
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		0.11	0.14	0.05
Number of children		1.07*	0.97	0.76
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		0.65	0.76	0.75
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			–0.95*	–0.75*
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			0.48	0.64
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.20
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				–0.39
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				1.34**
Constant	9.16***	6.49***	10.59***	9.65*****
New father figure Waves 1 to 2 or Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 1038 observations, 422 children)				
New father figure	0.21	0.18	0.37	0.32
Wave 2 (compared to Wave 1)	–1.21***	–1.26***	–1.12***	–1.10***
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 1)	–1.45***	–1.49***	–1.36***	–1.40***
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		–0.31	–0.33	–0.09
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		–0.02	–0.04	–0.04
Number of children		–0.15	–0.24	–0.30
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		0.14	0.28	0.33
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			–0.96***	–0.75**
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			0.18	0.25
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.66
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				–0.60*
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				1.93***
Constant	10.65***	11.11***	15.12***	15.23***

Notes: Characteristics of employment status, mental health and physical health and parenting are those of mothers. Analyses include only children in single mother family at *time 1*, with non-missing outcome variable and non-missing values on all explanatory variables. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A6: Fixed effects analyses of teacher-reported child emotional and behavioural problems (SDQ), for children who had lived with a single mother at time 1, K cohort

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
New father figure Waves 1 to 2 (*N* = 606 observations, 362 children)				
New father figure	2.05	2.58	2.78*	2.70*
Wave 2 (compared to Wave 1)	–1.97**	–1.94**	–1.70**	–1.62*
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		0.09	0.16	0.40
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		1.63	1.63	1.67
Number of children		–2.20*	–2.22*	–2.25*
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		–1.02	–0.76	–0.60
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			–1.26	–1.21
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			1.01	0.65
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.01
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				–0.86
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				1.26
Constant	9.59***	14.29***	19.09***	19.45*
New father figure Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 564 observations, 362 children)				
New father figure	0.54	0.41	0.45	0.46
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 2)	0.07	–0.11	–0.14	0.02
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		–1.12	–1.14	–1.19
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		–1.81	–1.78	–1.70
Number of children		0.99	0.94	0.98
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		1.16	1.22	1.23
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			–0.09	–0.18
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			0.51	0.52
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				0.96
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				–0.56
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				–0.02
Constant	7.72***	6.00***	6.38*	4.80
New father figure Waves 1 to 2 or Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 865 observations, 362 children)				
New father figure	0.85	0.80	1.02	0.92
Wave 2 (compared to Wave 1)	–1.81***	–1.86***	–1.68***	–1.63**
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 1)	–2.09***	–2.13***	–1.96***	–1.96***
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		–0.49	–0.49	–0.39
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		0.23	0.25	0.21
Number of children		–0.39	–0.51	–0.55
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		0.14	0.37	0.43
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			–1.12*	–1.06*
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			0.47	0.38
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.33
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				–0.39
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				0.56
Constant	9.64***	10.63***	15.23***	16.79***

Notes: Characteristics of employment status, mental health and physical health and parenting are those of mothers. Analyses include only children in single mother family at *time 1*, with non-missing outcome variable and non-missing values on all explanatory variables. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A7: Fixed effects analyses of receptive vocabulary (PPVT) for children who had lived with a single mother at time 1, K cohort

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
New father figure Waves 1 to 2 (*N* = 646 observations, 400 children)				
New father figure	–0.30	–0.72	–0.75	–0.74
Wave 2 (compared to Wave 1)	9.68***	9.51***	9.42***	9.42***
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		0.62	0.66	0.60
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		1.34	1.25	1.25
Number of children		0.68	0.69	0.69
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		1.51	1.44	1.42
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			0.42	0.39
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			–0.59	–0.65
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.46
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				0.10
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				–0.30
Constant	63.81***	60.69***	59.12***	61.57***
New father figure Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 672 observations, 400 children)				
New father figure	–0.09	–0.04	–0.01	–0.06
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 2)	4.59***	4.59***	4.60***	4.59***
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/ very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		0.34	0.34	0.35
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		1.06	1.06	1.06
Number of children		–0.56	–0.58	–0.59
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		0.09	0.11	0.15
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			–0.26	–0.24
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent) –0.03				–0.02
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.06
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				–0.29
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				0.02
Constant	78.24***	78.80***	79.96***	81.25***
New father figure Waves 1 to 2 or Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 966 observations, 400 children)				
New father figure	–0.42	–0.52	–0.55	–0.57
Wave 2 (compared to Wave 1)	9.80***	9.73***	9.70***	9.71***
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 1)	14.55***	14.45***	14.42***	14.36***
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/ very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		0.20	0.21	0.20
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		0.72	0.70	0.70
Number of children		0.00	0.02	0.01
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		0.44	0.41	0.41
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			0.18	0.17
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			–0.22	–0.27
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.48
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				0.11
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				–0.17
Constant	63.76***	63.15***	62.46***	64.60***

Notes: Characteristics of employment status, mental health and physical health and parenting are those of mothers. Analyses include only children in single mother family at *time 1*, with non-missing outcome variable and non-missing values on all explanatory variables. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A8: Fixed effects analyses of nonverbal intelligence (Matrix reasoning) for children who had lived with a single mother at time 1, K cohort

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
New father figure Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 556 observations, 278 children)				
New father figure	–0.49	–0.29	–0.34	–0.42
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 2)	0.47*	0.42*	0.39	0.29
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		–0.65	–0.66	–0.70
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		–0.78	–0.78	–0.82
Number of children		–0.27	–0.23	–0.18
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		0.52	0.49	0.57
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			0.49	0.48
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			0.17	0.05
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.53
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				–0.21
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				–0.51
Constant	10.49***	11.37***	9.21***	13.41***

Notes: Characteristics of employment status, mental health and physical health and parenting are those of mothers. Analyses include only children in single mother family at *time 1*, with non-missing outcome variable and non-missing values on all explanatory variables. Data only available at Waves 2 and 3. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A9: Fixed effects analyses of teacher-rated numeracy for children who had lived with a single mother at time 1, K cohort

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
New father figure Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 384 observations, 192 children)				
New father figure	0.07	0.16	0.15	0.16
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 2)	0.06	0.07	0.04	0.02
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		0.19	0.18	0.19
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		–0.17	–0.18	–0.19
Number of children		–0.18	–0.18	–0.20
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		0.02	0.02	0.02
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			0.19*	0.21**
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			0.25	0.26
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.14
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				0.09
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				0.06
Constant	3.38***	3.75***	2.91***	2.96***

Notes: Characteristics of employment status, mental health and physical health and parenting are those of mothers. Analyses include only children in single mother family at *time 1*, with non-missing outcome variable and non-missing values on all explanatory variables. Data only available at Waves 2 and 3. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A10: Fixed effects analyses of teacher-rated literacy for children who had lived with a single mother at time 1, K cohort

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
New father figure Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 402 observations, 201 children)				
New father figure	0.09	0.18	0.17	0.17
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 2)	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.05
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		0.04	0.04	0.06
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		–0.18	–0.18	–0.20
Number of children		–0.16	–0.15	–0.18
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		0.05	0.05	0.04
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			0.12	0.15*
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			0.06	0.07
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.22*
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				0.16
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				0.11
Constant	3.48***	3.84***	3.33***	3.30***

Notes: Characteristics of employment status, mental health and physical health and parenting are those of mothers. Analyses include only children in single mother family at *time 1*, with non-missing outcome variable and non-missing values on all explanatory variables. Data only available at Waves 2 and 3. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A11: Fixed effects analyses of teacher-rated approach to learning for children who had lived with a single mother at time 1, K cohort

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
New father figure Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 406 observations, 203 children)				
New father figure	0.08	0.14	0.13	0.13
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 2)	–0.04	–0.03	–0.04	–0.05
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		0.10	0.10	0.10
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		0.09	0.09	0.09
Number of children		–0.18*	–0.18*	–0.19*
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		–0.08	–0.07	–0.07
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			0.12	0.12
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			0.17	0.17
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.05
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				0.05
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				0.01
Constant	3.12***	3.48***	2.96***	2.95***

Notes: Characteristics of employment status, mental health and physical health and parenting are those of mothers. Analyses include only children in single mother family at *time 1*, with non-missing outcome variable and non-missing values on all explanatory variables. Data only available at Waves 2 and 3. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A12: Fixed effects analyses of child injuries requiring attention for children who had lived with a single mother at time 1, K cohort

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
New father figure Waves 1 to 2 (*N* = 708 observations, 422 children)				
New father figure	–0.04	–0.05	–0.05	–0.05
Wave 2 (compared to Wave 1)	–0.04	–0.05	–0.04	–0.04
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		–0.10	–0.11	–0.12
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		–0.17	–0.17	–0.17
Number of children		–0.01	–0.01	–0.01
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		0.08	0.08	0.08
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			–0.03	–0.03
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			0.06	0.08
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				0.06
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				0.03
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				–0.05
Constant	0.25***	0.35	0.44	0.16
New father figure Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 705 observations, 422 children)				
New father figure	–0.16	–0.14	–0.15	–0.16
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 2)	0.10*	0.11*	0.12**	0.11*
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		0.03	0.05	0.04
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		–0.07	–0.08	–0.08
Number of children		–0.02	–0.01	–0.02
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		–0.03	–0.05	–0.04
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			0.00	0.01
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent)			–0.22*	–0.22*
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				–0.06
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				–0.03
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				–0.01
Constant	0.30***	0.38	0.40	0.78
New father figure Wave 1 – Wave 2 or Waves 2 to 3 (*N* = 1,040 observations, 422 children)				
New father figure	–0.11	–0.09	–0.08	–0.08
Wave 2 (compared to Wave 1)	–0.02	–0.02	–0.02	–0.02
Wave 3 (compared to Wave 1)	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.06
Subjective wellbeing (1 = 'just getting along', poor/very poor, 0 = comfortable, well off, prosperous)		–0.03	–0.02	–0.02
Housing tenure (1 = owned/mortgaged, 0 = rented/other)		–0.11	–0.12	–0.12
Number of children		–0.04	–0.04	–0.04
Employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not employed)		–0.01	–0.01	–0.01
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)			–0.01	–0.01
Self-reported health (1 = fair/poor, 0 = good, very good or excellent) –0.18*				–0.18*
Warm parenting (1 to 5, higher = more warm)				0.04
Consistent parenting (1 to 5, higher = more consistent)				–0.02
Angry parenting (1 to 5, higher = more angry)				0.02
Constant	0.24***	0.38**	0.45	0.31

Notes: Characteristics of employment status, mental health and physical health and parenting are those of mothers. Analyses include only children in single mother family at *time 1*, with non-missing outcome variable and non-missing values on all explanatory variables. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A13: Survey attrition to Wave 3 of families with father living elsewhere at Wave 1, by Wave 1 maternal characteristics

	4–5 years (B cohort)				8–9 years (K cohort)			
Mother's own or family Wave 1 characteristics	**In sample in W1 only**	**In sample in W1 and 2 only**	**In sample in W1 and 3**	**Compare by response groups**	**In sample in W1 only**	**In sample in W1 and 2 only**	**In sample in W1 and 3**	**Compare by response groups**
		%				%		
Father has some contact with child	69.5	79.9	77.4		67.4	73.5	79.0	*
Parents always/ often hostile or angry	11.6	12.3	15.5		21.2	15.4	18.2	
Child had not lived with father	77.2	76.6	77.4		37.3	26.9	26.0	**
Mother's education = more than secondary education	15.1	10.7	18.9		13.2	14.4	19.4	
Mother's self-reported health = fair or poor	12.4	11.6	11.1		11.8	14.0	12.1	
Mother employed	5.3	15.4	28.1	***	25.2	31.1	47.4	***
Housing tenure = owned /mortgaged	2.4	12.9	12.4	*	15.9	32.9	30.8	**
Financial wellbeing with respect to needs = 'just getting along', poor or very poor	54.3	56.4	52.6		58.1	60.2	54.9	
Sample size	**85**	**70**	**315**		**125**	**78**	**542**	

Notes: Chi-square tests for different distributions just within those with father living elsewhere, according to response groups for these families. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A14: Whether responded to questions about father living elsewhere in Wave 3, according to Wave 2 details

	Mother answered questions about father living elsewhere at Wave 3			
	B cohort		K cohort	
	% answered	*N* answered	% answered	*N* answered
All with father living elsewhere at Wave 3	81.7	442	83.6	626
Father resident at Wave 2	94.3	150	90.2	119
Father lived elsewhere at Wave 2	75.9	262	82.2	474
Non-respondent Wave 2	90.0	30	97.1	33
Non-resident fathers' contact with child at Wave 2 (if father non-resident at Wave 2)				
Weekly	89.4	118	93.0	198
At least once a fortnight	81.5	44	90.8	128
Monthly to yearly	75.7	53	81.5	97
Less often or not at all	52.8	47	49.0	51
How well mother gets along with other parent at Wave 2 (if father non-resident at Wave 2)				
Very well or well	85.8	133	90.7	206
Neither well nor poorly	79.2	61	87.9	145
Poorly, very poorly or badly	70.4	57	75.2	109
No relationship	33.3	10	34.2	13

Note: These calculations are based on unweighted data. The percentage answered is the number answering in Wave 3, over the number in this group in Wave 2.

Table A15: Sociodemographic characteristics in Mother's home according to residency of father and response categories, Wave 3

Mother's own or family characteristics at Wave 3	4–5 years (B cohort)					8–9 years (K cohort)				
	Father living elsewhere					Father living elsewhere				
	Resident father (couples)	Mother no answer	Father no contact or response	Father respon-dent		Resident father (couples)	Mother no answer	Father no contact or response	Father respon-dent	
	%					%				
Father has some contact with child	n.a.	n.a.	68.2	100.0	***	n.a.	n.a.	67.2	100.0	***
Parents always/ often hostile or angry	n.a.	n.a.	19.8	20.4		n.a.	n.a.	17.2	19.5	
Child did not live with father at birth	n.a.	53.2	48.0	19.8	***	n.a.	35.5	23.6	7.7	***
Mother's education = more than secondary education	49.8	21.7	20.0	34.8	**	42.1	20.7	20.6	28.9	*
Mother's self-reported health = fair or poor	6.6	12.7	17.2	8.2		6.5	17.8	12.6	12.0	
Mother employed	63.4	40.5	43.0	61.6	***	73.3	64.7	60.1	66.6	
Housing tenure = owned /mortgaged	75.3	21.5	22.3	27.1		81.1	29.8	31.4	46.8	***
Financial wellbeing with respect to needs = 'just getting along', poor or very poor	26.5	50.8	44.1	51.6		24.4	45.3	55.9	48.5	
Sample size	**3,766**	**95**	**188**	**254**		**3,417**	**117**	**258**	**368**	

Notes: Chi-square tests for different distributions just within those with father living elsewhere, according to response groups for these families.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A16: Prior parental relationship for children with a father living elsewhere, with non response as a separate category, mothers' reports by cohort/wave

	B cohort			K cohort		
	0–1 years	2–3 years	4–5 years	4–5 years	6–7 years	8–9 years
		%			%	
Excluding non-respondents						
With father living elsewhere	9.4	13.1	16.1	15.3	18.3	21.5
Parents never lived together	3.9	3.6	3.3	2.4	2.5	2.7
Parents separated before birth	3.4	3.2	2.8	1.7	1.6	1.6
Parents were married	0.5	2.3	5.0	5.9	8.2	10.4
Parents were not married	1.5	4.0	5.0	5.3	6.0	6.8
With resident father (couples)	90.5	86.9	83.9	84.7	81.7	78.5
Resident father, married	72.4	72.8	72.4	75.7	74.0	71.6
Resident father, cohabiting	18.2	14.1	11.5	9.0	7.7	6.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
With non-response as a category						
With father living elsewhere	9.4	9.6	10.7	15.3	14.1	15.3
Parents never lived together	3.9	2.5	2.0	2.4	1.6	1.5
Parents separated before birth	3.4	2.1	1.6	1.7	1.1	1.0
Parents were married	0.5	2.0	3.9	5.9	6.9	8.2
Parents were not married	1.5	3.0	3.3	5.3	4.6	4.6
With resident father (couples)	90.5	79.8	74.2	84.7	74.0	69.7
Resident father, married	72.4	68.2	65.3	75.7	67.8	64.4
Resident father, cohabiting	18.2	11.6	9.0	9.0	6.3	5.3
Non-response	–	10.6	15.1	–	11.8	15.0
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Note: Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding.

Table A17: Sociodemographic characteristics in mother's home according to residency of father, Wave 2

	2–3 years (B cohort)				6–7 years (K cohort)			
	Father living elsewhere (FLE)				Father living elsewhere (FLE)			
	Resident father (couples)	Had lived with father	Never lived with father	All with FLE	Resident father (couples)	Had lived with father	Never lived with father	All with FLE
	%				%			
Child has no siblings co-resident in mother's home	17.3	42.7	42.0	42.3	6.3	19.6	34.3	22.6
Child has one or more siblings co-resident in mother's home	82.7	57.3	58	57.7	93.7	80.4	65.7	77.4
Has full siblings	80.0	44.8	41.0	42.9	91.3	68.9	42.1	63.5
Has half-siblings	7.7	17.2	22.0	19.6	7.3	24.2	31.9	25.9
Has step-siblings	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.0	1.6	3.7	2.0
Child lives with a grandparent or uncle/aunt	5.3	14.9	24.9	20.0	4.6	8.1	11.6	9.0
Mother's education = more than secondary education	48.1	27.6	15.4	21.3	40.9	24.4	13.5	22.0
Mother's self-reported health = fair or poor	4.5	8.6	8.4	8.5	5.6	7.3	3.7	6.5
Mother employed	58.3	42.7	34.1	38.3	65.6	61.2	43.8	57.4
Housing tenure = owned /mortgaged	72.7	23.9	13.0	18.3	79.7	39.0	27.0	36.3
Financial wellbeing with respect to needs = 'just getting along', poor or very poor	24.2	49.6	47.3	48.4	22.2	48.7	54.9	49.9
	Mean				Mean			
Age of mother (years)	33.4	30.2	29.5	29.8	37.1	34.9	34.0	34.6
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)	4.52	4.13	4.28	4.21	4.49	4.20	4.21	4.20
Sample size	**4,053**	**256**	**226**	**482**	**3,632**	**558**	**122**	**684**

Table A18: Sociodemographic characteristics in mother's home according to residency of father, Wave 3

	4–5 years (B cohort)				8–9 years (K cohort)			
	Father living elsewhere (FLE)				Father living elsewhere (FLE)			
	Resident father (couples)	Had lived with father	Never lived with father	All with FLE	Resident father (couples)	Had lived with father	Never lived with father	All with FLE
	%				%			
Child has no siblings co-resident in mother's home	8.3	27.0	35.3	30.1	5.5	16.1	29.5	18.4
Child has one or more siblings co-resident in mother's home	91.7	73	64.7	69.9	94.5	83.9	70.5	81.6
Has full siblings	89.7	59.7	40.4	52.5	92.1	72.1	46.5	67.7
Has half siblings	6.7	24.2	32.3	27.2	6.5	26.9	36.3	28.9
Has step siblings	0.1	2.0	0.3	1.4	0.1	2.4	3.1	2.5
Child lives with a grandparent or uncle/aunt	4.7	9.6	16.6	12.2	4.7	9.5	9.5	9.6
Mother's education = more than secondary education	49.8	32.3	16.8	26.5	42.1	26.7	15.2	24.4
Mother's self-reported health = fair or poor	6.6	9.7	17.4	12.6	6.5	12.8	15.3	13.2
Mother employed	63.4	59.4	35.0	50.3	73.3	66.1	54.7	63.8
Housing tenure = owned /mortgaged	75.3	30.2	13.9	24.1	81.1	40.5	29.5	38.2
Financial wellbeing with respect to needs = 'just getting along', poor or very poor	26.5	47.2	50.9	48.6	24.4	50.0	56.4	50.8
	Mean				Mean			
Age of mother (years)	35.4	33.4	30.8	32.5	39.1	36.8	35.8	36.6
Mental health (1 to 5, higher = better mental health)	4.49	4.22	4.16	4.20	4.45	4.17	3.99	4.14
Sample size	**3,766**	**364**	**173**	**537**	**3,417**	**626**	**114**	**743**

Table A19: Frequency of contact between fathers living elsewhere and child by phone, letter or other means, by contact with father and cohort/wave, mothers' reports, Waves 1 and 2

	B cohort				K cohort			
	0–1 year (Wave 1)		2–3 years (Wave 2)		4–5 years (Wave 1)		6–7 years (Wave 2)	
Frequency of contact between father living elsewhere and child by phone, letter or other means	**Sees father at least yearly**	**Never sees father**	**Sees father at least yearly**	**Never sees father**	**Sees father at least yearly**	**Never sees father**	**Sees father at least yearly**	**Never sees father**
	%				%			
Up to yearly contact	98.5	53.3	94.2	34.4	95.9	27.5	93.0	21.2
Weekly	82.0	8.5	65.5	5.4	65.3	6.6	53.9	2.2
Fortnightly	7.3	5.4	12.5	1.1	14.7	2.1	15.8	2.3
Monthly	3.6	6.1	6.9	5.9	7.5	7.7	11.4	4.1
Up to yearly	5.6	33.3	9.3	22.0	8.4	11.1	11.8	12.6
Less often than yearly, or never	1.5	46.7	5.8	65.6	4.1	72.5	7.0	78.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	**346**	**89**	**373**	**98**	**569**	**151**	**564**	**115**

Note: Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 per cent due to rounding. 'Never sees father' includes those who see their father less frequently than yearly. Wave 3 is not shown, as these data are more difficult to interpret given the relatively high proportion of in-scope mothers who did not provide responses to these questions.

Table A20: Reasons for having less involvement than preferred by frequency of contact between fathers living elsewhere and child, fathers who preferred to have a little or a lot more involvement with their child, fathers' reports, Wave 3

	The demands of your job makes more frequent contact difficult	Your child's other parent does not want you to see the child more	Child lives too far away for more frequent contact	Other reasons	Sample size
			%		
Weekly	46.8	30.2	5.8	30.9	242
Fortnightly	38.7	32.6	29.7	28.6	145
Monthly up to yearly	21.6	17.3	68.0	16.3	86
All fathers living elsewhere who preferred more involvement	**39.6**	**28.5**	**24.8**	**27.5**	**473**

Note: Sourced from Wave 3, both cohorts combined. Other reasons includes 'more frequent contact would be disruptive to the child's routine', 'contact causes distress to child', 'contact causes distress to you', 'travel is too expensive', 'you are prevented by illness or injury', 'you do not have suitable living arrangements for a child to visit', 'your new partner or family makes more frequent contact difficult', 'the terms of a court ordered arrangement prevent more contact', and 'other reason'. Multiple reasons could be given.

Endnotes

1 According to data published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2008, Table 10), of children aged from 0 to 9 years, 2 per cent had a mother living elsewhere.

2 The nature of the relationship between each person in the household and the study child is collected from the primary carer (the mother in this sample); however, the collection of these relationship details was not consistent between Waves 2 and 3, so direct comparison of these two waves is more difficult. For a new partner at Wave 2, relationship to the study child was collected, with one category of 'parent', as well as other categories (including 'unrelated male'). In some situations (in particular, those in which only one adult had lived in the household at Wave 1), this new partner may have been recorded as 'Parent 2', in which case this relationship information was also broken down into biological versus step-parent. When this information was not collected, those identified as parents are reported in Table 10: New partner's relationship to child, B and K cohorts, Waves 2 and 3 as 'parent, relationship unidentified'. In Wave 3, this 'parent' category was changed to allow separate identification of 'biological parent' and 'step-parent' for all new partners. These changes in categories mean that it is not valid to compare Wave 2 new parents with Wave 3 new parents.

3 In random effects models, because the coefficients are derived from multiple records per person, they represent both differences across respondents (at either wave) and differences within respondents (across waves). The coefficients cannot be used to draw conclusions about causal relationships. They instead are used to describe associations between variables.

4 As discussed above, some of these children living with their mother will also live part of the time with their father, but at the time of the study were living with their mother.

5 There were changes to the collection of marital status between Wave 1 and later waves, and it is not clear if this made a difference to the data item. It was evident that a small number of respondents reported being married to one person in Wave 1, and yet cohabiting with that same person in a later wave, which may indicate that some cohabiting parents considered themselves married, even if this was not legally so.

6 Authors' calculation, using published data from Table 10 of ABS (2008).

7 At Waves 2 and 3, respondents were not asked if the non-live-in-partner was the father, but the much lower percentage of these fathers at 4 to 5 years, from the K cohort, suggests that this is more common among those with very young children. There is some instability in these living-apart-together (LAT) relationships, as 23 per cent of B cohort children with LAT fathers had lived with these fathers at some time prior to Wave 1, and 39 per cent were living with them (and their mother) at Wave 2. However, our definition of fathers living elsewhere excludes fathers reported to be temporarily living away from home (for example, for work) from this category (they are included as resident fathers), so living apart, in these data, represents something more than a temporary event.

8 These data have not been presented in a table, as most cells had very small sample sizes.

9 See Baxter and Smart (2010) for analyses of parenting styles of resident fathers, and Zubrick, Smith, Nicholson, Sanson, & Jackiewicz (2008) for analyses of all parents. Data collected (but not analysed here) also allow for analyses of non-resident fathers' consistent parenting and inductive reasoning, but not hostile or angry parenting.

10 For these children with responding fathers living elsewhere, according to mothers' reports, 72 per cent of children in the B cohort and 75 per cent of children in the K cohort stayed overnight with the non-resident father at least monthly.

11 These data were not collected of mothers in particular circumstances, including those who reported that they did not know who the father was or reported that the father did not know about the child.

12 Some mothers may receive child support regularly, yet on a less frequent basis than monthly.

13 In Wave 4 of LSAC, more detailed analyses will be possible.

14 Walter's analyses used data from the AIFS Evaluation of the Child Support Scheme (1990).

15 Mothers who did not report, resulting in a missing response, have been coded into the category representing minimal or no contact between parents. See table note for more information.

16 Walter's analysis was based on similar data to these on consulting over decisions, but also incorporated information on the frequency of discussions between mothers and non-resident fathers on various child-related concerns.

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Occasional Papers

1. *Income support and related statistics: a ten-year compendium, 1989–99*
   Kim Bond and Jie Wang (2001)

2. *Low fertility: a discussion paper*
   Alison Barnes (2001)

3. *The identification and analysis of indicators of community strength and outcomes*
   Alan Black and Phillip Hughes (2001)

4. *Hardship in Australia: an analysis of financial stress indicators in the 1998–99. Australian Bureau of Statistics Household Expenditure Survey*
   J Rob Bray (2001)

5. *Welfare Reform Pilots: characteristics and participation patterns of three disadvantaged groups*
   Chris Carlile, Michael Fuery, Carole Heyworth, Mary Ivec, Kerry Marshall and Marie Newey (2002)

6. *The Australian system of social protection—an overview (second edition)*
   Peter Whiteford and Gregory Angenent (2002)

7. *Income support customers: a statistical overview 2001*
   Corporate Information and Mapping Services, Strategic Policy and Knowledge Branch, Family and Community Services (2003)

8. *Inquiry into long-term strategies to address the ageing of the Australian population over the next 40 years*
   Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services submission to the 2003 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Ageing (2003)

9. *Inquiry into poverty and financial hardship*
   Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee (2003)

10. *Families of prisoners: literature review on issues and difficulties*
    Rosemary Woodward (2003)

11. *Inquiries into retirement and superannuation*
    Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services submissions to the Senate Select Committee on Superannuation (2003)

12. *A compendium of legislative changes in social security 1908–1982*
    (2006)

13. *A compendium of legislative changes in social security 1983–2000*
    Part 1 1983–1993, Part 2 1994–2000. Bob Daprè (2006)

14. *Evaluation of Fixing Houses for Better Health Projects 2, 3 and 4*
    SGS Economics & Planning in conjunction with Tallegalla Consultants Pty Ltd (2006)

15. *The 'growing up' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: a literature review*
    Professor Robyn Penman (2006)

16. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views on research in their communities*
    Professor Robyn Penman (2006)

17. *Growing up in the Torres Strait Islands: a report from the Footprints in Time trials*
    Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health in collaboration with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2006)

18. *Costs of children: research commissioned by the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support*
Paul Henman; Richard Percival and Ann Harding; Matthew Gray (2007)

19. *Lessons learnt about strengthening Indigenous families and communities: what's working and what's not?*
John Scougall (2008)

20. *Stories on 'growing up' from Indigenous people in the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region*
Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health in collaboration with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2008)

21. *Inquiry into the cost of living pressures on older Australians*
Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs submissions to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs (2008)

22. *Engaging fathers in child and family services: participation, perception and good practice*
Claire Berlyn, Sarah Wise and Grace Soriano (2008)

23. *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services.*
Saul Flaxman, Kristy Muir and Ioana Oprea (2009)

24. *National evaluation (2004–2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004–2009*
Kristy Muir, Ilan Katz, Christiane Purcal, Roger Patulny, Saul Flaxman, David Abelló, Natasha Cortis, Cathy Thomson, Ioana Oprea, Sarah Wise, Ben Edwards, Matthew Gray and Alan Hayes (2009)

25. *Stronger Families in Australia study: the impact of Communities for Children*
Ben Edwards, Sarah Wise, Matthew Gray, Alan Hayes, Ilan Katz, Sebastian Misson, Roger Patulny and Kristy Muir (2009)

26. *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*
Natasha Cortis, Ilan Katz and Roger Patulny (2009)

27. *Ageing and Australian Disability Enterprises*
Shannon McDermott, Robyn Edwards, David Abelló and Ilan Katz (2010)

28. *Needs of clients in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program*
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2010)

29. *Effectiveness of individual funding approaches for disability support*
Karen R Fisher, Ryan Gleeson, Robyn Edwards, Christiane Purcal, Tomasz Sitek, Brooke Dinning, Carmel Laragy, Lel D'aegher and Denise Thompson (2010)

30. *Families' experiences of services*
Morag McArthur, Lorraine Thomson, Gail Winkworth and Kate Butler (2010)

31. *Housing costs and living standards among the elderly*
Bruce Bradbury and Bina Gubhaju (2010)

32. *Incentives, rewards, motivation and the receipt of income support*
Jacqueline Homel and Chris Ryan (2010)

33. *Problem gamblers and the role of the financial sector*
The South Australian Centre for Economic Studies (2010)

34. *Evaluation of income management in the Northern Territory*
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2010)

35. *Post-diagnosis support for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, their families and carers*
Kylie Valentine and Marianne Rajkovic, with Brooke Dinning and Denise Thompson; Marianne Rajkovic, Denise Thompson and kylie valentine (2011)

36. *Approaches to personal money management*
    The Social Research Centre and Data Analysis Australia (2011)

37. *Fathering in Australia among couple families with young children*
    Jennifer Baxter and Diana Smart (2011)

38. *Financial and non-financial support to out-of-home carers*
    Marilyn McHugh and kylie valentine (2011)

39. *Community attitudes to people with disability: scoping project*
    Denise Thompson, Karen R Fisher, Christiane Purcal, Chris Deeming and Pooja Sawrikar (2012)