

Chapter 10

Bringing Leisure in: The Benefits and Importance of Leisure to Non-resident Fatherhood and Parent-Child Contact

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Introduction

I think any involvement you can have with their life at all is obviously going to be a bonus, being there for their presentation night or their dancing show or whatever it is that they're doing.... [Non-resident Father 1]

I feel happy. I feel really happy when I'm playing with my kids. I feel really good when I'm actually playing with them. When they leave I get a bit upset. I really do, I really miss them. I wish I had them all the time ... I love playing with them and love having them. [Non-resident Father 2]

The above quotes are extracts from interviews conducted as part of a recent Australian study of non-resident fathers' leisure with their children (see Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b, 2009). This is an important area of research because in many countries increasing numbers of divorce, de facto separation and non-marital childbirth are among a number of factors that have led to more and more fathers not sharing the same home address with their children (Jenkins & Lyons, 2006). Despite increasing evidence that fathers can be central to their children's education, health and well-being, and that for many non-resident fathers contact with their children is important and highly desirable but inadequate, research on non-resident fathers, fathering, fatherhood and family dynamics as aspects of contemporary western society and family life is lacking (e.g. Kay, 2006a; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). Being a father is already very complicated, and the concept of fathering is being increasingly complicated by a range of factors. These factors include changing family structures and patterns (e.g. increasing numbers of working mothers); changes in how societies conceptualise fathering and fatherhood;

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the widely varying expectations of fathers particularly with respect to work, play and their relationships with their families; increasing family diversity; and the growing numbers of non-resident fathers (e.g. Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; deVaus, 2004; Smyth, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b).

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *Survey of Family Characteristics* (2008), in Australia, there are almost 400,000 non-resident fathers, fathers with at least one natural child who is aged 17 years or under and who resides elsewhere. Of these non-resident fathers, approximately 36% live alone, 31% have repartnered and live with their partner in a family household with children and 18% have repartnered and live with their partner but without children (ABS, 2008). The ABS also reported that there were approximately one million children aged 0–17 years (or about 22% of children in this age group) who had a natural parent living elsewhere. In 82% of cases, the children did not live with their father, and most (about 75%) of these children lived in one parent families, 12% in step families and 10% in blended families. This broad overview, however, hides some even more worrying family trends. For example, the ABS data reveals that of these children aged 17 years or less, approximately 28% saw their non-resident parent less than once a year or never and 47% never stayed overnight with that parent. Moreover, less than half of the children (43%) saw their non-resident parent at least once per fortnight, and only 4% actually spent half their nights or more per year living with that other parent. Leisure is an important avenue for fathers to spend quality time with their children (Caruana & Ferro, 2004), but separation and divorce often leads to a decline in leisure satisfaction for some family members (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003).

This chapter reviews research on non-resident fathers and fatherhood. First, it discusses the incidence of divorce, de facto separation and non-marital childbirth in Australia and other westernised states and how this has led to a significant number of fathers living separately from their children. Secondly, it explains that for many non-resident fathers contact with their children is highly desirable but inadequate. Thirdly, it reveals that father involvement is important to children's education, health and well-being, but often only if, for example, some important family dynamics such as developing a positive or non-conflictual relationship with the children's mother and the nurturing and supporting of children are integrated (e.g. Allen & Daly, 2007; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). Finally, with reference to a recent Australian case study, this chapter explains how leisure and recreation are important aspects of many non-resident parents' engagement with their children and important and positive means for them to reassert themselves as good, nurturing and supportive fathers.

Negative stereotypes, including the derogatory label 'Disneyland dad' (e.g., Shulman, n.d.; Women's Divorce.com, n.d.), for example, have been applied to non-resident fathers. Among other things, this Disneyland stereotype implies that some fathers attempt to buy the love of their children and that their time spent with children is mainly dedicated to having fun without the constraints of school and homework (Jenkins & Lyons, 2006). Other labels include 'missing in action' (Stewart, 1999). Stereotyping of non-resident fathers in these ways implies that the absence and sporadic leisure-based and indulgent interactions of non-resident fathers are products of individual choice (Stewart, 1999; Braver et al., 2005). However, Lamb (in Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006: 13) contradicts these images, asserting, for example, 'Our research

really bashes the stereotype of the low-income father. These fathers care about their kids, but may not show their love in conventional ways and sometimes lack of a job, poor communication with the mom, or even their own childhood experiences can prevent them from getting involved'. Stereotyping also trivialises, for example, the leisure interactions of non-resident fathers and fails to consider that these leisure interactions are often shaped by legislation, family structures and a range of other variables that may act as constraints to fathers' engagement with their children (Green, 1998; Greif, 1995).

Jenkins and Lyons (2006) described the significance of leisure in non-resident fathers' engagement with their children and the lack of substantive research in this area. They explained how until recently leisure in this important context has been unnecessarily and unreasonably trivialised, and highlighted how there are in fact significant benefits that arise from family leisure-based interactions. For the purpose of this chapter, leisure (and recreation) is considered an important part of people's lives (e.g. Chubb & Chubb, 1981; Lynch & Veal, 1996; Mercer, 1980; Patmore, 1983; Van Lier & Taylor, 1993; Walmsley & Jenkins, 2003) and a rewarding form of human experience (Kraus, 1984; Lynch & Veal, 1996). 'Leisure is important to personal development, and viewed holistically, it 'brings a degree of balance to spirit, mind, and body...'' (Walmsley & Jenkins, 2003: 279). Although leisure 'means different things to different people', the relaxation people experience during leisure, for example, may be central to reducing stress in daily living. Indeed for some people, leisure might be just as important as work, with 'discrete periods of time given to leisure each and every day. For others, leisure time is hard to find amidst work (including the journey to work) and the pressures of day-to-day life' (Pigram & Jenkins, 2006: 2). Some sections of the following literature review on 'family separation and divorce' and 'father involvement and the importance of leisure', draw substantially from Jenkins & Lyons (2006) and Jenkins (2006b).

Family Separation and Divorce: Background and Overview

Most research on family separation and divorce has centred mainly on deficit assumptions (or negative impacts), and on the interpretations and impacts of legislation and law on family circumstances, and particularly as to how mothers and children were affected by separation and divorce (Hawthorne, 2005; Smyth, 2004a, 2005a). Much less research has considered fathers and the dynamics of fatherhood, the importance of non-resident fathers to family functioning and children's development through positive engagement with their children, and the effects of separation and divorce on fathers and their relationships with their children (Blankenhorn, 1995; Gibson, 1992; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006; Smyth, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b), although there is a growing body of international and local knowledge that brings separation, divorce, fathering and fatherhood into much a sharper and deeper focus (Allen & Daly, 2007; Amato, 2001; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Hawthorne, 2005; Kay, 2006a, 2006b; Pruett, 2000; Rettig & Leichtenritt, 2001; Smyth, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b).

In Australia, the public policy focus on fathers and fatherhood is gathering momentum. Amendments to the *Family Law Act 1975* in the *Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Bill 2006* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006), informed by the Report on the Inquiry into Child Custody Arrangements in the Event of Family Separation (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003), give priority to encouraging shared parental responsibility. They promote the positive involvement by both fathers and mothers in the lives of children; include the presumption of joint parental responsibility, except in cases involving child abuse or violence; and consider the interests of children and their opportunities to spend time with their relatives, including grandparents. This legislative action was a major shift which has brought about greater consideration of the interests of both parents and the child(ren), and the Commonwealth government has vigorously argued that these reforms would also help promote the best interests of children. As McIntosh and Chisolm (2007: 9) pointed out, 'the principle that the child's best interests must be treated as paramount... was repeatedly emphasised in the background papers to the amending Act of 2006', and for which Section 60CA provides. There is nonetheless speculation about how the 2006 legislation would impact on affected families and whether it could cope with enormous diversity in separated families and conceptualisations of parenting. It was argued that changes to family law and child support would likely prove problematic in many cases (e.g. Flood, 2003, 2006).

It was widely argued that the 2006 amendments would encourage the courts to consider sharing parenting time in appropriate cases and would encourage parents to consider substantially sharing parenting time when negotiating parenting plans (for a detailed discussion, see Kaspiew et al., 2009). The Commonwealth government did roll out a suite of interrelated and supportive reforms, including the establishment of 65 family relationship centres across Australia and changes to criteria for assessing child support payments since July 2006. And the government very explicitly sought to promote and support cooperative parenting rather than the pursuit of litigation in family matters (Kaspiew et al.).

In their very detailed *Evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms*, Kaspiew et al. (2009) reported that parents overwhelmingly supported the philosophy of shared parental responsibility (involvement in decision-making about a child's development and welfare) but did not understand that shared parental responsibility would not necessarily lead to shared care (50:50 time spent with the child). Some fathers became disillusioned to 'find that the law does not provide for 50-50 custody' (p. E3), but the changes 'encouraged more creativity in making arrangements that involve fathers in children's everyday routines, as well as special activities in arrangements made either by negotiation or litigation', and led to an increased proportion of these arrangements being made. Importantly, the report also found that 'The majority of parents with shared care-time arrangements thought that the arrangements were working well both for parents and the child ... [and] Generally, shared care time did not appear to have a negative impact on the wellbeing of children except where mothers had safety concerns...' (p. E3). In brief, McIntosh and Chisolm (2007) in their review of recent data

endorse the findings of earlier studies and ‘suggest that shared physical care is an arrangement best determined by the capacity of parents to exercise maturity, to manage their conflict and to move beyond egocentric decision-making in order to adequately embrace the changing developmental needs of their children’ (p. 14). In discussing their findings with a prominent researcher (Bruce Smyth, whose work is cited in this chapter), they further indicate that ‘the capacity of parents for “passive cooperation” and the containment of acrimony may prove to be central benchmarks’ (p. 14). [Similar issues were raised in a broader scoping study and manual produced in the United States (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006)].

Prior to the 2006 legislative amendments, several models of non-resident parent-child contact were applied through courts of law or used by parents (see Smyth, 2004b, 2005a). The most widely applied models were summarised by Smyth (2004b) (see Table 10.1). The extent to which each of these models will become more or less prominent (or others evolve) under the 2006 legislative reforms is not yet known, though there are indications that they are slowly promoting increased father engagement (Kaspiew et al., 2009). That said, although the extent of contact between children and non-resident fathers is receiving greater attention and is encouraged by the recent amendments and supporting policies and programmes, we still lack a clear picture of the quality of non-resident fathers’ engagement with their children and the associated roles of and intersects between fathers’ work, leisure and other aspects of time use (e.g. Jenkins, 2006a; Jenkins & Lyons, 2006; Smyth, 2004a). We also lack a sophisticated understanding of the factors that make involvement of fathers in decision-making and shared parenting more likely. These situations mean that it will be difficult to develop policy settings which truly support the intent of recent legislative amendments and which truly support shared (50:50) care. Although the statistics show some slight variations, Weston et al.’s (2002, pp. 18–19 in Flood, 2006: unpaginated) comments remain salient; ‘the culture of fatherhood has changed much faster than the conduct. Fathers share physical care of children equally in only 1–2 per cent of families, and are highly involved in day-to-day care in only 5–10 per cent of families’.

The former Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS, 1999; also in Sullivan, 2001) highlighted the challenge of being a father. Perhaps more pointedly, the ‘definition of “father”, like most aspects of fathering, is contested – on theoretical, pragmatic, and moral and ethical grounds’ (Sullivan, 2001: 46), and there is a justified concern that changes to the social constructs of fatherhood and fathering reveal ‘extensive ambiguity and confusion’ (Hawthorne, 2005; also see Flood, 2003). Given the diversity in separated families, these observations concerning the ambiguities of fathering and fatherhood have some resonance with Harrington’s (2006: 424) discussion in which she argues that ‘Kelly’s (1995) reformulation of leisure as “interaction environment” ... would open up the field to study leisure within other intimate communities, including those most marginalised from mainstream research; for example, gay and lesbian people, migrants and refugees, street children and other homeless people’. Indeed, important social relationships and phenomena are revealed by the social analysis of leisure (Rojek, 2005).

Table 10.1 Models of non-resident parent-child contact

Contact Model	Characteristics
<i>Fifty-fifty care</i>	Care equally shared among parents (seven days and nights with each parent in a fortnight period). Children can be close to both parents, but such arrangements are criticised because of the lack of stability as children move between two homes and possibilities for children to be exposed to conflicts between parents, neglect and mental health problems
<i>Little or no contact</i>	Very common model. Many variables influence disengagement, including fathers not wanting to see their children because they feel the children have turned against them, strained relationships with the mother, work engagements, substance abuse, distance, children growing older, feelings of inadequacy, role ambiguity, and fathers failing to cope emotionally and psychologically with divorce
<i>Holiday-only contact</i>	Often arises when one parent relocates a considerable distance from the other parent and his/her child(ren). Problems arise in that contact often becomes less and less frequent and may eventually cease. Or the nature of contact becomes such that children are often, if not always, in a 'school-free zone' and when the father may in fact be taking time off work
<i>Daytime-only contact</i>	Children do not stay overnight. They and their non-resident parent may have limited opportunities to experience some important family activities such as reading before bed-time; eating night-time and morning meals together; dressing and cleaning the house together
<i>The standard contact</i>	Non-resident parents see their children every alternate weekend and half the school holidays. It is a common model, perhaps the most common in Australia and overseas (Ferro, 2004). There are a number of possible explanations for the evolution and widespread application of this model. These reasons concern 'traditional sex roles and work patterns' (Smyth, 2004b: 88). Non-resident fathers may continue in their 'traditional roles', working during the week and seeing children on weekends. While some fathers would like to see their children on every weekend, in an increasingly widespread situation where mothers are working, mothers too reserve a right to see their children on weekends (Ferro)

Source: Smyth (2004b)

Father Involvement and the Importance of Leisure

Many non-resident fathers struggle to first establish, let alone maintain, what they and others might regard as a normal parent-child relationship (Parkinson & Smyth, 2003, 2004; Smyth, 2005b). This situation has been attributed to their inability to

spend time with their children on a daily basis (Bailey, 2002; Smyth, 2004a, 2005b), their lack of involvement in day-to-day decision-making (Bailey, 2002; Green, 1998; McMurray & Blackmore, 1993; Smyth, 2005a) and lack of information about their children's activities and progress at school (Bailey, 2002; Amato, 2001; Wallerstein, 2001), and the fact that they may no longer be regarded as a family member (Bailey, 2002; Green, 1998). Other reasons for fathers failing to establish or maintain regular contact with their children post-separation include the following: fathers may be marginalised if they believe their worth to children's lives is undermined by courts, counsellors or the children's mother; fathers simply do not care and refuse to support their children; fathers cannot afford to support their children and subsequently withdraw; fathers are rejected by the children or others; fathers give up if they feel incompetent or find contact difficult; the geographical distance between fathers and their children is great; either of the parents repartners; and conflict between the parents is apparent to the children (Jenkins & Lyons, 2006, p. 224; Allen & Daly, 2007; Green, 1998; Smyth, 2004a, 2005a, 2005b).

International research on fathers and fatherhood has demonstrated that fathers have important influences on their children (Allen & Daly, 2007; Green, 1998; Lamb, 1997, 2000; Menning, 2002; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Pruett, 2000; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). Demographic and family circumstances, socioeconomic resources, and the nature and quality of father-child interaction have consequences for children's well being, cognitive development, social competence and academic achievement, and their educational and occupational attainments as adults (Hernandez & Brandon, 2002; Menning, 2002). Jackson (1999) and Dunn, Cheng, O'Connor, and Bridges (2004) highlighted the importance of fathers in the lives of children and adolescents, as well as the direct, inverse relationship between the extent and quality of contact between father and child and the extent and nature of behavioural problems. While there are cases in which children who grow up without fathers do well or where contact with their father places children at risk of harm, children who grow up without a committed and involved father are more likely to suffer disadvantage and lower levels of well-being (Horn & Sylvester, 2002).

The quality or nature of the time non-resident fathers and children spend together is not determined exclusively by the amount and timing of their contact. What fathers actually do with their children is important (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Green, 1998), and for many non-resident fathers (perhaps especially so for those with standard, holiday only or little contact) a good deal of the time spent with their children may well be leisure-oriented and recreational (Smyth, 2004a, 2004b), but shaped quite significantly by work and other commitments or constraints (Jenkins & Lyons, 2006).

Research reveals that parents make valuable contributions to children's cognitive, social and emotional development when they share leisure time, and for fathers, playing with their children is 'particularly important in forging a secure parent-child relationship' (Brown, Michelson, Halle, & Moore, 2001, pp. 1-2; Mactavish & Schleien, 1998). To date, however, examinations of father-child play interactions

have failed to adequately analyse 'how the restricted and unique characteristics associated with being a non-resident father may impact activities, attitudes, perceptions and meanings for the parents and children involved' (Jenkins & Lyons, 2006, p. 227).

Research on leisure and families has been directed mainly to such matters as marital leisure patterns, with involvement in leisure and recreation activities linked to factors such as joint leisure experiences, family bonding and strength (e.g. Hawks, 1991). Shaw and Dawson's (2001) work on constraints suggests that families sometimes see family recreation as a form of purposive leisure. For instance, family-based recreation could improve communication, bonding, health and fitness, and give parents opportunities to express particular values, interests and world views (see Jenkins & Lyons, 2006, pp. 226–227). Leisure and families is a neglected aspect of leisure studies (e.g. Jenkins & Lyons, 2006; Kelly, 1997; Shaw & Dawson, 2001), and the traditional two-parent family has been the focus of a good deal of attention with respect to parent-child leisure interactions, while wider recognition is gradually being given to leisure in non-traditional families such as lone parent, blended, and same-sex-couple households.

There is growing evidence that leisure and recreation are important and positive aspects of many non-resident parents' interactions with their children. Stewart's (1999) research in the United States indicates that most non-resident parents' primary interactions with their children actually take place in leisure contexts. These interactions were linked to a variety of factors affecting the role of the noncustodial parent. Woods's (1999) interviews with 252 non-resident parents revealed that 94% of respondents provided recreation and entertainment activities involving a 'significant cost' during contact visits. Of those who provided recreation and entertainment activities, 55% said that 'it helped to build the relationship with the children' (p. 28) (also see Jenkins & Lyons, 2006, p. 227).

Strong relationships among family members are vital to children's and parent's happiness, health and well-being and can be supported by leisure together (Brown et al., 2001; Halle, Moore, Greene, & LeMenestrel, 1998). Family bonding, compatibility and strength can be promoted by engagement in leisure activities by families (Crawford, Houts, Huston, & George, 2002; Hawks, 1991; Mactavish & Schleien, 1998; Orthner & Mancini, 1991). Leisure can lead to better mental and physical health and health maintenance, personal development, greater appreciation of self, positive changes in mood, social and cultural and other benefits, and increased overall quality of life and well-being (Driver & Burns, 1999; Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991; Haworth, 1997; Orthner & Mancini, 1991). The relative freedom experienced within a leisure context actually affords non-resident fathers opportunities to spend quality time with their children, engaging in a range of mutually beneficial activities (e.g. Caruana & Ferro, 2004; Kazura, 2000). It is also within the context of leisure that the constraints associated with matters such as limited and affordable contact are likely to be a reality, and the responsibilities and commitments set by individuals, families, communities and the law are often negotiated (see Jenkins & Lyons, 2006, pp. 225–226).

What Non-resident Fathers Do with Their Children: A Case Study of Leisure with Their Children ¹

Methodology

Much is to be gained from talking to fathers in a variety of personal and family circumstances, but it is difficult to recruit fathers for research projects, and this has been especially the case for non-resident fathers (Smyth, 2004a). As Smyth (2004a, p. 21) notes, despite the fact that women and men have different attitudes, perceptions and recollections of events and issues, 'Much of what we know about separated/divorced fathers in Australia comes from talking with mothers'. Marsiglio (1995) made similar observations but reported that the collection of data directly from fathers was rising.

Non-resident fathers residing in the Hunter Region of Australia were recruited in a nonrandom purposive manner. A sample of self-selected separated fathers was recruited. Referral sampling was also used. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 non-resident fathers from September 2005 to February 2006 at a location of their choice. Most interviews were conducted at the fathers' homes or at a university office. Interviews were taped and transcribed, and transcripts were de-identified. In the analysis and findings, only pseudonyms are used.

Fathers were asked questions about their personal details including date and place of birth, education, income, payment of child support, employment status, their work commitments, where they lived, how long they had been separated and their relationship with their children's mother. Fathers were also asked to describe their children, their relationships with their children and their children's living arrangements. Other questions were directed to fathers' living arrangements and marital status, their child-contact arrangements, their perceptions of how their children felt about contact with them and fathers' willingness and ability to spend time with their children. These ideas provided a context for exploring non-resident fathers' leisure, and additional questions were asked such as the following: What do you hope to see come from your leisure with your children? Are these hopes or aspirations met? Are any activities with your children more important to you than others? Fathers discussed ways of reducing barriers and constraints to leisure with their children as well as other forms of contact such as speaking on the telephone, writing e-mails, cards and letters, and sending mobile phone text messages.

The 18 fathers ranged in age from 29 to 57 and their average age was 46 years. One father was born in New Zealand and the rest in Australia. Educational attainment ranged from completion of Year 10 (or equivalent) schooling to undergraduate university degrees.

¹ The methodology for the case study is described in more detail in Jenkins (2006b, 2009).

Discussion

The original results of this research (e.g. see Jenkins, 2009) presented four key themes grounded in data arising from interviews with fathers: the effects of experiences of separation and divorce on fathers' life circumstances, lack of time and time pressure, leisure meanings and activities, and fathers' aspirations for and experiences of leisure with their children. These themes provided a framework for analysing non-resident fathers' leisure with their children. The following discussion briefly focuses on elements of each overlapping theme, but draws particular attention to two interrelated themes: time and time pressure; and leisure meanings, activities and experiences. These are themes which help display the importance of leisure to non-resident fathers' engagement with their children and highlight the relevance of the social analysis of leisure (Rojek, 2005) in the context of non-resident fatherhood. As mentioned above, all data has been de-identified and pseudonyms have been used.

Fathers perceived leisure differently, but it appeared no less important to them and their engagement with their children. Zac, Trevor and Walter's definitions or perceptions of leisure were closely related to conventional notions of free or unconstrained (non-work) time:

Leisure according to the dictionary means an opportunity to do, or afforded by free time, time at one's own disposal. And I think it is the substance of what we're talking about, this free time; these opportunities we have with our kids that makes all the difference... This leisure is vital to the healthy interaction between parents and children. So, leisure to me was just going swimming and activities, and it's partly that but it's more than that. It's that opportunity to have that free time with each other that isn't constrained. Unconstrained time. And that's something that I believe the children and the dads, and the mums too, are entitled to have with each other. [Zac]

Something that you enjoy that's not work ... for the purposes of leisure activity with your kids some sort of bonding activity that encourages growth. [Trevor]

Leisure to me is time away from work ... walking for me is a real buzz. I used to do a bit of swimming ... Even just lying there with a few beers with different people. Family time as well, you know barbeques, bits and pieces. Boat[ing], make that into a family day, invite all the kids down and have the boat for half an hour if they've got it. I really enjoy it. Leisure for me, I'm a realist and I think I've only got 10 years ahead with these kids to really have some impact.... [Walter]

Among the fathers, leisure with their children involved a wide variety of activities – water sports such as skiing, surfing and swimming; cycling; walking; camping; long drives; building sand castles and playing in the sand at the beach; kicking the footballs; and playing cricket. These are active leisure pursuits frequently linked to fathers' engagement with their children in intact families (Jenkins & Lyons, 2006). However, passive and educational leisure pursuits, less often associated with fathering, were also commonly referred to by interviewees – arts, crafts, drawing and reading; playing board and computer games. For the majority of fathers, common activities such as watching television and videos/DVDs were prevalent. Perhaps unsurprisingly, other activities such as home renovations and working on the property, mowing the lawn

or even doing household chores with children appear to have taken on a leisure dimension for some fathers. Several fathers recounted the 'pleasures' of doing household renovations with their children, cleaning, washing up and child care around the home.

As Kelly and Lamb (2000) argued, for non-resident fathers to be fully integrated in their children's lives, they need to participate in a range of everyday activities that allow them to function as parents rather than as regular visitors. Overnight visits and time spent reading, washing up, doing homework, talking and cuddling assist fathers to be relevant to children's socialisation and development. Thus, the timing, length, nature and quality of contact are all critical factors in fathers' leisure with their children. Regardless of the level of child support paid by the father, the financial costs of leisure were considered by fathers to be substantial, especially in providing for particular activities, maintaining diversity in activities, acquiring good equipment and catering to changing tastes that arise in and among children over time. Some fathers thought they perhaps made time and space for leisure during contact with their children to an extent they may not have done before separation.

Most fathers experienced a form of time stress or pressure, especially if more than one child was involved and especially where those children either varied with age or were of different sex. The problem was compounded by infrequent (e.g. day-time only or holiday only) contact. Stanley, for example, described his experiences of a weekend with four children saying it was 'impossible' to adequately accommodate their needs. He then elaborated:

That's what I miss, you know it's alright to have the weekend and you know you're a Disneyland dad, and all you do is muck around with the kids. Well, I'd rather have the kids during the week. What I miss with my kids is talking about how they went at school, helping with their homework, helping with school projects, discussing other kids in the class. And you lose all that. All you get is, you go to dad for fun time and it is... dad's try to jam 14 days of life with their kids into 2 days. You hear these women saying 'he just spoils him rotten and takes him to McDonalds and does this and that'. And I say, 'well, who wouldn't? If you had someone, who, when they're born, you basically dedicate your life to them and then suddenly you can only see them a couple of days a fortnight, of course you're going to!' The couple of dollars a week you've got left you're going to spend it all on your kids. [Stanley]

After deducting child support, reestablishment costs and maintaining contact with his children, it was apparent Stanley's intent in his expenditure on his children was not an effort to 'buy love' but an outcome of having little discretionary income and an acknowledgement of the significance of contact to him and his children.

In the course of discussions, fathers were asked what aspirations they had in engaging in leisure with their children; what did they hope to gain from leisure activities with their children? Many responses centred on developing a relationship with their children:

Just a very loving relationship – a very loving relationship. [Gareth]

The only thing I hope for them is that they have a good connection with me as their father, so whatever they choose and what ever direction they go I just want to support them. I think that's important. Very, very important. [Callan]

Leisure is a very central part of family life for intact and separated families. However, it takes markedly different forms and is a very important means for non-resident fathers who have little and highly regulated contact (e.g. daytime-only or weekend-only contact) to make a valuable contribution as parents to the lives of their children. As Frank put it so succinctly, 'I feel that I'm cheated in many ways because of the lack of time I get with the kids... I suppose I have been talking about some of the barriers/constraints I experience with the boys. The biggest barrier is time, of course' [Frank].

Several fathers described flexibility in their work arrangements that were vital to facilitating contact with their children:

I'm very lucky that my hours of work are like 9.00 [am] to 3.30 [pm]... I've got a lot of flexibility in that compared to normal people's work hours.... [Gareth]

Flexibility and me being self employed is fairly important... I maintain approximately 20% to see my children; about 20% of the year... so that's about 75 days. So when I'm with my children I'm with them all the time. So that's a big commitment. And I can only do that if I work for myself. Noone is going to give me a job where I have 75 days off a year. So I realised that pretty quick. [Callan]

I had to work every second weekend; well I was supposed to work nearly all weekends, but I organized to have every second weekend. [Stanley]

Some fathers made changes to their workplace arrangements to find time to see their children. One father described how he worked long hours between school holidays in order to make time to travel interstate to visit his children:

I had between 12 and 14 weeks off a year with my work and all of every school holidays ... No normal person takes 14 weeks a year off. I couldn't care less about what normal people do. This is my relationship with my children and I'm trying to do the best that I can to maintain that and get it to a stage where they can ring me up any time they want whatever their need is and say hey dad I need to talk to you about this. [Joseph]

Even among this small sample of non-resident fathers, it was evident that fathers facilitated contact with their children in many different ways – changing from full-time-paid employment to self-employment, limiting their hours of work, changing occupations and rearranging work/shift schedules. However, not all fathers were able to change their work patterns. Casual employment, working nights, being on call and lack of predictable work arrangements made it very difficult for some fathers. One father who had repartnered worked between two or three casual jobs simultaneously while studying full time. Two fathers emphasised their valuable relationship with their work supervisor who allowed them to alter work hours to help them see their children. As Wilbur put it:

Well, my employer is XXX. And strictly speaking they don't have a system for father's type things. But my boss is a top bloke and we get on really well and I do over hours and he understands that. He says any time you need time to go and see your kids or do whatever it is you've got to do, just go. [Wilbur]

Flexible arrangements were vital to Wilbur. His contact with his children had a 3-week cycle, in which although he saw his children every week, the extent of contact varied in each of the 3 weeks.

Conclusions

Family diversity needs to be better reflected in leisure research. Families affected by separation and divorce are one case in point. Non-resident fathers have important influences on their children, but spending time with their children presents a considerable hurdle for many of them. Leisure, widely considered free time, varies among families in context, setting, form and extent, and indeed in a family over time, and is far from trivial. However, leisure is a vital, qualitative aspect of many non-resident fathers' contact and engagement with their children. Nevertheless, for non-resident fathers to be fully integrated in their children's lives, they need to participate in a range of everyday activities that allow them to function as parents rather than as regular visitors. To develop and refine recent policies and programmes that support the goal of promoting fathers' involvement in the lives of children, it is essential to understand the extent and nature of fathers' current participation and involvement and how these are linked to the social, economic and demographic characteristics of fathers and their families.

Although this study does not use a representative sample of non-resident fathers which allows for generalisations, it does suggest the need for research concerning non-resident fathers' time use and indicates that policy and legislation promoting fathers' roles in supporting and caring for their children is outpacing social and workplace arrangements that might better facilitate such roles. Widespread (traditional) family and societal models of fatherhood are somewhat out of step with the recent 2006 policy and legislative developments, wherein, for example, non-resident fathers need support to develop and maintain strong relationships with their children, while formal and flexible workplace arrangements that facilitate these outcomes are inadequate and ad hoc. In this context, the social context for leisure proves to be a very fertile field of inquiry which can uncover, important and inform us about many aspects of contemporary family life.

The benefits of leisure to family relationships and family members' well-being are very evident in this study. Leisure is an important part of non-resident fathers' engagement with their children, and leisure supports non-resident fathers' parenting. Through leisure, fathers can help build relationships with their children. Children and fathers benefit from positive leisure experiences.

A better picture of the extent of non-resident father-child contact is being unpacked by researchers in leisure studies and other fields. However, we still do not know enough about how non-resident fathers use their time and what they do with their children during contact and with what effects both with respect to the fathers, the children and their wider families, including the children's mother. Among many research gaps that could be fruitfully explored, there remains a very urgent need to better understand the supports and interventions required by non-fathers, living in vastly different circumstances and with varying levels of contact and contact arrangements, to enable participation in paid work, fulfilling leisure and positive involvement in the lives of their children. We might also usefully explore how fathers negotiate constraints to leisure with their children, children's own perspectives

of leisure with their non-resident parents, the extent to which fathers' leisure with their children is influenced by how those fathers experienced leisure with their own parents and whether, in fact, non-resident fathers actually experience leisure in very different or similar ways to resident dads. This is not only an important area of study, but, to paraphrase Rojek (2005), a very rich one for leisure studies grounded in the analysis of social relationships and phenomena.

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