

Fathers as Primary Caregivers

“Non-traditional” roles in two parent families with young children

Working paper

First presented at the 1994 NZARE conference

Christchurch, December 1-4

Revised December 1995

Paul Callister & Associates
Economic and Social Research
Paekakariki

E-mail: paul.callister@actrix.gen.nz

Fathers as Primary Caregivers

“Non-traditional” roles in two parent families with young children

Paul Callister

Paekakariki

Introduction

One of the themes of the International Year of the Family includes highlighting the roles and contributions to family life by fathers. Traditionally in two parent families a key role of the father has been that of primary income earner.^{1 2} But increasingly this is being challenged by rapidly changing economic conditions and shifting ideas about the roles of both men and women.

The arguments for men lessening their focus on the “public sphere” and increasing their involvement in the “private sphere” come from a number of angles. From certain strands of feminist thought, which emphasise the importance of women’s participation in the public sphere on equal terms with men, there comes the view that women will always be constrained in the public sphere if men are not taking an equal share of the work in the private sphere (Folbre, 1994; Rantalaio, 1993). From within the New Zealand economics profession Rose (1990) predicts that the “full employment” of the late 1990s may look very different from the full employment of the 1950s, and may, in part, come about through men taking on more unpaid caring roles. From within psychology and sociology Dinnerstein (1977) and Chodorow (1978), although differing in their analyses of the underlying causes, have put forward theories that the oppression of women originates in the female monopoly on mothering. To counter this, they argue for the concept of dual parenting whereby men share equally in the rearing and caring of infants. A number of psychologists and anthropologists also suggest that men will not only gain emotionally from a greater involvement in their child’s upbringing but they will also make better decisions in the public sphere with this new dimension to their being (Kitzinger, 1992; Price, 1988; Smith, 1990). In addition, there are studies which suggest that there may be positive gains for children from the involvement of fathers (Carro, 1983; Lamb, 1986; Pruett, 1987; Radin et al, 1982; Snarey, 1993). Yet, at the same time there has recently been increased public awareness about men as abusers of children, both within the home and within formal childcare settings.

In New Zealand within the last decade there have been major changes in the paid employment status of mothers and fathers in two parent families with young children. In general, while there has been a steadily increasing movement of mothers into paid work there has also been a significant movement of fathers out of it. While along with these employment changes there appears to have been some shift towards men taking up a greater share of unpaid work in two parent families both in New Zealand and overseas, in general, women continue to undertake a high proportion of the domestic work and childcare while men continue to work longer hours of paid work than women (Davey & Callister, 1994; Gershuny & Robinson,

¹ In this paper I am examining only heterosexual two parent families.

² It is perhaps important to note that the concept of the father as sole provider is a cultural arrangement of relatively short standing in Western society. Ferree (1990) argues that the ‘provider myth’, that is, the concept of men spending a significant portion of the day away from home and bringing back a wage that could support a non-employed family is only a phenomenon of the last industrial era. Therefore the social association of masculinity with the role of sole provider is new, not ‘traditional’.

1988). However, despite these overall patterns, there have been some significant shifts in attitudes and behaviour within a small group of families.

There are a variety of theories from a range of disciplines which try to predict and explain the division of labour in the home. These theories range from those based on genetic differences, differences in productivity, differences in “human capital”, relative resources of parents, sex role ideologies and the time available by each parent. (Becker, 1981; Coverman, 1985; Wilson, 1975). Many of these studies however tend to contain circular arguments which uphold the status quo (Callister, 1993a; Hyman, 1994). In empirical studies looking at relative use of time within two parent families the central research question has often been “who is responsible for (most of) the family labour?”, however researchers are now increasingly asking “for which activities and under what conditions can or will family tasks be redivided between partners?” (Van Dongen et al, 1993:1).

As overseas researchers have focused on this new question they have tended to look closely at families where the mother has moved away from her traditional role of looking after children full-time at home, to join the father in paid work (Brannen & Moss, 1990; Crosby, 1991; Hochschild, 1989; Pleck, 1985; Sandqvist, 1987). These overseas time use studies are useful in that they identify factors which can alter the share of unpaid work, although they tend to highlight the unpaid work patterns of only those parents at the middle to upper end of the socio-economic scale.

In some of the households studied men have made little response on the domestic front to their partner’s participation in paid work which has created a “double burden” for the mothers. In others, men have increased the amount of time they spend looking after children. This is particularly likely if parents work different shifts (Presser, 1988). But, in some of the households, while men may be increasing their relative share of the household work to that of the mother, their total hours of unpaid work may have increased only slightly, remained stable, or, in some cases, even declined. Much of the previous unpaid work of these families has now been “professionalised” which means that, in general, it is now undertaken on a paid basis by other women (Hertz, 1986). While this is helpful to the particular parents, this does little to alter the overall contribution to childcare and domestic work by men in society.

In addition, while studies of dual “job” families are important, in New Zealand only 10% of two parent families have both parents in full-time paid work (7% if both work 40 or more hours per week) when children are under one, and just over 16% (11%) in the one to under five age group³. When part-time work is included then only 26% of families have both parents in paid work when a child is under one, rising to 42% in the one to four age group (Davey & Callister, 1994). Even in the United States, which has a higher labour force participation rate for woman than New Zealand, just over twenty per cent of married couples both work full-time year round when their youngest child is under three years of age (Hayghe et al, 1993). This is primarily because the majority of women in two parent families continue to stay out of paid work, or work part-time, when their children are very young.

This paper instead focuses on the data and literature available on an even smaller group of families. These are families in which there appears to have been a major shift in “traditional” paid and unpaid roles by both parents, and in particular, situations in which fathers have significantly increased both their relative and absolute share of childcare.

While these families should be of interest to researchers from a range of disciplines they should be of particular interest to researchers in the area of education. The reasons for this include:

- The first few years of a child’s life appear to be a very important period in a child’s development (Carnegie Corporation, 1994). Although there is continuing debate about the government program of “Parents as First Teachers”, parents, in actuality, usually perform a key role in early childhood

³ Even by the time the youngest child reaches the age of fifteen only 52.2% of partnered women work full-time (30+ hours per week), and 35.2% 40 or more hours per week.

education. It is therefore important to look at the effects, both positive and negative, on the children when it is the father, rather than the mother, who acts as primary caregiver.

- It is of interest to see how the education of both parents comes into the decision making process when choosing a primary caregiver. For individuals there are strong links between their level of education, participation in paid work and income level, but in two parent families there is a complex process of decision making based on two intersecting sets of educational qualifications along with a range of other factors.
- In literature on fathers' involvement in childcare and household work in dual income families the education of both the mother and the father has at times been shown to influence the father's behaviour (Sandqvist, 1987). In particular, specific forms of education such as attending ante-natal classes and learning childcare skills appears to be associated with increased father involvement (McBride, 1990; Russell, 1983).
- Just as education appears to have had some impact on changing girls' expectations of careers it is important to determine whether education is playing a role in expanding choices for boys.
- And, finally, what is happening at the interface between early childhood education services and families when these services in the past have dealt almost exclusively with mothers as the primary caregivers. In situations where there is a high level of direct parent involvement, such as Playcentre, these changes are particularly important and raise a range of issues.

This paper does not attempt to delve into any of these specifically education related issues in particular detail but instead provides a broad overview of some of the emerging themes.

It is divided into two sections. The first is based on data from the New Zealand census and attempts to establish the number of families in which the father is the primary caregiver, and some of the characteristics of these families. The second section covers a review of New Zealand and international literature on men as primary caregivers, including the reasons why they have taken on the role and their experiences in it.

Section one

Changing families and patterns of paid work

In order to place the changes within two parent families into a wider family perspective Table One shows the overall pattern of families with preschool children as well as their participation in paid work in 1991. This snapshot indicates a great diversity in family situations, a pattern which has been also shown in the New Zealand Council for Educational Research's work on families, employment and childcare arrangements (Podmore, 1994). Podmore's work however emphasises that these patterns are not static, rather there is a high level of movement between differing family types and paid employment. In an American context Stacey suggests that, like postmodern culture, contemporary family arrangements are now diverse and fluid (Stacey, 1990).

Table 1- Families with youngest child under five - Ranked order by family type and participation in paid work - 1991

	<i>Actual</i>	<i>%</i>
Two-parent family - Father full-time paid work, mother not in paid work	66114	34.3
Sole mother not in paid work	36509	18.9
Two-parent family - Father full-time paid work, mother part-time paid work	31125	16.1
Two-parent family - Both in full-time paid work	21507	11.1
Two-parent family - Neither in paid work	18957	9.8
Sole father - Not in paid work	2961	1.5
Sole mother - Full-time paid work	2745	1.4
Sole mother - Part-time paid work	2594	1.3
Two-parent family - Father part-time paid work, mother not in paid work	2433	1.3
Two-parent family - Father not in paid work, mother full-time paid work	2298	1.2
Sole father - Full-time paid work	1719	0.9
Two-parent family - Father not in paid work, mother part-time paid work	1698	0.9
Two-parent family - Both part-time paid work	1125	0.6
Two-parent family - Father part-time, mother full-time paid work	951	0.5
Sole father - Part-time paid work	174	0.1
Total	192910	100

Source: (Davey & Callister, 1994)

Note: The category “paid work” in this and subsequent tables is equivalent to the official Statistics New Zealand classification “gainfully employed in the labour force” and, in fact, includes a small number of unpaid workers in family businesses. “Not in paid work” includes those unemployed and looking for work and those not in the labour force.

One parent families are not the prime focus of this paper. However it is worth noting two opposing trends in regard to fathers in this area. May (1992) notes that in the last two decades women with children have had more opportunities to enter the paid workforce, as well as having the backstop of the Domestic Purposes benefit, should they wish to leave a relationship. She argues that these factors have also made it easier for men to leave their families. The strong growth of sole mother families has meant that one group of children probably have even less contact with their fathers than in the past. However, from a small base, there has also been a recent strong increase in the number of sole father families (Davey & Callister, 1994).

While some of the issues facing men in two parent families will be similar to those faced by men in sole parent families the experiences of sole fathers is an area needing exploration in its own right. In addition, the paper does not address the issue of men working in paid childcare, although some of the themes explored do have direct relevance to this subject.

Characteristics of two parent families where the mother has a higher level of participation in paid work than the father

This section uses official New Zealand statistics to focus on mothers’ and fathers’ participation in paid work. The attention given to paid work reflects to a large degree the lack of survey data on unpaid work in New Zealand. Two parent families are divided into two groups. In the group to be analysed in this paper the father works less hours in paid work than the mother, or is not in paid work.⁴ While it would be possible to analyse hours of paid work at a fine level of detail, such as whether the mother worked forty-five hours per week and the father forty -two hours, this paper instead uses the broad groups of “full-time”

⁴ In the text and tables I refer to these families as “non-traditional”.

and “part-time paid work”, and “not in paid work”.⁵ This group does not include families where both partners work full-time or both work part-time or families where neither partner is in paid work, the latter representing a significant group in some communities. In some of the “no job” families it is possible the father is the primary caregiver, but most research seems to indicate that the mother has this responsibility, often with little help from the father (Davey & Callister, 1994).

The following tables show the number of families where the mother had a greater involvement in paid work than the father in 1986 and 1991. For 1991 two figures are shown. The first column shows the total number of families in each group, while the second shows those families where the father indicated in the 1991 census that he looked after children at home in the last week. While this is insufficient to conclude that he was the primary caregiver, the second column will probably give a better guide to the number of men in two parent families who are spending a significant amount of time looking after children under five.⁶ Overall the tables show that this number has grown between 1986 and 1991 but is still very small.

Table 2- Two parent families -Youngest child under one

	1986	1991	1991*
Mother full-time paid work, father part-time paid work	138	162	132
Mother full-time paid work, father not in paid work	132	444	315
Mother part-time paid work, father not in paid work	72	303	240
Total	342	909	687
Total number of two parent families	40,326	41,976	41,976
Non “traditional” families as % of all two parent families with a child under one	0.8	2.2	1.6

* Father indicated that he looked after children at home in the last week

Source: Census, Statistics New Zealand

The biggest growth in the “non-traditional” families has been in those situations where the mother works full-time or part-time and the father is not in paid work. As a comparison, in 1991 55 % of two parent families were in the situation where the father was in full-time paid work, and the mother was not in paid work. As a further point of comparison, the 1991 census identifies 948 men as being sole fathers of a child under one, 423 of whom stated that they looked after the children in the week before the census.

As Tables 3 and 4 indicate the proportion of families who are “non-traditional” increases as the age of the youngest child rises.⁷

⁵An alternative approach would be to look at situations where the mother was the main income earner. In 1991 census data indicated that just under 10% of women in two parent families, with dependent children, earned more than the man. This is a significant increase on the 1981 figures, where just under 5% of women earned more than their male partners. However while earnings may have a significant influence on the allocation of household and childcare work they give little guide to relative time available to each parent for childcare.

⁶ As a comparison with the census data Podmore (1994) found that in 5% of the sixty families in the Wellington region studied the father had the most responsibility for the child’s care during their first five years. In addition, Easting & Fleming (1994) found that “reversal” of roles is rare, and tends to be seen as a temporary phase.

⁷ This is consistent with trends in Sweden where very few fathers make use of paid parental leave in the first six months of a child’s life, although the rate subsequently rises in the next 12 months (Callister, 1994).

Table 3- Two parent families Youngest child 1-4

	<i>1986</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1991*</i>
Mother full-time paid work, father part-time paid work	669	789	636
Mother full-time paid work, father not in paid work	777	1,854	1,452
Mother part-time paid work, father not in paid work	339	1,395	1,083
Total	1785	4,038	3,171
Total number of two parent families	104,166	104,238	104,238
Non “traditional” families as % of all two parent families with a child 1-4	1.7	3.9	3.0

* Father indicated that he looked after children at home in the last week

Source: Census, Statistics New Zealand

In the one to four age group 41.3% of families had a father in full-time paid work, and a mother not in paid work, while there were also a total of 3,861 sole fathers of which 2,496 said they looked after children in the last week.

Table 4- Youngest child 5-15

	<i>1986</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1991*</i>
Mother full-time paid work, father part-time paid work	2,016	2,094	1,089
Mother full-time paid work, father not in paid work	2,079	4,215	2,001
Mother part-time paid work, father not in paid work	951	2,541	1,086
Total	5,046	8,850	4,176
Total number of two parent families	189,870	160,575	160,575
Non “traditional” families as % of all two parent families with a child 5-15	2.7	5.5	2.6

* Father indicated that he looked after children at home in the last week

Source: Census, Statistics New Zealand

In this last table the column indicating the number of men who looked after children at home may be misleading. It is very likely that many mothers and fathers do not consider being with a 10 year old before and after school or in the school holidays as “looking after children”.

In this 5-15 age group the proportion of families where the father was in paid work full-time and the mother was not in paid work had dropped to 19.2%, while in the same age group of children there were 11,769 sole fathers of which 6,819 said they looked after children in the last week.

Regarding just those situations where the mother works more hours in paid work than the father there are significant differences between Maori and non-Maori families.

Table 5 shows the ethnicity of both parents.

Table 5 - % in each family group by ethnicity of both parents - Youngest child under five - 1991

	<i>Maori father, Maori mother</i>	<i>Maori father, non- Maori mother</i>	<i>Non- Maori father, Maori mother</i>	<i>Non-Maori father, non- Maori mother</i>
Mother full-time paid work, father part-time paid work	0.9	0.5	0.7	0.6
Mother full-time paid work, father not in paid work	3.4	2.1	2.3	1.3
Mother part-time paid work, father not in paid work	1.9	2.0	1.3	1.0
Non “traditional” families as a % of all two parent families in particular ethnic group	6.1	4.6	4.4	3.0
n=	10,848	7,296	7,260	120,819

Source: Census, Statistics New Zealand

Tables 5 and 6 reflect the higher rate of unemployment amongst Maori men than Pakeha men, and also the higher rate of full-time work amongst Maori women than Pakeha women. Other work indicates that the proportion of “non-traditional” families is even higher amongst Pacific Island Polynesian families (Callister, 1994).

Table 6 -% in each family group - Youngest child 5-15 - 1991

	<i>Maori father, Maori mother</i>	<i>Maori father, non- Maori mother</i>	<i>Non- Maori father, Maori mother</i>	<i>Non-Maori father, non- Maori mother</i>
Mother full-time paid work, father part-time paid work	1.9	1.7	1.6	1.2
Mother full-time paid work, father not in paid work	5.8	4.3	4.0	2.2
Mother part-time paid work, father not in paid work	2.6	2.5	1.8	1.5
Non “traditional “ families as a % of all two parent families in particular ethnic group	10.3	8.5	7.4	4.9
n=	10,095	6,291	7,122	137,079

Source: Census, Statistics New Zealand

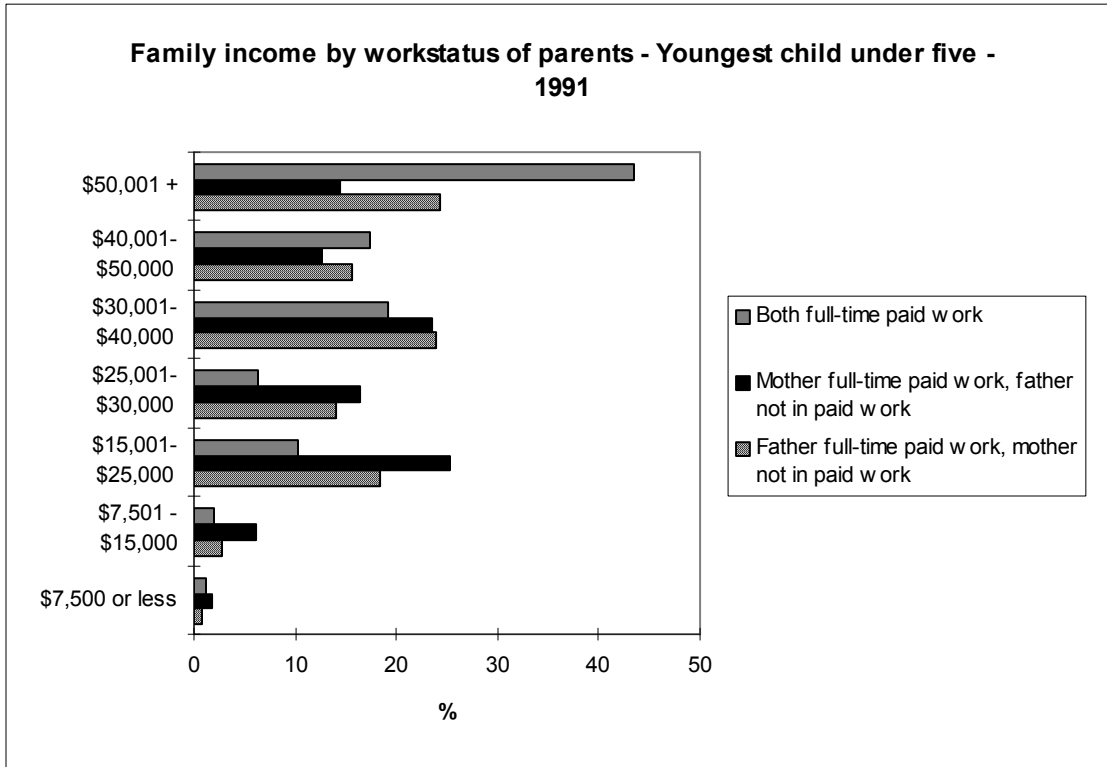
The following section focuses on those families where the mother is in full-time paid work and the father is not in paid work. There are also some comparisons drawn with the more common “mirror image” family, in which the father is in full-time work and the mother is not in paid work.

1991 census data indicates that the occupational and industry profiles of mothers and fathers who are primary income earners differ from each other. However, in general, these differences tend to reflect the overall occupational differences between women and men.

Occupational and industry gender segregation, along with differing hours of work, flows through to income differentials between women and men and this is reflected in family income. Figure One shows the income profiles of families where the mother is the only parent in paid work and the opposite situation where the father is the only parent in paid work. As a comparison, the income profile of parents when both partners are in full-time paid work is included. The chart clearly shows that in terms of maximising family income (before childcare costs are taken into account) then it is preferable to have both parents in full-time paid work, but if it is only one parent who is in paid work then fathers can generally provide higher family

incomes than mothers. The ability of men to generate greater market income than women has often been put forward as a rationale for mothers rather than fathers staying at home to look after the children (Callister, 1993a).

Figure 1



Source: Census, Statistics New Zealand

The characteristics of those families where the mother is the sole income earner can be further examined by looking at the highest level of formal education of each parent within the family. Table 7 shows the number of families by the highest qualification of both the mothers and father. It indicates that mothers as sole income earners are numerically most common where neither partner has any formal qualification.

Table 7 - Number of families in each group where the mother is in full-time paid work, and the father is not in paid work- Youngest child under five - 1991

Qualification of Father	Qualification of mother				Total
	University	Other tertiary	Total School	No Qualification	
University	114	66	27	9	216
Other tertiary	90	324	150	102	663
Total school	78	162	153	63	444
No Qualification	51	216	282	432	978
Total	333	756	609	603	2301

Source: Census, Statistics New Zealand

However the families in which the mother is the sole income earner in each qualification combination can be further analysed as a percentage of all families in each qualification combination.

Table 8 - % of families within each family grouping where the mother is in full-time paid work, and the father is not in paid work- Youngest child under five - 1991

Qualification of Father	Qualification of mother				Total
	University	Other tertiary	Total School	No Qualification	
University	1.5	0.9	0.7	1.0	1.1
Other tertiary	2.9	1.6	0.7	0.9	1.2
Total school	4.5	1.7	1.1	1.0	1.4
No Quals/other	7.5	3.0	2.3	2.2	2.5
Total	2.6	1.7	1.2	1.6	1.6

Source: Census, Statistics New Zealand

Table 8 shows that in 7.5% of families where the mother has a university qualification and the father has no qualification / other the mother is the sole income earner. While this arrangement is most common within this combination of qualifications, in fact there are only a small number of families in this group. Overall, it is uncommon for a mother to have a university qualification and the father to have no qualifications (Davey & Callister, 1994). But the table indicates that in a “tight” labour market both a mother’s enhanced ability to obtain paid work through having tertiary qualifications, and a father’s difficulty in obtaining work through having few qualifications are likely to influence the uptake of this lifestyle. However, an interesting feature of this table is that the uptake of this lifestyle is not significantly lower in families where both partners possess a university qualification and would therefore indicate that both appear to have relatively good paid work prospects, than in families where neither have qualifications and therefore far less choice in the job market. This may indicate that both ideology and economic opportunities may be at work in the choice of this family arrangement.

The number of children in families where the mother is the primary income earner is also of interest.

Table 9 - Number of children under fifteen in two parent families in which the youngest dependent child is under five - 1991

<i>Paid workforce status</i>	No of children in family (% in each group)				Total
	One	Two	Three	Four +	
Father not in paid work, mother full-time	36.5	34.0	18.6	11.0	100.0
Father part-time, mother full-time	36.1	38.9	17.9	7.2	100.0
Father full-time, mother full-time	35.0	35.1	20.2	9.7	100.0
Father part-time, mother not in paid work	29.9	35.6	21.5	13.0	100.0
Father full-time, mother not in paid work	28.9	38.4	22.0	10.8	100.0
Both parent not in paid work	28.5	32.0	21.2	18.2	100.0
Father not in paid work, mother part-time	27.7	36.5	23.8	12.0	100.0
Father full-time, mother part-time	26.4	41.7	23.5	8.4	100.0
Father part-time, mother part-time	26.3	41.8	22.9	9.3	100.0

Note: Rows may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding errors

Source: Census, Statistics New Zealand

Families where there is only one child under fifteen, and that child is under five, are most common in situations where the mother rather than the father is in full-time paid work. As looked at in more detail in Section Two, overseas studies of families in which men are the primary caregivers and the mother is the primary income earner, indicate that small families predominate. However, Table 9 indicates that the predominance of small families may be more to do with the paid work status of the mother rather than the unpaid work status of the father.

Section two

Two Parent Families where the Father is the primary caregiver

In the last decade there has been an increasing interest in the role of the father within families. This interest tends to be concentrated in two main academic disciplines, that of psychology and sociology, but there are also contributions from within women's studies and from the small, but emerging, discipline of men's studies. The interest covers a wide range of topics from traditional fathers in two parent families, gay fathers, sole fathers, through to relatively small groups such as fathers who are in the armed forces (Hanson, 1985)

This section is based on a review of New Zealand and overseas literature and focuses on fathers who are the primary caregivers of their children. The majority of studies have concentrated on families with very young children, that is, those families with children 0-5 years. In addition, most of the studies have been based on small, non-randomly selected samples. Hence the findings are very much of a qualitative exploratory nature.

An early draft of this paper was reviewed by three New Zealand fathers who have been primary caregivers, as well as discussed at two fathers' groups. This was done partly to determine whether the overseas research accords with the realities of New Zealand men in this role and whether these findings are still applicable to men's experiences in the early 1990s. Where appropriate and agreed upon, their comments have been noted anonymously.

The term primary caregiver appears to be increasingly used when discussing men who are primarily responsible for childcare in the two parent family, and this is the understanding attached to it in this paper. At times, particularly within the popular media, but also within academic literature, terms such as "househusband" or "role reversal family" have been used. Nussbaum (1985), in an American study, argues that "househusband" is inappropriate, in that it defines a person by the location of his work and as an attachment to his wife. At the same time however Nussbaum suggests that there are difficulties in not having an occupational label for men who are primary caregivers. In his study he uses the term "primary caretaker". Pruett, also looking at American families, does not like the term "role-reversal", as he feels that these changes represent an extremely complex collage of issues of identity, creativity and parental satisfaction for both men and women (Pruett, 1987). Harper (1980), in a study of Australian families, similarly rejects the term "role reversal" for two reasons. Firstly, according to Harper, there is seldom a strict reversal of "traditional" sex roles and secondly, people in this family situation see the very existence of sex roles as questionable in the first place. She argues that these families, in general, see the roles themselves as needing to be abandoned, rather than there being simply an exchange of who fills them (Harper, 1980). This feeling about the inappropriateness of the term "role reversal" was also shared by a number of New Zealand fathers (personal correspondence, 1994). The difficulty in developing appropriate language in the face of social change is illustrated by a media article where the author, to avoid using the lengthy term "male primary caregiver", used the initials MPC throughout the article (The Listener, 1993)

However, there are also a variety of definitions of primary caregiving. In Grbich's study (1992) of Australian fathers a male primary caregiver was defined as a father in an intact nuclear family who took sole charge of his pre-school aged child/children for a minimum of twenty five hours per working week. The twenty five hours during the working week (8am-6pm) was to ensure the father was indeed the sole caregiver as nights and weekends were judged (and verified) as being time shared with a partner (Grbich, 1992).

Nussbaum (1985) argues that it is more appropriate to use a relative scale within families. Primary caregiver fathers use the implicit comparison of the amount of time they spend caring for their children vis-a-vis the amount of time spent by the mother to determine their primary caregiver status. He notes that this temporal comparison underlies the fact that when men are primary caregivers they are not necessarily exclusively responsible for childcare. This is in common with many time use surveys which use *relative* share of housework within a particular household as a measure of equality (Sandqvist, 1987).

Pruett (1987) also raises questions over how to define who is actually the primary caregiver. Is it the person who wakes up at night when the baby cries, the person who decides when the baby is really sick, the person who calls the doctor or the one who decides to go home to take care of the baby when childcare arrangements fall apart? He argues that usually, but not always, this correlates with the overall time commitment to childcare (Pruett, 1987).

Implicit in Pruett's analysis is an understanding of the emotional labour involved as well as the actual time spent in caregiving. Other researchers have also focused on this issue of "emotional labour" arguing that simply looking at the absolute time spent or the way in which physical activities are divided misses out some important information (Habgood, 1992; Hochschild, 1989). The concept of time and responsibility is also explored by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1987: 125) who have three groupings for a father's involvement with his children. *Interaction* refers to the father's direct contact with his child through caretaking and shared activities. *Availability* is a related concept which concerns the father's potential availability for interaction, by virtue of being present or accessible to the child whether or not direct interaction is occurring. *Responsibility* refers to the role the father takes in ascertaining that the child is taken care of and arranging for resources to be available for baby-sitters, making appointments with the paediatrician and seeing that the child is taken to him/her, determining when the child needs new clothes, and so on. As yet, studies of men as primary caregivers have not explicitly analysed father involvement with their children in these terms.

Brannen and Moss (1990) also explore this issue and argue that time spent with children has two meanings. These include "undirected time", that is, time spent simply being with the child; and "directed time", or

time spent with the child in order to develop it to its full developmental potential. From this type of analysis comes the idea of “quality time”.⁸ “Quality time” and “quality care” have become important and oft-cited concepts within debates about childcare responsibilities, however most of the studies of men as primary caregivers do not address this type of breakdown of time directly. Russell, James and Watson (1988) note that while the concept that “quality is more important than quantity” is necessary in order to change ideas about the amount of time that mothers need to spend with their children, this philosophy when applied to fathers, ironically, has the potential to support the current over-emphasis on men’s commitment to paid work, distancing them even further from becoming primary or shared caregivers.

Pruett notes that the total time involved in childcare and domestic tasks varies between households. In his study the men from low socio-economic groups who were primary caregivers also tended to do the housework, but this was not always the case for the upper socio-economic group where these services were often purchased (Pruett, 1987).

Why do men become primary caregivers and what are their characteristics

Why the fathers initially took on the job

In his early 1980s study of Australian families Russell suggests that there are four reasons why fathers took on the role of primary caregiver (Russell, 1983). These include

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1. Belief in equality between sexes | 24 respondents |
| 2. Inability to get a job | 7 |
| 3. Partner can get higher paying work | 24 |
| 4. Less disruptive to their own career path | 16 |

In Grbich's (1992) more recent Australian study of twenty-five male primary caregivers the stated reasons for taking on the role were

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1. Not committed to a career path | 13 respondents |
| 2. Needed a change from a long term job | 4 |
| 3. Flexible careers | 3 |
| 4. Retrenched | 3 |
| 5. Illness | 1 |
| 6. Sacked | 1 |

However, Grbich notes that although the above factors were identified as facilitating the uptake of the role of primary caregiver each of these men stressed that they actively wished to take on this role.

Grbich argues that the movement of males into this new role has as much to do with changing social attitudes as it has to do with economic conditions. This contention is, in part, implicitly supported by Russell’s findings that men involved in shared care are more likely to have been to ante-natal classes, read books about childrearing, and attended the birth. (Russell, 1983). Yet, Russell’s study also indicated that the inability of the father to be involved in paid work did appear to have prompted the role change in some of the families.

Pruett states that none of the families in his study considered this new family type a permanent situation at its inception and so saw it as a short term decision. About a third had decided the father would be primary

⁸ Inherent within this understanding of “quality” time is its oppositional relationship with that of “quantity” time, the implication being that the two are mutually exclusive. Therefore “quantity” time can not simultaneously be “quality” time- a depressing ideology for any primary caregiver! In addition, underlying this concept of “quality time” are a host of cultural assumptions regarding what activities are perceived as developmental for the child.

caregiver before pregnancy, another third during pregnancy, and the last third around the time of birth. The early deciding group tended to be professionals, graduates, those from upper socio-economic groups and those who had timed conception. The second group tended to be influenced by the mother's changing feelings about becoming the primary caregiver, or a reconsideration of relative careers. The third group were mainly forced into the situation through economic reasons. This group contained the highest number of initially reluctant, uncertain fathers but it also contained the fathers who stayed the longest in the role and became the most vocal committed practitioners.

In terms of factors in their own childhood which would lead men to become primary caregivers the studies give little guidance. Pruett argues that his group either had pleasant memories of their own father or lingering dissatisfaction, but little in between. Overall, they were not a homogenous group with easily identified predispositions to fathering. Pruett thinks it is important that no predictor can be found in terms of which men will become primary caregivers, because this means the role is open to anyone. Grbich (1987) notes that a majority of mothers and fathers in her study referred to a distant relationship with their fathers and a close relationship with their mothers as they were growing up, but recognises she is dealing with only a small sample. She also notes that two thirds of the female partner's mothers were in paid work when they were growing up, while only one third of the male partner's mothers were in paid work.

Nussbaum argues that primary caregivers can be divided into three distinct types, each of whom have differing reasons for taking on the role:

- (a) Respite fathers - these are men taking a leave of absence from their regular jobs to spend some significant amount of time caring for their children.
- (b) Tandem fathers - are both primary caregivers and concurrent holders of some other work which is usually both part-time and paid.
- (c) Career fathers - they consider their primary caregiving to be virtually their only work and they do not see themselves as temporarily on leave from their regular activities. And although they may be involved in other activities these are generally unpaid.

In making the decision to become the primary caregiver Nussbaum argues there are a mix of personal, temporal and economic issues.

Respite fathers emphasised the personal benefits from being a primary caregiver. They gained two major benefits from the decision, the "romance" of caretaking, and temporary "escape" from paid work. Tandem fathers however emphasised the availability of time being an important reason for taking up childcare. Finally, for career fathers they are in the role mainly for economic reasons. But Nussbaum suggests that generally, these decisions were based on a mixture of reasons.

The concept of tandem fathers, although not using the same label, is noted in another American study which showed that in situations where both parents are in paid work and working different shifts the fathers increased their time in childcare (Presser, 1988).

Nussbaum however notes that underlying the reasons given for men being primary caregiver there appears to be an ideological dimension. Infants and their perceived needs are given a central position in these families. These families share a belief that they, as parents, are the ones who are best qualified to care for and meet their infants' needs and, in addition, that infants are better off when they are principally cared for in a one-to-one situation.⁹

⁹ This belief in one-to-one care in the home is not only held by this particular group of parents and "traditional" families in which the mother has been based at home. For instance, Hertz (1986) documents the experiences of high income, dual career American couples who also believe that their children are best cared for at home except, in this particular scenario, the carer tends to be low paid and female, and possibly a woman of colour.

Nussbaum argues that the following factors are necessary for men in two parent families to become primary caregivers

- Women need to be in paid work
- Women's salary needs to be adequate to support the family. (In general, this requires the same level of hours and commitment to long term career as those men who are breadwinners).
- The existence of an ideology of parenting which sees primary caregiving by a parent as preferable to caregiving by another adult.

Radin (1988), in looking at men as long term primary caregivers in America, provides an inventory of factors which precipitated the decision for the father to become the primary caregiver. Four antecedents are given:

- The mother was not the primary caregiver of the child for more than 18 months, and in most cases, for not more than 6 months after the child's birth.
- The family hold the belief that young children should not be left with a sitter for a prolonged period of time.
- The father's hours are flexible or he is not working at all.
- One of four alternative conditions prevail relevant to the parents' occupational status: the mother has a strong career interest and the father is supportive; the father has a weak or negative view of his career and the mother is supportive; both parents have a strong career interest and also flexible hours; or the father is obtaining additional training or education and the mother is able to work and help support the family

For some more disadvantaged groups in society the decision appears to be driven more by financial considerations. In a study of Hispanics in the United States most of the men viewed their role as temporary, brought about by external economic circumstances (Davis and Chavez, 1985).

In the studies cited, the issue of breastfeeding is seldom discussed as a factor affecting the initial decision about who becomes the primary caregiver. However, examples can be found in three studies of women who did breastfeed on a time structured basis, a process that often involved a considerable amount of organisation and travel (Clary, 1982; New Zealand Herald, 1992; Pruett, 1987). Two of these studies were based in America, a culture where breastfeeding is far less common than in New Zealand (New Zealand Plunket Society, 1993). Breastfeeding on a time structured basis was also noted by another New Zealand male primary caregiver (personal correspondence, 1994). In this particular case the first child was breastfed for eleven months, the second for ten months and the third for nine months.

In reviewing literature on men and masculinity Segal (1990) puts forward the hypothesis that men are more likely to accept a primary commitment to home and childcare when women can command a higher income, when men have already achieved higher levels of personal self-satisfaction and independence (usually when they are older), when there is a more supportive social milieu, or when there are fewer children and household demands are less onerous (Segal, 1990).

A passing phase in their lives?

A number of studies have gone on to explore whether the decision was indeed a short term one with the family quickly reverting back to more traditional patterns of parenting.

Russell, in his Australian study in the early 1980s, found that over a two year period 41% of families in which men had become primary caregivers had reverted back to "traditional" patterns of role allocation,

with this trend being most common in the situation where the men originally took up the role through unemployment (Russell, 1983).

In her study carried out between 1983 and 1990 Grbich (1987) noted a quite different response in terms of the length of time spent as primary caregiver. Only seven out of twenty-five men had moved out of the role after two years, and two of these temporarily. After five years thirteen men were no longer primary caregivers. Seven of these were due to family breakdown, and of those still in the role seven no longer had pre-schoolers at home.

Pruett's study was also carried out in the early 1980s but in the United States. After two years he revisited the group and found in half the families the father remained the primary caregiver, and within these families half had another child. After four years 44% of primary caregivers were fathers. By that stage some were supplementing their care of children with various combinations of day care, babysitting or family day care. But his study also showed a variety of housework situations, with some of the more affluent having housekeepers.

Pruett also notes that the women who assumed the primary caregiving role after their second pregnancy tended to credit their husbands as being nurturing role models for their own mothering of the second child.

A study which specifically looked at men who were long term primary caregivers indicates a number of conditions are predictive of persisting high father involvement: (Radin, 1988)

- The parents are generally satisfied with the child-care arrangement.
- Both parents have positive, non ambivalent feelings about the mother's working.
- The family resides in a community supportive of such arrangements.
- The parents are in their thirties rather than their twenties, and have started in their careers or are fairly well established in them.
- The mother does not feel a great sense of guilt about leaving her child.
- The mother feels she has to work.

Conditions fostering the perpetuation of the arrangement in the long term:

- The mother's investment in her career grows.
- The father finds caring for the child gratifying.
- The mother's salary is sufficiently large to warrant her working outside the home.
- Family members do not pressure the mother to stay at home.
- The father's hours continue to be flexible, or he works on a part-time basis.
- The family remains small and no catastrophic illness occurs.
- The child the father is caring for over a prolonged period of time is a daughter, or more likely, an independent child.

Radin also found more long term primary caregivers with daughters even though the initial sample was evenly split.

The New Zealand media provides examples of men who spend only a short time in the primary caregiver role but also some examples of men who have spent up to seven and eight years in the role (Nelson Evening Mail, 1993; New Zealand Herald, 1992; New Zealand Listener, 1993).

Russell, like Radin, also suggests that shared caring is likely to take place in smaller families, but in New Zealand there are documented instances of where the arrangement appears to have worked well within larger families also (Nelson Evening Mail, 1993; New Zealand Listener, 1993).

How the fathers adapted to the role

As might be expected, just as some mothers face extreme difficulties in taking up the role of primary caregiver while others enjoy the role, there are fathers who adapt well to the role of primary caregiver and others who do not. An American study provides a summary of factors which seem to influence behaviour (Lutwin and Siperstein, 1985).

They argue that well adjusted “househusbands” are men who:

- Enter this role on a voluntary basis
- Commit themselves to this alternative lifestyle
- Have definite plans on what to do after homemaking
- Receive support from extended family and friends
- Do not experience stress from boredom and alienation

Alternatively, poorly adjusted men often enter the role involuntarily, with little previous experience in childcare or homemaking. They are conservative, traditional and make excuses for being at home.

Risman (1987) stresses the importance of fathers being supported in their new role. She argues that when fathers’ social networks change to preclude dependence on their wives for child care, for instance, when men become sole fathers, their behaviour changes accordingly. She suggests divorced, widowed, and even married fathers are capable of providing the nurturance that young children require despite their gendered socialisation. Men start to exhibit “mothering” behaviour.

It is not surprising therefore that these men face similar problems to mothers who are primary caregivers. In most studies many of the men talk about isolation. Two factors are involved in this isolation, the physical isolation of being a parent at home, but also the added emotional isolation as a result of transgressing traditional gendered patterns of behaviour. A view held by many of those who hold power in society is that childcare and housework are low skill, low value occupations. This is reflected in wage rates when the work of childcare and housework is carried out on a paid basis, and when undertaken on an unpaid basis it “counts for nothing” (Waring, 1988).

The isolation and lack of support of mothers at home has been noted in numerous studies so it is not surprising that some men in this role also have similar feelings. Clary discussing his own experiences, although stressing that overall his experience as a “househusband” was a positive one, noted that after more than a year in this role he started feeling “numbed and becalmed” by his confinement at home, seeing chores such as shopping as exciting (Clary, 1982). Clary also notes that he started to pay more attention to household cleanliness and, at times, suffered from the “problem that has no name” which he found intriguing especially as he had voluntarily undertaken the job.¹⁰

In a New Zealand study a father discusses feeling both isolated from the world he came from as well as isolated in the world he moved into (Kedgley, 1985:107)

“For the first two years I found it very hard to cope with being at home and not being a workaholic. I found it extremely isolating and very lonely because I got right out of touch with all sorts of people and groups and networks. I had great crises of personal confidence about who I was and basically I felt terrible. In fact, for a while I went through a period of feeling that I had the worst of both worlds. Because when you change you lose a lot of traditional relationships with people. I found I didn't have anything in common any more with a lot of men who were old friends or acquaintances. We just weren't talking about the same things. But then again a lot of women didn't want to know me either, because they found a man at home with the kids rather strange. The women I came across during the day at kindy and school committees didn't want to

¹⁰ “The problem that has no name” was Betty Friedan’s (1963) diagnosis of the ‘condition’ suffered by middle class, housebound American mothers in the 1950s and 1960s.

talk about my being at home. They avoided the whole topic. I was never asked for coffee or anything like that, so I never came to feel part of their world. So I found I was actually stuck somewhere in between the man's world and the women's world and for a period the losses seemed quite great.

But there were compensations, and the main one was being with the children."

Hispanic fathers in the United States who were primary caregivers reported greater involvement in family life and greater understanding of their partners and children, but also stress and related problems as a result of taking on the role (Davis and Chavez, 1985). Like many mothers in the role of primary caregiver most studies indicate the fathers in this role show some "ambivalence", acknowledging both the difficulties and joys of looking after children.

While many studies show that men as primary caregivers value the new closeness they find with their children, some men clearly worry that the children are becoming too dependent on them (Gray, 1983).

" I've enjoyed the children, but I got a bit toey with my older daughter. She got a bit too attached to me while I was looking after her. I started taking her to playcentre and school and that and she got too attached. Every time she stubbed her toe or something she'd scream out for Daddy, Daddy, instead of mummy. She's growing out of that now."

On a more practical level men as primary caregivers, at times, face some seemingly small but potentially difficult problems. For example, an Australian researcher argues that changing rooms are often located in the "ladies' lounge" or in the "ladies toilets", also the sign usually portrays a woman with a child (Rio, 1993). The men in Grbich's study also faced similar problems, including visiting children's playgrounds with signs stating "No male over 13 years" (Grbich, 1992). Sietses (1994) notes that there are Playcentres in New Zealand where the adult toilets are marked as "Mothers' Toilet". Examples of public spaces designed for mothers are common in New Zealand, such as the Wellington Railway Station where the "Parents' Room" is through the door leading to the women's toilets and the major Porirua shopping centre, K-Mart, which has a "Mothers Room". But in both New Zealand and Australia this is slowly changing with some new developments such as shopping malls endeavouring to provide parents' rooms with no gender bias.

This "toilet problem" does not necessarily go away when children get older. A New Zealand "househusband" describing his experiences with two pre-school daughters in the 1980s describes how, in public places, he felt taking them to "the gents" was not an option, but could not accompany them to "the ladies" (Hutchins, 1993). However, he felt very protective about sending them in alone, and, at times, women stepped in to help him. His eventual solution to the problem was to carry a potty in his car.

However while most studies show good and bad times for men as primary caregivers there are isolated studies which indicate that, in some situations, men are generally not happy in the role.

A German study based on interviews with a relatively large sample of five hundred men who either worked part-time or were "househusbands" (Prenzel and Strumpel, 1990) suggested that the "househusbands" were largely disillusioned by their role, while part-time workers expressed, in general, overwhelmingly favourable attitudes. While the latter had to overcome prejudices in the workplace, they felt highly rewarded by the greater interaction with their children and female partner. This contrasts with the views of a British researcher who felt, in looking at models of non-sexist childrearing, that the current conditions of employment make any combination of childcare and paid employment extremely difficult for men (Statham, 1986). She argues that while role sharing seems to be a good option for both parents it is actually harder than a straight forward exchange of "traditional" gender roles, whereby the man stays at home while the woman does the paid work. This is in spite of the problems of social disapproval and women's limited access to well paid jobs. In part, the differences between these findings may reflect cultural differences. But they also probably reflect the varying range of experiences of men as primary caregivers.

However, in looking at why, in most studies, men can adapt well to the role of primary caregiver Pruett speculates that men might enjoy primary caregiving more than women as it is a generally a more active choice rather than a given role, and therefore it can be “unchosen” as well.

But even if men enter the role with a positive attitude, and remain positive, it is not an easy job. Russell's study indicated that few fathers were able to anticipate the difficulties they would encounter staying at home looking after their children (Russell, 1983). Many had looked upon the prospect of changing roles with enthusiasm, thinking it would give them time to do the things they had always wanted to do - read, renovate the house, landscape the garden, or simply relax. They quickly found they had to rethink their ideas and generally underwent a three stage process of adjustment.¹¹

1. Building up the initial expectations of achieving a personal goal, and then becoming frustrated when it was realised childcare was not “a piece of cake”. This frustration often lead to conflict between the father and children.
2. Abandonment of personal goals, and focusing most, if not all, attention onto the children.
3. Finally achieving some kind of compromise between the demands of the children and the demands and needs of the father.

Grbich notes that in her sample of men the majority of fathers had little or no experience of the role and found that it took up to three months to accumulate and prioritise those skills such as cooking, cleaning, shopping and budgeting required to cope with the daily household tasks (Grbich, 1987) Initially, most men instigated highly organised routines for housework which broke down through lack of consideration of the needs and demands of young children, with all fathers finding that their revised operation placed the children first and housework second. Grbich, in examining whether a view of “limited” or “free” choice in taking on the primary caregiver role would affect task mastery, found that these factors had no predictive value. Instead it appears that the sum of the father’s resources, that is, his attitudes and organisational skills, is a more accurate indicator of competency and satisfaction within the role.

Pruett reports a transition when the mother returned to work. At first, many of the fathers would wonder what their partner would do in each situation they confronted, but anywhere between ten days and a few months later they developed their own style of parenting.

How other people view male primary caregivers

In her Australian setting, which appears to have much common ground with New Zealand, Grbich argues that most of the men in her study faced considerable reaction from their social groups; some responses were positive; some positive with reservations; while the majority, initially, were negative (Grbich, 1992). Perceived positive responses were received by fathers from all social status categories, but were initially more evident from the professional and non-professional middle classes, although this appeared to be filtering down over time. Pruett found that, in general, the parents initially faced some hostility from their own parents, a theme common in almost all studies of men as primary caregivers.

Grbich goes on to argue that any change to existing gender patterns tends to be perceived as threatening. She notes that perceived comments from parents, friends, workmates, neighbours, community playgroup members and representatives of the wider society in the form of taxi-drivers, shop owners, parking attendants and “the meandering public” indicate that the role of the caregiver is not widely considered appropriate for men. She also notes that the tactics used to reinforce this view of role inappropriateness included sexual labelling, for example ‘poof’, or ‘queer’; avoidance by ‘real mothers’ in community playgroup or neighbourhood situations and also by breadwinning males in social situations; ostracism, by friends who felt uncomfortable with the new arrangement; active confrontation, particularly from other

¹¹ This three stage process of adjustment to the role of primary caregiver may not be unique to men.

breadwinning males; lowered expectations of the father's performance or capabilities; access to limited resources in the form of changing rooms, clubs and playgrounds; and non-payment of the child allowance to primary caregiver fathers. Grbich argues that these responses can be interpreted as marginalisation.

New Zealand research and media articles support the idea that male primary caregivers find the reactions of outsiders, at times, unsupportive (Kedgley, 1985; Nelson Evening Mail, 1993; New Zealand Herald, 1993, The Listener, 1993). Hutchins (1993) writes of his experiences as a primary caregiver in small town New Zealand in the 1980s. He gives examples of men in hotel bars making derogatory comments, notes indifference and rudeness when he made contact with local parents at meetings and daycare centres, and comments how he often overheard comments from one end of the spectrum of reaction such as "probably unemployed" to those such as "I think its marvellous what some men are prepared to do these days" (Hutchins, 1993:55). However, he goes on to note that by the early 1990s some attitudes had changed arguing that men in hotels will now make positive comments about a man bringing in a child in a backpack.¹² The idea that attitudes are rapidly changing is supported by personal comments from New Zealand men who are primary caregivers. Many now report positive support even from strangers (personal correspondence, 1994).

Hutchins' example of positive remarks about a father and back-pack is interesting as it appears the image of a man with a baby in a backpack is seen as a particularly negative image by those opposing male involvement in childcare. This negative view is illustrated by a quote from a man interviewed in a New Zealand study of changes brought about by feminism:

I don't want to wimp along with those silly bunches of fellows who wear carry-cots on their backs and pretend to be mothers and call themselves male support groups. They seem so silly. It's role playing. I mean you might as well become transvestites if you want to do that. If those guys were training themselves to be in the forefront of men's change I wouldn't mind, but they're not. They're training themselves to be marshmallows basically. They're twits and donkeys, walking around with their strange little knapsacks on their backs (Kedgley, 1985:81).

Nearly a decade later Haden (1994) echoes this view:

There are few sights more ridiculous than a sensitive new age guy with a beard, spectacles and sandals, carting a child around in a back-pack, grinning fixedly to demonstrate that he is as good as any women.

In terms of negative reactions from women Gerson, in a United States context, argues that one of the possible reasons for mothers reacting negatively to men as primary caregivers is that domestically oriented women find themselves in the unenviable position of defending the legitimacy and viability of the domestic option for women against the incursions of social change (Gerson, 1987). In her study she found that behaviorally and ideologically, these women supported traditional male privileges and obligations and struggled to keep men economically responsible. In return, they were happy to provide homemaking services and, indeed, excluded men from domestic duties which they wished to preserve for themselves. Gerson goes on to argue that women in paid work generally think that men, like women, are capable of and morally responsible for the care and nurturance of their offspring, and in her study even, at times, judged their spouses to be more nurturant and oriented towards parenthood than they were. Unfortunately, it tends to be women at home, rather those in paid work, who men as primary caregivers mainly mix with.

Hutchins, in a New Zealand context, has a slightly different view. He agrees that "traditional" women are having their power base diminished. But he also argues that "modern" women feel that men should experience child rearing, and all its problems, because that is what they, or as he noted rather their mothers, had to endure. He also argues that "modern" working women sometimes feel that making headway in the corporate world requires more energy and takes a greater personal toll on them than the problems men face stepping into the role of primary caregiver, therefore these men should not complain (Hutchins, 1993).

¹² Men in hotel public bars are an interesting barometer of attitudinal changes!

Woods (1993), in her book on New Zealand mothers at home, while supporting the idea of having a parent to look after the children, gives no indication that she thinks it could just as easily be the father. In fact, she is rather critical of the media's focus on "househusbands".

In Australia, America and New Zealand research indicates that organisations, such as play groups, which can give support to mothers have not, at times, been welcoming to men who are primary caregivers (Clary, 1982; Grbich, 1987; Hutchins, 1993; Kedgley, 1985).

In looking at his experience at a New Zealand playcentre after voluntarily deciding to become a "househusband" one father perceived that the women around him assumed he was either on the dole, on a sickness benefit, been made redundant, a sole father, simply too lazy to work, or just "plain weird" (Sietses, 1994). He goes on to note:

"In those early days at Playcentre I also noticed that most women had mixed feelings about a man entering 'their' world on a permanent basis.

On the one hand, it was very interesting and there was the novelty aspect, but on the other hand it was also an intrusion into their world which regularly made both parties feel very uncomfortable".

Sietses also notes that the language at Playcentre can be excluding with signs and notices addressing adults often referring to "mothers" rather than parents or caregivers. He notes that, in addition, Playcentre correspondence and literature often refers to "mothers". Other men at Playcentre have also noted the use of language which excludes men (Playcentre Journal, 1994a). However this view is not shared by all men at Playcentre with some men noting that they were treated no differently from mothers, and that the term parents has always been used (personal correspondence, 1994).

One reaction of some men to being uncomfortable in women dominated groups has been to form their own support groups (Grbich, 1992; The Listener, 1993). Hutchins notes the emergence of such groups in the latter part of the 1980s, within a city context.

Grbich goes on to note that the informal networks of childcare and support which often build out from existing institutional parent support groups have tended to exclude men (Grbich, 1987). This is also reported by Rio (1992). Grbich argues that male primary caregivers often encountered difficulties in convincing not only other mothers but also other fathers that they were adequate caregivers with a genuine desire to participate and not bent on pursuing extra-marital activities. However, one father quoted in the New Zealand media noted that he understands the reluctance of a mother at home with the kids to invite the man up the road to come over for coffee (NZ Herald, 1992). Segal (1990) notes that most studies on fathers do not address very real concerns about male involvement in child abuse which is likely to be a major factor in the reluctance to bring men into childcare swapping arrangements. However this is not the case in recent New Zealand media articles where men do discuss their awareness of the child abuse issue and their strategies to deal with it (New Zealand Listener, 1993; Playcentre Journal, 1994b) For example, in an article on men's involvement in Playcentre sessions one man noted that he was reluctant to become involved with children's play, noting that the publicity surrounding the Christchurch municipal creche has polarised attitudes and clouded men's involvement in childcare, while another notes that attending sexual abuse workshops can feel like a male "witch hunt" if not structured thoughtfully (Playcentre Journal, 1994b).

It appears that it is common amongst New Zealand men who are primary caregivers to devise strategies to keep themselves "safe" when interacting with other peoples' children. Men who attend Playcentre stress self imposed rules such as:

"I have never been, nor will I ever be, in an isolated position with somebody else's child nor will I ever pick them up or cuddle them".

The father stating this view goes on to note that he realises at times a child might feel neglected when it does not get the appropriate comforting. Other fathers say they will not take other parents' children to the toilet (personal correspondence, 1994).

Overseas studies also indicate that the "helping" professions have often not been very supportive of fathers becoming the primary caregiver.

For example, a doctor writing in a medical journal in the mid 1980s emphasises that men becoming the primary caregiver is not a desirable role which is jointly negotiated or decided upon but one which befalls the couple in a crisis situation (Penfold, 1985). He argues that men as primary caregivers are unlikely to do the housework and cooking and will hand these jobs, plus childcare, over to their wife when she arrives home. The wife then perceives her husband as lazy, unable to get another job and unwilling to fulfil the homemaker role. He perceives her as unsupportive, unsympathetic and unaware of his level of stress and pervasive self doubts. They, and their "stressed out" children, all then arrive at the doctor for treatment (ibid).

A family counsellor takes a similar view (Tauss, 1976). She argues that adjustment to new roles can be difficult and the services of a family counsellor can be helpful. The article was written with the assumption that the father will eventually find work and then the problem will be that of adjusting to a dual income family, or the more likely option of the wife returning home to looking after the children.

Nussbaum argues that health professionals can have an influence on parents making the choice of who will be primary caregiver. But Sagi (1987) argues that an examination of overseas literature on welfare services provided for children and families suggests that helping professionals (physicians, public health nurses, social workers etc) are not prepared either ideologically or organisationally to encourage paternal involvement in the family (Sagi, 1987). However, New Zealand men point to examples where groups such as Plunket have been very supportive to men as primary caregivers, including, in one case, helping set up a fathers' support group (personal correspondence, 1994).

Visibility in the popular media can also have an influence on behaviour. In recent years there have been a number of articles and television programs which have focussed on men as primary caregivers (Metro, 1987; Nelson Evening Mail, 1993; New Zealand Herald, 1992; The Listener, 1993; TVNZa&b, 1993). While these articles and programmes have tended to focus on middle class Pakeha men where active choice rather than economic circumstance has placed them in the role, there has been one example provided of a Maori man forced into the role through redundancy (TVNZa, 1993). However, despite these articles the competing, and more dominant, model is the man who succeeds in the public world, with maybe some short periods of "quality" time but not "quantity quality" time with the children. For example, the men chosen by the Government to be special ambassadors in the Year of the Family are all high achievers in the public world, which means that it is highly likely that some other party, be it their wife or some other woman, has undertaken most of the childcare when their children were young (Family, 1994).

Farrell (1993) goes one step further in analysing the social position of men as primary caregivers and theorises about the prospects in the "marriage market" of men who display potential for being at home looking after children. He argues that while the "attractive" (as defined by Farrell), unemployed woman with the potential for being a homemaker is sought after by many men; the "attractive", unemployed man with the potential for being a homemaker is not sought after by many women. Goldscheider & Waite (1991) argue that American families probably want their daughters to marry liberated men, who will share in the housework so that these daughters can be successful, but are preparing their sons to marry traditional women, who will carry the household burden themselves to further their son's career. They suggest that families are not yet ready to prepare their son for someone else's ambitious daughter.

Despite lack of social support Grbich argues that the fact that most of her group of fathers stayed in the caregiver role suggests power is relative and can lie with both individuals and societal groups (Grbich, 1992). Grbich suggest that it could be argued that some men's involvement in part-time paid work and study represents a tacit acceptance that historical arrangements are strongly entrenched and that a facade

may be necessary to deflect criticism from an antagonistic social group and/or this may be a way of coping with personal role conflict emanating from a strong early socialisation toward the breadwinner role.

However, she goes on to state that it could also equally be argued that the inclusion of work or study in the daily routines of many of the men whom she studies may be part of a male redefinition of the caregiver role, a definition unconstrained by expectations for women in the role. Alternatively, it might be a realistic appraisal of women's workforce opportunities and an attempt to balance family finances (Grbich, 1992).

Grbich notes that the argument for men actively defining and negotiating their situations is extended by the long term role occupation of many fathers even after their children have started school; participation in media debates; the creation of alternative networks (father's playgroup) and the apparent change in attitude over time of some persons in close contact with the fathers.

Nussbaum too is interested in how male primary caregivers cope in those situations where they are seen as deviant. He notes that unconventional behaviour in front of some audiences is devalued, while with another audience it may be valued. He argues that, at times, men use different identities to cope with outside views, for instance using a previous paid job, a part-time one or saying they are studying as a "cover up". In this way they can identify themselves as a primary caregiver and also present themselves as having some clear and achievement orientation to an activity or world other than parenting. This strategy has been reported by New Zealand men (personal correspondence, 1994). Or they can use "hero" tactics. Some envisage themselves as leading social change and breaking new ground, thereby gaining a sense of value. But, according to Nussbaum, such a view cannot be sustained on a day to day basis. He also notes that men as primary caregivers can try and normalise behaviour although this was a rare strategy amongst men in his study.

Not surprisingly, positive self concept and male gender identity were enhanced when family and friends were supportive and accepting of the role transcendence (Davis and Chavez, 1985).

Amongst New Zealand parents of young children there seems to be a wide range of views on appropriate roles for fathers. In Podmore's (1994) study of sixty families she notes that almost 20% were emphatic that fathers should be in paid work, 27% mentioned the obligation for fathers to be in paid work, 35% recommended more flexible arrangements including some suggesting that it was appropriate for fathers to stay home and look after children, and 13% pointed out a range of inadequacies in the traditional role of fathers.

Effects of men as primary caregivers on children and partners

Most medical literature currently provides a strong case for breastfeeding, including identifying it as a major factor in the prevention of cot death (Plunket, 1993) as well as assisting early cognitive development (Lucas et al, 1992).

A decision to breastfeed, particularly on a "demand" basis, makes it difficult, but not impossible, for the father to become the primary caregiver. But this period is relatively short in a child's life and in the mother's and father's overall working lifetime, and there is a long subsequent period in which one parent is the primary caregiver, currently usually the mother, and as a result stays out of paid work, works part-time or less than 40 hours per week in paid work, or alternatively, is in paid work long hours but is still responsible for organising childcare and other child related matters and therefore suffers the effects of this "double burden".

In Pruett's study psychological testing undertaken by the researcher indicated that the children raised by fathers were thriving, robust, vigorous, competent children. However he argues that ultimately the babies may be thriving because of the abiding commitment by two parents (instead of the traditional one and a half) to the infant's well-being and growth. Lamb (1987) and Crosby (1991), after reviewing a wide range of studies of women and men in situations of childcare, suggest that fathers, potentially, have as much to

offer when it comes to parenting. Lamb however stresses that in all the studies showing positive gains for the children the fathers had actively chosen to be involved in childcare. Like Pruett, he believes that having two committed parents may play a big part in fostering the positive outcomes. He also suggests the results could be very different if the fathers were forced to be involved, such as through unemployment, claiming that studies show a retarding influence on children of a hostile, rejecting, or maladjusted father (Lamb, 1987).

Pruett discusses the idea, common in the literature on fathers, that fathers are more likely than mothers to "play", and often in quite a boisterous way, with their children. He argues that this decreases with familiarity, but suggests that fathers often do have a different style of parenting from mothers. However, he sees this behaviour as positive as he thinks it encourages infant curiosity and fosters a sense of mastery over the outside world. Sietses (1994) also notes that men involved in Playcentre sessions effect a change of atmosphere with play becoming more boisterous, suggesting that men tend to be a little less inhibited when it comes to playing outdoors or in messy play. However this view is disputed by some New Zealand men (personal correspondence, 1994)

The issue of men as primary caregivers and that of child abuse has yet to be tackled in the academic literature. However, Pruett notes one study which indicated that if a man is involved in the physical care of his child before they reach the age of three, there is a dramatic reduction in the probability that the man will be involved later in life in sexual abuse of children in general, as well as his own (Parker and Parker, 1986).

While the father may become close to the child if he is the primary caregiver Nussbaum notes there was a mixture of views amongst parents as to whom the child was closest based on such indicators as who s/he would turn to when upset. He argues that being primary caregiver is not equivalent to, nor does it necessarily lead to, an identity as primary parent in the child's perception.

In terms of family relationships Pruett felt there were more emotional pressures associated with this particular paid and unpaid work arrangement although the overall long term effects for the family were positive.

Pruett also notes that the mothers in these families reported high levels of satisfaction with paid work, many of them attributing positive feelings, in part, to feeling free from worry about the quality of childcare. Overall, Pruett paints a positive picture.

In the early 1980s Russell argued that a shared caregiving pattern can be associated with a reduction in satisfaction in couple relationships (Russell, 1983). However he found a diversity of experiences with some couples reporting greater equality in terms of power and responsibilities, whereas others reported conflict and tension associated with the process of renegotiating family tasks and responsibilities. However in a later study, using a different sample, he found that shared caregiving couples were no less satisfied with their relationships, nor did they report more negative interactions or commitments to their relationships than "traditional" couples (Russell, 1989).

Russell (1989) suggests that some mothers are reluctant to give up their power and status within the domestic domain, and find it difficult to be supportive of their partner in the child care role. At the same time, however, he questions suggestions that this reluctance is simply associated with the lack of power and status that women have in the public domain. Russell argues that there is something more involved, as the majority of women in his study in these shared caregiving samples had relatively high status jobs. He notes that this reluctance is noticed and sometime resented by fathers.

Wainrib (1992), in an indepth study of four professional women whose partners were primary caregivers, also notes the women's ambivalence toward their source of power in the home being usurped by their male partners. She notes that the women had to make major adjustments to their expectations of male behaviour, had problems with differing performance standards with regards to housework, and, at times, felt resentful about their partner's free time or options for using free time. She goes on to argue that:

“I strongly suspect that what is most essential to the success or failure of the househusband situation, from the women’s point of view, is her own sense of completeness and positive self image. How comfortable or uncomfortable a women feels about her own identity and self image is essential to her acceptance of this situation. If the old message that was handed down to women for generations, that is: ‘you are only as good as the man you marry’ is still active in some part of the women’s psyche then there can be difficulty. The corollary of this message, is the projection by the women of her own socially devalued self-image onto the spouse who has chosen the less-socially-valued role of househusband. This also interferes in the same way.” (Wainrib, 1992:14).

But Grbich (1994) notes some very positive labour market outcomes for mothers in these families. Although many of the mothers faced some stress of separating from very young children, regret at missing the early development years and negative social pressure to return to a more traditional role, many significantly improved their career options and perceived themselves as more forthright and assertive.

Russell argues that more research is needed on potential problems associated with adopting work/family patterns which contradict dominant cultural beliefs about appropriate gender roles and needs of children.

Family income and the effects on the men of being economically dependent

The negative effects of women’s economic dependence on men have been documented (Briar, 1992; Horsfield, 1988). Briar suggests that women’s full or partial financial dependency places them under an obligation to provide a range of unpaid services for young dependent children, sick or disabled family members and able-bodied husbands. She also suggests economic dependence may be demeaning to the woman, may create stresses for both the dependant and the provider, as well as increasing the potential for the exploitation and abuse of the woman and her children. In addition, Horsfield (1988) notes that women’s economic dependence increases the material inequality between men and women over a lifetime.

The issue of male economic dependency is not addressed in any detail in the literature on men as primary caregivers, but it is likely that there are important issues to explore in this area. Phillips (1988), drawing ideas from a very limited sample of men, notes that where men have assumed the role of “homemaker”, they found it very difficult to operate on someone else’s money. However, comments by some New Zealand men suggest economic dependency is not as problematic for men as for women (personal correspondence, 1994) Grbich’s findings (1987;1992) showed that many fathers who were primary caregivers worked part-time indicating that perhaps, as has been the experience of many women, it is possible to attain some level of financial independence while still being responsible for childcare. However Table One of this paper indicates that in New Zealand it is far more common for the father of a child under five not to be in paid work than to be in part-time paid work in situations where the mother works full-time. In general, while women and men both have high levels of part-time work both when they are very young or when nearing the end of their paid work without dependent children, unlike many women few men work part-time when they have young children (Callister, 1993b).

As illustrated in Figure Two, men taking on the role of primary income earner can often mean a decline in family income given the current differences between women’s and men’s wages. This was noted by some men who took on the role of primary caregiver, with this decline in income being accepted by the family (The Listener, 1993). However, there are studies which indicate that men, in general, may face a decreased income if they are interested in issues such as gender and childcare (Shiffman, 1987). Schiffman’s study of those men attending men’s conventions in America indicates that while the participants were largely white, middle-class, college-educated men, in general, they had lower than average incomes for their level of educational attainment. Research is needed to examine the effect on lifetime earnings of men who take time out of paid work to look after children, relative to the experiences of women. It may be that employers react more negatively in terms of pay, promotion and training opportunities to men taking breaks from paid work because this behaviour transgresses traditional male employment patterns.

Is unpaid work more equally shared when men are primary caregivers?

Russell (1989) reports that in a sample where men took primary responsibility for day-to-day childcare or shared these duties, in fact, the mothers performed slightly more domestic and childcare tasks than their partners, despite being at home much less often. American researchers, in looking at time use data for families where the man is the primary caregiver, come to this conclusion as well (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). But equally, according to Russell, there is little evidence of women moving towards sharing in traditional male domains. In support of Haas's findings (1982) fathers in Russell's study retained their responsibilities for "handyman" tasks and were more involved in physical play activities.

While male primary caregivers in the Hispanic community reported greater involvement in family life and greater understanding of their partners and children, the division of labour tended to be traditional (Davis and Chavez, 1985).

Grbich (1987) however notes that the fathers in her study took on a greater proportion of childcare and household tasks than those in previous studies. This group executed 69% of childcare tasks, more specifically feeding, dressing, changing nappies, reading stories and play and night attendance. Reduced responsibility occurred only in the area of bathing which the female partners deliberately retained as part of their daily contact with their children. A comparison of father-child, mother-child interaction indicated that fathers exhibit as much patience, sensitivity, baby talk and public kissing and cuddling of their young children as their partners did when they were in the same situation but that the type of play differs. Initially, the majority of fathers preferred physical outdoor activities with their children, while their partners preferred indoor "educational" activities. The sex of the children bore little relationship to these initial play preferences

Grbich suggests that after some time in these "non-traditional" roles, a change occurred, with one third of the fathers and their partners moving toward a balance of indoor and outdoor activities. Other differences in parenting styles related to cleanliness of children's clothes and faces (in general, men had "lower standards") and the greater freedom and self reliance given to, or expected of, children by fathers. Continuing negotiation occurred between parents over differences in standards. Grbich argues that the lack of prior socialisation for this role as well as other peoples' lack of expectations of men in this role seem to give the father considerably more freedom of interpretation than that likely to be extended to his partner.

Grbich also notes that a greater proportion of housework tasks were being done by fathers compared with those reported in previous studies. She suggests this may have been to do with the higher number of hours in sole charge of house and children, together with a long term commitment to this role. Despite negative comments from some fathers about housework the majority of them bought food, cooked meals and washed dishes, clothes and floors. Grbich found that, in general, the few instances where the partners performed these latter activities was in order "to help out". Some of the fathers appeared to attach less importance than their partners to such jobs as cleaning the bathroom and toilets, and considerably less importance to sewing, ironing and dusting. The female partners tended to retain these last three jobs while the fathers retained the outside jobs. Grbich notes there was an indication that it takes some partners up to one year to cease surveillance of the household tasks.

While Grbich argues that men, as primary caregivers, perform more housework and childcare work than found in previous studies, another study also suggests that men in this role claim more leisure time for themselves than do women in a similar position (Te Kloeze, 1990). These men see leisure as "time for yourself" and in this they compare themselves with other men, rather than with women at home.

Life after primary caregiving

As children grow up most mothers return to the job market but can face difficulties through lack of confidence, or qualifications and skills which are out of date. In a New Zealand media article one father notes similar problems (NZ Herald, 1992).

Future trends

Over the last decade, and particularly in the period 1986 to 1991, the nature of paid work has changed dramatically in New Zealand. The decline in the manufacturing and primary sector has been of particular importance, but at the same time there has been an overall growth in service sector employment (Callister, 1993c). Common features of these declining industries were that they employed predominantly men, and that a high proportion of the jobs disappearing were those of a manual, unskilled or semi skilled nature. In addition, this period was characterised by both a decline in the proportion of full-time jobs as well as a rapid increase in the amount of part-time work available. Overall however, jobs that men have traditionally filled have declined, while those traditionally held by women have increased.

Most labour market analysts now argue that, in general, the jobs which are growing in the economy require a higher level of skills/education than has been the case in the past. Secondly, many more jobs require “people skills” or “emotional labour”, such as those in the tourism industry. Thirdly, where there has been growth in low wage, but not necessarily low skill, jobs such as domestic work and childcare then it is almost solely women who fill the positions.

New Zealand census data in families with children under five shows that women and men still have quite different patterns of formal qualifications. In 1991 just over half of partnered fathers with a child under five had tertiary qualifications, while just under 40% of mothers had similar qualifications. However this is likely to change over the next decade.

According to the 1991 census a higher proportion of women than men in the 20-39 age group are studying full-time or part-time. At universities women form a higher proportion of the under 20 age group, a smaller proportion of the 20-29 age group, but have an overall higher participation due to the larger numbers of female part-time and extra-mural students in older age groups (Davey, 1993). It would seem, therefore, that women and men are increasingly on more of an equal footing in terms of gaining employment in mainstream jobs, although discrimination in the paid workforce may hold back women’s wages. And women, judging by recent employment trends, generally appear to have better prospects in a labour market requiring more “people skills” and “emotional labour” skills, or in areas where low wages are paid. As more women join the paid workforce this, in turn, tends to generate further jobs in female dominated occupations and industries, in particular childcare and domestic work.

Despite the increase in the last two years in jobs for men many forecasters expect female participation in paid work in New Zealand will continue to increase as it is still lower than a range of other OECD countries.¹³ If female participation in paid work continues in an economy where, as predicted by most forecasters, overall employment growth will remain relatively slow where does this leave low skilled fathers of young children, in two parent families, who are currently unemployed or face unemployment in the future? They appear to have a number of options. In terms of trying to earn an income to support the family they can start to compete with women in low wage areas such as cleaning (but for a variety of reasons will have trouble moving into childcare jobs), they can live on welfare, they can turn to crime, or with a longer term strategy of re-entering the paid workforce, providing they can find a way of supporting themselves financially or their partners can support them, they can gain new skills. Finally, if their partner can earn sufficient income to sustain the family, they can stay home and look after the children. However as indicated, staying home and looking after the children would require a major change in attitudes by not only individual men but also their families and wider society. In addition, low skill men, if part of a two parent family, tend to be with low skill women reducing the chances of the female partner being a sole, and adequate, earner of family income (Callister & Davey, 1994).

¹³In New Zealand the proportion of all women in the 15-64 age group who were in paid work stood at 63.8% in 1990. According to the OECD in the same year the figure for Sweden was 83.5%, Finland 72.9%, Norway 72.6%, USA 69.6%, Canada 69% and the UK 68.4%.

So what about the fathers of young children who have the choice of being in paid work? In the short term it is unlikely that many will become primary caregivers either on a full-time basis, or a part-time basis in combination with part-time paid work, or even for a short period such as taking parental leave. The reasons for this include:

- Unpaid work is seen to be of little value in our society, particularly amongst men, but also by an increasing number of women.
- If the mother chooses to breastfeed then, generally, this means that in the initial period of a child's life it will be the mother who leaves paid work, necessitating the father's continuing employment. It has been suggested that the establishment of such gendered patterns of paid and unpaid work, on the birth of a child, are difficult to reverse as children mature (Habgood, 1992).
- Many parents, and wider family members, still have traditional attitudes about the roles of women and men.
- In addition, many other individuals and groups in society will continue to hold traditional attitudes.
- There is nowadays a need, or wish, to earn two incomes when children are young, partly encouraged by increasing worries about building up savings for education, health, retirement and other needs which used to be more supported by the state. In addition, with a longer period spent in education, and the possibility of early retirement or redundancy, income earning is concentrated in the period when most people are having children.
- A diminution in the ideology that children are best looked after by parents at home as well as increasing choice in childcare options. In many, but not all, cases where there is a strong belief in the importance of a parent caring for children at home this is likely to co-exist with traditional views of the roles of women and men.
- A limited number of situations where the mother is significantly better placed in the job market than father.
- It may be more acceptable to employers for women to either take off time for parental leave, or to spend an extended period not in paid work caring for children, or to be in part-time paid work.
- A lack of permanent, well paid part-time jobs at a senior level.

However, a major difficulty for individual fathers, and society as a whole, in weighing up the costs and benefits of men becoming the primary caregiver, or sharing care, is that they are constrained in these decisions by a lack of information. In terms of women moving into paid work the direct benefits, particularly in monetary terms, have been relatively easy to identify. But the potential costs, particularly the issue as to whether children will be deprived or not, has been the subject of intense research, and even though the evidence generally supports the idea that children in any situation of quality care are not deprived the debate continues.

But for men who increase their childcare work the costs are easy to identify, but the benefits are far more difficult to assess. This is particularly so as the benefits may not accrue to them directly - they may go to children and their partner so the men have to weigh up the benefits of being altruistic. This can be difficult in an individualistic society where altruism is not highly valued.

But factors which in the longer term are likely to assist men becoming primary caregivers, not necessarily in the role full-time at home, but simply taking main, or equal, responsibility for the children include:

- Equal opportunities in paid work for women and men, including providing opportunities at all levels of seniority for men to work part-time, or less than 40 hours per week.
- Social support, positive encouragement and increased visibility of men taking up the role. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has been helpful in supporting women moving into paid work, but unlike some countries such as Sweden, in New Zealand there are few official programs supporting equality within the home as well as outside of it (Working Party for the Role of the Male Stockholm, 1986). In much of Europe the subject of men and women equally sharing childcare and income earning

responsibilities is on the political agenda and related policy formation is discussed in officially sponsored forums (European Commission Network on Childcare, 1993).¹⁴

Official programs in New Zealand have been aimed at making workforce participation more attractive to women, but research on mothers' entry into and exit from full-time paid work suggests that it is now equally important to focus on developing policies at making both female and male roles more flexible and interchangeable (Lloyd et al, 1990).

In terms of obtaining a higher level of visibility for men as primary caregivers, this may be more difficult to achieve than was the case for women as they moved into the public world. As women moved into the public world they started to gain access to, and became part of, the media and academia so increasingly they had a means to talk about, and reinforce, their own experiences and to create networks and a power base.¹⁵ Men moving out of paid work are also, in general, lessening the means to publicly analyse, write about, study or promote their own lifestyle. Where their lifestyle is analysed or promoted it is often through the conduit of someone who is simply an observer and not a participant in that lifestyle. Pruett (1987), for example, although describing himself as a nurturing father argues that he came to the study as an "objective observer", unlike, he claims, most women writers who are "subjective" observers having been primary caregivers. And yet just as feminist research has helped build up models and support systems for a variety of lifestyles, from the achievement oriented focus within the public world of liberal feminism to the support of the nurturing mother within cultural feminism, a body of research and information supporting men as nurturers is likely to help reinforce these tendencies amongst men. Without these supporting models men as primary caregivers have to develop their own individual models. Hanson (1985:61) notes:

The transition from traditional fatherhood and wage earner to househusband is an emergent passage for which there are few guidelines, reference groups, or role models. For most men it is a "solo passage" whereby they act as their own agent of socialization creating their own timing, tactics, criteria for assessment, and learning situations".

From an Australian perspective Russell, James, and Watson (1988:263-264) argue the following measures would also be helpful in encouraging men to take an equal or main share of caregiving in the longer term:

- Policies that acknowledge the interaction between male involvement in child care and women's employment opportunities, and encourage greater recognition and acceptance by employers of work/family conflicts for *both* mothers and fathers.
- More emphasis on policies and practice that will facilitate changes in attitudes to give higher priority to children and their needs, and to acknowledge the responsibility of the entire community, including employers, for children and families.
- Elimination of sexism that is still common in parent education material. As an example of blatant sexism Russell cites *Toddler Taming* by Christopher Greene, an author sponsored for a lecture tour of New Zealand by the Department of Internal Affairs during the Year of the Family.
- The implementation of parenting courses for boys in school, and for fathers, for example in hospitals, or especially at places of employment, to give them more opportunities to learn childcare skills.
- The instigation of special initiatives in order to develop support and information groups for caregiving fathers.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the New Zealand government's role in promoting gender equality in the home see Callister (1995).

¹⁵ For example, in New Zealand most journalists working on "lifestyle" magazines are now women.

- The development of policies which will encourage fathers to see part-time work and family leave from work as realistic options.
- The development of couple and parent education and support programs which emphasise the difficulties that mothers and fathers both have in sharing childcare.
- Finally, just as girls need to be encouraged to expand their options, boys need to be encouraged to be less competitive and achievement oriented and more nurturant, to enable them to develop alternative skills to prepare themselves for traditional female jobs or parenting.

In Europe, in discussions about bringing men into childcare, there tends to be a prevalent feeling that strategies need to be aimed at both the home and, as Russell suggests, traditional female jobs, particularly childcare work (European Commission Network for Childcare, 1993).

Risman (1987), using a microstructural theory approach, agrees with many of these points. But she argues that “individualist theory”, which suggests that to produce more nurturant fathers men need to be taught to parent, is of limited value. In contrast, she suggests that in order to encourage men to do substantial infant care organisations must provide parental leaves¹⁶ and flexible time for both men and women workers and to reduce their wage differential. In addition, she argues that we must, as a society, expect men to do as much child care as women before we will see substantial change in parenting patterns. She concludes that only when overall societal views change, will parenting behaviour among men become more similar to the parenting behaviour of women.

Conclusion

Data from the 1991 census indicates that the number of two parent families with dependent children where the mother works longer hours in paid work, or is the only parent in paid work, is very small. However, the group has grown over the five years from 1986 to 1991, a period in which there was a significant loss of full-time jobs held by men. The data also indicates that the group where the mother is the primary income earner and the father is the primary caregiver is even smaller, but the changes over time are unable to be measured.

The growth in two parent families where the mother is the primary income earner appears likely to have been mainly stimulated by the growth of male unemployment. This is in contrast with some overseas studies which indicate social factors are a strong influence in the growth of this family type, and articles in the New Zealand media which focus on more active choices by men.

The research on men as primary caregivers indicates that when men are positive about being in this role they are just as capable as women of caring for children. At the same time, however, there are still some well founded worries in society about the actions of another small group of not so benevolent fathers.

Research in the late 1970s and early 1980s suggests that men who were primary caregivers were in a role often not considered appropriate by society, families, peers and friends. However, while nowadays the fact that there is only a small number of male primary caregivers indicates that much of society still feels that it is inappropriate for men to take on this role, it appears attitudes towards families who make this choice, or have it forced on them, are slowly changing.

Given forecasts of employment trends which appear to favour growth in jobs traditionally held by women, in combination with more tolerant social attitudes toward men heavily involved in childcare, it is possible that there may be some further growth in two parent families where the father is the primary caregiver and the mother the primary income earner. Changes in the labour market, such as women achieving equal

¹⁶ This includes leave to look after sick children, and as is the case in Sweden, even time off to visit schools or childcare centres.

opportunities in the workplace and men having opportunities to take up permanent, part-time work at all levels of seniority and responsibility, would also help this trend. But this would be part of a trend of moving toward an increasing diversity of family types. In some two parent families the fathers will be the primary caregiver or will share care. In others, men will be the primary income earner but be highly involved with childcare and housework, in some they will provide the financial resources but give little emotional or time input into the children, and in some they will be virtually absent in both financial and emotional terms. In addition, in some families the father through his own choice, the choice of the mother, or both, will be physically absent, turning a two parent family into a one parent one.

But in the longer term more involvement by fathers depends, to a large degree, on whether parents who have the resources to make choices within their own families (and who are often in the position to make policy decisions within society) want men to be involved in childcare, or simply want to pass the job onto other, often low paid, women.¹⁷

Finally Hutchins (1993:115), drawing on his own experiences in a New Zealand context, provides a broad overview of past and likely future trends:

“Househusbanding has sometimes been trumpeted as being an oasis of calm and fatherly concern, a bright-eyed and bushy-tailed example of what modern men can do - if they care.

This line has been put forward as part of a gender trap, set by mothers hell bent on returning to the glamorous corporate work-force. Such situations, with their deceptions and hidden agenda, have often caused wounding resentment.

Then there have been the sincere ones, the men who, either through circumstances or intelligent choice, have made the change for the good of the family - and exposed themselves to forces they may or may not have been able to predict.

Some househusbands have been nervous but proud, reticent but rugged. They haven't had the communication skills to enable an easy dovetailing with the wider community. Often the wider community has been less than forthcoming, and reticence has become a siege mentality - a do-it-yourself, go-it-alone approach.”

He concludes

“However, while segments of society make warm, fuzzy noises about the concept of househusbanding, there is still a way to go before society as a whole accepts the reality of committed male care-giving.”

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the male primary caregivers who commented on early drafts of this paper. However any errors or opinions remain the sole responsibility of the author. The research has been supported by a grant from the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology.

¹⁷ It is likely, given the current attention on child abuse by men in childcare centres, that bringing men into childcare on a paid basis will follow, rather than lead, any changes within the home. This is supported by the already mentioned finding that men who are heavily involved in the early care of their children are less likely to be child abusers (Parker and Parker, 1986).

References

- Becker, G. (1981). *A Treatise on the Family* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Brannen, J. and Moss, P. (1990). *Managing Mothers: Dual Earner Households After Maternity Leave.*, London: Unwin Hyman.
- Briar, C. (1992). Women, economic dependence and social policy. In C. Briar, R. Munford, and M. Nash (eds.), *Superwoman where are you? Social policy and women's experience*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press. 41-69
- Callister, P. (1993a). Girls can do anything so why can't boys? Paper presented at the winter conference of the New Zealand Association of Economists 23-25 August 1993, Dunedin.
- Callister, P. (1993b) *Growth in male part-time work: Recession spinoff or social change*. Paper presented to the New Zealand Geographers Conference, Victoria University.
- Callister, P. (1993c). *Tomorrow's Skills* Wellington: Quest Rapuara - Careers Service.
- Callister, P. (1994). Families with preschool children. Chapter four in *New Zealand now: Families*. Wellington: Statistics New Zealand.
- Callister, P. (1995). Men and childcare -An issue for public policy? *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 5 53-66.
- Callister, P; Podmore, V. N; with Galtry, J & Sawicka, T. (1995). *Striking a balance: Families, work and early childhood education*. NZCER: Wellington.
- Carnegie Corporation (1994). *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children - The Report of the Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children*. New York: Carnegie Corporation.
- Carro, G. (1983). *Stay-home fathers' superkids* Psychology Today, 17 pg 71.
- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Clary, M. (1982). *Daddy's Home*. New York: Seaview Books.
- Coverman, S. (1985). Explaining husbands' participation in domestic labor *The Sociological Quarterly*, 26, (1).
- Crosby, F (1991) *Juggling - The unexpected advantages of balancing career and home for women and their families*. New York: The Free Press.
- Davey, J. & Callister, P. (1994). Parents in paid work: The workforce patterns of parents of children under five years of age. *New Zealand Sociology*, 9 (2), 216-241.
- Davey, J. (1993). *From Birth to Death III*. Wellington: Institute of Policy Studies.
- Davis, S.K and Chavez, V. (1985). Hispanic househusbands *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 7, (4), 317-332.
- Dinnerstein, D. (1977). *The Mermaid and the Minotaur : Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* New York: Harper and Row.

Easting, S.K and Fleming, R. (1994) *Families, money and policy*. Wellington: Intra Family Income Project in association with the Social Policy Research Centre.

European Commission Network on Childcare and other Measures to Reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities for Women and Men. (1993). *Men as carers: Towards a culture of responsibility, sharing and reciprocity between women and men in the care and upbringing of children*. Report of an international seminar. Ravenna, Italy, May 21-22.

Family (1994) Newsletter of the Aotearoa/ New Zealand International Year of the Family, March/April. Wellington

Farrell, W (1993) *The Myth of Male Power: Why are men the disposable sex*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Ferree, M. M. (1990). Beyond separate spheres: Feminism and family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 52, 866-884.

Folbre, N. (1994). *Who pays for the kids?: Gender and the structures of constraint*. New York: Routledge.

Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell Publishing.

Gershuny, J. & Robinson, J. (1988) Historical changes in the household division of labour *Demography*, 25, (4) 537-552.

Gerson, K (1987) What do women want from men? : Men's influence on women's work and family choices. In M. Kimmel (ed) *Changing Men: New directions in research on men and masculinity*. California: Sage Publications, 115-130.

Goldscheider, F & Waite, L (1991) *New families, No families - The Transformation of the American Home* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gray, A. (1983). *The Jones Men - 100 New Zealand Men talk about their lives* Wellington: A.H and A.W Reed Ltd.

Grbich, C (1987) Primary Caregiver Fathers - A Role Study: Some Preliminary Findings *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage & Family*, 8, (1) 17-26.

Grbich, C. (1992). Societal Response to familial role change in Australia: Marginalisation or social change? *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 23, (1) 79-94.

Grbich, C. (1994). Women as primary breadwinners in families where men are primary caregivers *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, (in press)

Haas, L (1982). Parental sharing of child care tasks in Sweden *Journal of family issues*, 3 (3) 389-412

Habgood, R. (1992). On His terms: Gender and the Politics of Domestic Life. In R. Du Plessis with P. Bunkle, K. Irwin, A. Laurie and S. Middleton (eds.), *Feminist voices - Women's studies texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.

Haden, F (1994) *Women must accept the price of the boy's game* Sunday Star-Times, July 10, C9.

Hanson, S. (1985). Fatherhood: Contextual variations. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 29 (1) September/October 55-77.

- Harper, J (1980) *Fathers at Home* Melbourne: Penguin Books Australia Ltd
- Hayghe, H. V.; Bianchi, S. M.; Walter, A. (1993). *Changes in the Labour Force Role of Married Mothers* Paper presented at the ASA Winter Conference 'Families and Children: Research Findings, Data Needs and Survey Issues', January, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.
- Hertz, R. (1986). *More equal than others: Women and men in dual career marriages*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Hochschild, A. (1989). *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking.
- Horsfield, A. (1988). *Women in the economy: A research report on the economic position of women in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Women's Affairs.
- Hutchins, G. (1993). *Just you wait till your mother gets home!: Reflections of a New Zealand Househusband* HarperCollins Publishers (New Zealand) Limited.
- Hyman, P. (1994). Feminist Critiques of Orthodox Economics: A Survey. *New Zealand Economic Papers*, 28, (1) 53-80.
- Kedgley, S. (1985). *The Sexual Wilderness - Men and Women in New Zealand*. Wellington: Reed Methuen.
- Kitzinger, S. (1992). *Ourselves as mothers: The universal experience of motherhood*. London: Doubleday.
- Lamb, M. (1986). *The Father's Role: Applied Perspectives*. New York: Wiley-Interscience.
- Lamb, M. (1987). Emergent American father - Moving from breadwinner. In M. Lamb (ed.), *The father's role - Cross cultural perspectives*. New Jersey: Hillsdale.
- Lamb, M.E, Pleck, J.H, Charnov E.L, and Levine, J.A. (1987) A biosocial perspective on paternal behavior and involvement. In J.B. Lancaster, J. Altmann, A.S. Rossi & L.R. Sherrod (eds) *Parenting across the lifespan: Biosocial perspectives*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter. 111-142
- Lloyd, M., Fergusson, D. M., Horwood, L. J. (1990). A longitudinal study of maternal participation in the full-time workforce: Part 2: Exit from the full-time workforce. *New Zealand Population Review*, 16 (1) 39-52.
- Lucas, A., Morley, R., Cole, T. J., Lister, G., & Leeson-Payne, C. (1992). Breastmilk and subsequent intelligence quotient in children born preterm. *Lancet*, 339, 261-64.
- Lutwin, D.& Siperstein, G. (1985). Househusband fathers. In S. Hanson and F. Bozett (eds.), *Dimensions of fatherhood*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- May, H. (1992) *Minding the Children Managing Men - Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books
- McBride, B. A. (1990). The effects of a parent education/play group program on father involvement in child rearing *Family Relations*, 39, 250-256.
- Metro (1987) The new parents: Trying to have it all, July .
- Nelson Evening Mail (1993). *More fathers are taking on the challenges of childcaring* Weekender 19th June.

- Nussbaum, J. (1985). *Fathers as primary caretakers of infants*. Doctoral thesis: University of California.
- NZ Herald (1992) *Dad's Turn* December 15, Section 2, pg 1.
- Parker, H., & Parker, S. (1986). Father-Daughter Sexual Child Abuse: An Emerging Perspective *American Journal of Ortho-psychiatry*, 56 (4) October.
- Penfold, P (1985) *The involuntary househusband: Recipe for disaster* Canadian Medical Association Journal, Vol 133, No 4 275-278.
- Phillips, J. (1988). *The mother experience: New Zealand women talk about motherhood*. Auckland: Penguin.
- Playcentre Journal* (1994a) Vol 90, July 35
- Playcentre Journal* (1994b) Vol 89, March 21-24.
- Pleck, J. (1985). *Working wives/working husbands*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Plunket Society (1993). Personal communication.
- Podmore, V. N (1994) *Employment & childcare arrangements among families* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Prenzel, W. & Strumpel, B. (1990). Male role changes between partnership and career *Zeitschrift fur Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologie*, 34,(1) 37-45.
- Presser, H. (1988). Shift work and child care among young dual-earner American parents *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50, 133-148.
- Price, J. (1988). *Motherhood: What it does to your Mind*. Pandora.
- Pruett, K. D. (1987). *The Nurturing Father*. New York: Warner Books.
- Radin, N. & Russell, G. (1982) Increased Father Participation and Child Development Outcomes. In M. Lamb (ed.), *Non-traditional Families: Parenting and Child Development*. Hillsdale: N.J:Erlbaum.
- Radin, N. (1988). Primary caregiving fathers of long duration. In P. Bronstein & C. Cowan (eds.), *Fatherhood Today: Men's changing role in the family*, Canada: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 127-143
- Rantalaiho, L. (1993). *Reshaping the gender contract*. Paris: OECD.
- Rio, V. (1993). *Who cares?: A psychoanalytic study of men as primary caregivers*. 4th Australian Family Research Conference, Institute of Family Studies.
- Risman, B. J. (1987). Intimate relationships from a microstructural perspective: Men who mother. *Gender and Society*, 1, March 6-32.
- Rose, D. (1990). *The fully employed high income society*. Wellington: New Zealand Planning Council.
- Russell, G. (1983). *The Changing Role of Fathers?* University of Queensland Press.
- Russell, G. (1989). Work/family patterns and couple relationships in shared caregiving families *Social Behaviour*, 4, 265-283.

- Russell, G., James, D., Watson, J. (1988). Work/family policies, The changing role of fathers and the presumption of shared responsibility for parenting. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 23 (4), November 249-267.
- Sagi, A (1987) Fathers in Israel. In Lamb, M (ed) *The Father's Role - Cross Cultural Perspectives*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sandqvist, K. (1987). *Fathers and family work in two cultures - Antecedents and concomitants of father's participation in childcare and household work* Doctoral Dissertation, Almqvist and Wiksell International: Stockholm.
- Segal, L. (1990). *Slow motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*. London: Virago Press.
- Shiffman, M. (1987). The men's movement: An exploratory empirical investigation. In M. Kimmel (ed) *Changing Men: New directions in research on men and masculinity*. California: Sage Publications. 295-312
- Sietses, C. (1994). Men at playcentre: A view after 4 years inside. *Playcentre Journal*, 89, March pg 21.
- Smith, G. (1990). *Will The Real Mr New Zealand Please Stand Up?* Auckland: Penguin Books.
- Snarey, J. (1993). *How fathers care for the next generation: A four decade survey*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Stacey, J. (1990). *Brave new families: Stories of domestic upheaval in late twentieth century America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Statham, J. (1986). *Daughters and Sons - Experiences of Non-Sexist Childraising*. UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Tauss, V (1976) Working wife - househusband: Implications for counseling *Journal of Family Counseling*, 4, (2) 52-55.
- Te Kloeze J.W. (1990). *Housewives' and "Househusbands" leisure: A study of the experience and concepts of leisure among women and men who stay home to run the house*. International Sociological Association conference
- The Listener. (1993, September 18-24). *Looking for Mr Mum*.
- TVNZ documentary (1993a) *The Smell of Money*, Channel One, April 12.
- TVNZ documentary (1993b) *60 Minutes*, Channel Two, June 27.
- Van Dongen, W.; Malfait, D.; Smulders, H.; Pauwels, K. (1993). *A New Perspective on the Sexual Division of Family Labour, Hypothesis, Methodology and Data for Flanders* International Conference "Out of the Margins" Amsterdam, 2-5 June.
- Wainrib, B. R. (1992). Successful women and househusbands: The old messages die hard. *Psychotherapy in Private Practice*, 11 (4) 11-19.
- Waring, M. (1988) *Counting for Nothing: What men value and what women are worth*. Wellington: Allen and Unwin.
- Wilson, E. (1978). *On human nature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Woods, G. (1993) *Just a mother- The importance of women at home*. Wellington: GP Publications.

Working Party for the Role of the Male (1986) *The Changing Role of the Male*. Stockholm, Sweden.