

# Parenting in modern Britain

## Understanding the experiences of Asian fathers

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### **An exploration of fathering behaviours and experiences among UK Asian men.**

This study explores the interplay of cultural, religious, economic and social factors in the fathering behaviour and experiences of Asian men in the UK. It focuses on four minority religio-ethnic 'groups': Bangladeshi Muslims, Pakistani Muslims, Gujarati Hindus and Punjabi Sikhs.

Researchers and policy-makers are interested in family and parenting issues but have a limited understanding of parenting behaviour and experiences in minority ethnic populations, especially with regard to fatherhood.

This report covers:

- what fatherhood means to Asian men in terms of identity, role and responsibility;
- experiences of fatherhood;
- the extent and type of fathering contributions;
- individual, family and wider influences on fathering behaviours and experiences; and
- the implications for policy-makers and practitioners.



# Contents

List of tables and figures	4
Executive summary	5
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2 Being a father: identity, role and responsibility</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3 Experiencing fatherhood</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>4 Extent and types of fathering contributions</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>5 Individual, family and wider influences on fathering behaviours and inputs</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>6 Implications for policy and practice</b>	<b>60</b>
References	66
Appendix: Qualitative fieldwork	69
Acknowledgements	72
About the authors	72

# List of tables and figures

## Tables

1	Summary of Phase One data generation	11
2	Examples of specific fathering inputs reported by mode across the four dimensions of the fathering role	32
3	Diversity in fathering arrangements	43
A1.1	Summary characteristics of interview respondents: fathers	69
A1.2	Summary characteristics of interview respondents: mothers	70

## Figures

1	The interplay of being, experiencing and doing fathering	46
2	Influences on fathering	47

# Executive summary

Understanding fathers' experiences in contemporary minority ethnic families is an important foundation for future child, family, education and employment policy. However, despite a strong interest in families among policy-makers and researchers, recent reviews have highlighted a limited understanding of family life and parenting in minority ethnic populations in the UK.

There is increasing recognition that family support services need to engage with, consult and respond to, fathers from minority ethnic backgrounds. However, such commitments are not routinely put into practice.

In response to these policy imperatives and research gaps, this study explored the interplay of cultural, religious, economic and social factors in fathering behaviour and experiences. The study used a range of qualitative research methods and focused on fatherhood across four religio-ethnic Asian 'groups' identified as Bangladeshi Muslims, Pakistani Muslims, Gujarati Hindus and Punjabi Sikhs.

## Being a father: identity, role and responsibility

Becoming a father was an anticipated event, a fundamental life stage and a key component of self-identity for the majority of fathers in the study. For many respondents, having children was seen within the context of the wider family, not just the husband–wife couple.

Being a father was associated with responsibility, commitment and pride. But there was some variation in what men understood a father's role and responsibilities to be. While income-earning was consistently identified as an integral part of being a father, Punjabi Sikh and Gujarati Hindu respondents also saw this as a legitimate part of being a good mother, an opinion

seldom expressed by Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents.

Nurturing, protecting and spending 'quality time' with children were commonly seen as important elements of a father's role, as was linking children to the outside world, both in terms of their religio-ethnic community and wider society. Being a personal care-giver was less commonly felt to be an integral part of a father's role and this was commonly felt to be a mother's responsibility across all four groups. However, some men felt they *should* contribute in this way.

There was evidence of some UK Asian men struggling to define what it means to be a father. Many respondents felt 'unusual' and reported wanting to be a 'friend' to their children. Nevertheless, it was clear across all groups that fathers were both holding on to elements of fathering from a past generation and fashioning new approaches.

## Experiencing fatherhood

Most fathers aspired to and had loving relationships with their children. Many distanced themselves from what they saw as a 'typical Asian father' – an authoritarian figure to be respected. Children were talked about as a source of pride and happiness and most felt that the rewards greatly outweighed the sacrifices involved in fatherhood.

Some fathers, however, expressed a heavy sense of responsibility and worried greatly about their children's successful upbringing. Some found personal care-giving tiring and frustrating and felt pressured to provide materially and find time for direct contact with children.

Despite emphasis on the father-child bond, many (though not all) believed mothers had closer relationships with children. In some cases, these beliefs were underpinned by religious teachings or notions about 'natural' differences between men and women.

## Extent and types of fathering contributions

Fathers contributed to their children's upbringing both directly and indirectly (via mothers, other people and role modelling). The majority contributed materially, but there was variation as to how much pressure they felt to earn income. A large number regularly contributed to feeding, bathing and other personal childcare tasks. Examples of fathers providing sole personal childcare were found across all four religio-ethnic groups. Mothers, however, usually retained responsibility in this area.

Most respondents wanted to raise children who were both respected and respectful members of their own religio-ethnic community and the wider UK society. Many parents, however, felt that problems such as drug and alcohol use, premarital sex and family breakdown made wider society risky for their children.

Fathers nurtured and protected their children by supporting educational achievement, providing social, cultural and religious resources, supporting emotional development and providing discipline. In these domains there were few clear patterns in paternal versus maternal contributions and significant variation across families.

Fathers who worked long hours were not necessarily absent from personal childcare, but where men had limited contact with their children it was more commonly devoted to 'quality time' such as playing and reading together. Despite mothers and fathers sharing responsibilities, mothers were often more active in terms of discipline and boundary-setting, short-term planning, organising and scheduling

## Individual, family and wider influences on fathering behaviours

Though the ability to earn an income was seen as an important part of being a father, at a practical level it constrained some fathers from contributing in other ways. This was evident where men had low-paid jobs with little flexibility or significant career aspirations. The transnational nature of many of the families meant that fathers had often spent periods away from home, with implications for the input they could provide.

Gendered norms constrained some fathers' involvement in particular childcare tasks, notably those relating to personal hygiene. Where mothers worked, fathers were more involved in daily care-giving. This pattern related not only to who was available to do what, but also to shifts in ideas of what they *should* be doing.

While some mothers were ambivalent about fathers having a more varied and involved parenting role, most encouraged their husbands to have a close relationship with their children. Children were also found to influence their fathers' contributions, often by demanding one-to-one attention. Grandparents, particularly paternal grandparents, were found in several cases to shape the amount and type of inputs from fathers.

Several respondents identified that attitudes in their religio-ethnic community constrained how they could act as fathers. Adoption of a house-husband role was felt to receive widespread condemnation, especially if the mother was working. Some men concealed their behaviours or avoided 'Asian areas' when looking after their children alone for fear of negative reaction.

Family support services appeared to have little influence on the fathering practices of Asian men. Many of the respondents were aware of local provision, but perceived the offer as unattractive. There was widespread use of religio-ethnic community resources for children's development, but these tended to involve children separately from their parents rather than providing opportunities for fathers and children to interact.

Attitudes to paid childcare were varied. Negative perceptions of childcare outside the home could mean fathers were more involved in day-to-day childcare when mothers were working.

This pattern was most common among Gujarati Hindu and Punjabi Sikh families, with some adopting working arrangements to allow one parent to always be with the children.

## Implications for policy and practice

These findings highlight the great family diversity that exists *within* ethnic 'groups'. Asian fathers also have much in common with dads from other UK ethnic groups, including white fathers. There is therefore a need to challenge the 'othering' and homogenising of minority ethnic fathers that can occur through the design of services and the attitudes of practitioners.

This does not imply that religion and ethnic identity have no relevance to Asian fathers. There are areas where policy and practice could do more to support fathers including: supporting the transmission of language, religion and cultural identity to children; protecting children from racial disadvantage; recognising the transnational nature of many minority ethnic families and the effect this may have on parenting patterns; understanding that childcare arrangements occur within the context of the wider family; respecting and seeking to understand the ways in which cultural norms or religious teachings may inform parenting behaviours and choices; and helping fathers to navigate services and access resources and opportunities.

If services want to attract men in greater numbers they must provide an environment that is perceived to be worthwhile and flexible, rather than constraining, judgemental, patronising or simply irrelevant.

To encourage more involved fatherhood, gendered stereotypes need to be broken down and high levels of father involvement legitimised. Efforts to encourage men to take a more direct role must be sensitive to mothers' attitudes and ensure these women understand the benefits for their children and themselves. While practitioners must not make assumptions about family structures and relationships, awareness of the potential role of other family members is also essential.

The majority of Asian fathers in this study placed great value on education and provided a variety of inputs in this respect. To support this,

there is a need to expand initiatives that help migrant mothers and fathers gain familiarity with the national curriculum, admission procedures and the school system in general.

Government intervention aimed at helping Asian men towards a better work–life balance must tackle a range of issues including: professional work cultures that valorise long hours; poor working conditions within small-scale enterprises; and the pressure that men face to be good earners.

Provision of childcare remains high on the Government's agenda and it is recognised that some minority ethnic groups are less likely to take up free childcare places. Additional free places seem unlikely to attract more children from Asian families unless childcare is seen to be culturally appropriate and beneficial. For many Pakistani and Bangladeshi families this would also require a shift in perceptions of the desirability of mothers taking up employment outside the home.

Fathers are often still perceived by practitioners to be difficult to engage, with Asian fathers seen as particularly problematic. Yet this study indicates that a lack of engagement with formal family support services is not necessarily indicative of limited involvement with their children. The majority of fathers in the study had close and loving relationships with their children and considered fathering to be a large part of their lives.

# 1 Introduction

## Rationale and objectives

Despite the upsurge in interest among policy-makers and researchers in families and parenting, recent reviews have highlighted the very limited understanding of parenting among minority (or ‘minoritised’) ethnic populations in the UK (Allgar *et al.*, 2003; Phoenix and Husain, 2007). In reviewing evidence on parenting and ethnicity, Phoenix and Husain (2007) identified a need for empirical work that examines how different ethnic groups define and practise parenting, as well as theoretical frameworks that more adequately incorporate the role of ethnic diversity.

This limited understanding is particularly evident in relation to minority ethnic fathers. While a growing academic interest in what fathers do with and for their children has been recognised in the USA and the UK since the 1970s (Lamb *et al.*, 1987; Doherty *et al.*, 1998), along with a resurgent belief in policy circles that fathers can have substantial impact on the development of their children (Lamb *et al.*, 1987; Clarke and O’Brien, 2004), minority ethnic fathers have received remarkably little attention (Lewis and Lamb, 2007). Within Europe there is growing awareness that concepts of fatherhood and father involvement must be sensitive to cultural and religious diversity (O’Brien, 2004). Further, the experience of social and economic exclusion can significantly shape the constraints and opportunities for minority ethnic families. Understanding the experiences of fathers in contemporary minority ethnic families and their relationship to labour market and wider cultural change is an important foundation for future child, family, education and employment policy.

Fatherhood is a key component of identity for the majority of UK Asian men (Modood *et al.*, 1998; Shaw, 2000). The demographic profile and family-forming patterns of UK Asian populations mean that the majority of these men become

fathers and that Asians, particularly Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslims, who have higher fertility rates than Indian Hindus and Sikhs, make up a disproportionate number of new fathers. However, research to date has often been poorly specified with respect to Asians (for instance, the preoccupation with father absence, rather than with fatherhood in general) and very little is known about the forms of father involvement or the ways in which these fathers might best be supported (Husain and O’Brien, 1999). Also, research has often employed the broad category ‘Asian’ rather than disaggregating analyses by religio-ethnic groupings or paying attention to the diversity within such groups.

It is also evident that fathering research has focused predominantly on infancy, and often taken a narrow, child-development perspective rather than a broader family-systems approach. There is a need for work that explores the meaning and practice of fathering at other ages, particularly the early years and primary school age, since recent child policy (HM Treasury, 2003) promotes parental involvement during this period.

The present project was intended to be largely descriptive and to focus on fathers identified from the community setting, rather than those that were in receipt of particular services or were recognised as having particular needs or difficulties. In response to the current policy imperatives and the obvious gaps in research evidence identified above, the present study aimed to describe and understand within and across four religio-ethnic Asian ‘groups’ – Bangladeshi Muslims, Pakistani Muslims, Gujarati Hindus and Punjabi Sikhs:

- how people understand what it means to be a father, and the associated roles and responsibilities;
- the forms that father involvement takes and its boundaries;

- how fatherhood is experienced by men;
- the ways in which father involvement is negotiated through interactions between fathers and other actors;
- the influence of community and wider society on fathering;
- the practicalities and conflicts of day-to-day fathering;
- the role of child and family support services.

The project particularly aimed to explore the interplay of cultural, religious, economic and social factors in the patterning of fathering behaviour.

## Understanding families, fatherhood and religio-ethnic diversity

Prior research into minority ethnic parenting has been criticised for being based on ethnocentric values and assumptions and failing to address issues that are of greatest concern to minority parents themselves (Allgar *et al.*, 2003). Research can often serve to perpetuate stereotypes, presenting the behaviours and experiences of people from particular minority groups as homogenous rather than illuminating their fluid and diverse nature. Furthermore, the common focus on culture diverts attention from social, historical, economic and political factors that shape the circumstances of minority ethnic families.

At the same time, however, ethnic identity and group membership do have important implications for people's lives. What constitutes a family and its members is socially constructed and variable over space and time. An understanding of parenting therefore requires us to examine more than specific behaviours and practices, which can carry different meanings and implications in different sociocultural contexts (Mahtani Stewart and Harris Bond, 2002). Furthermore, individuals often weave together complex and conflicting cultural influences in their parenting practices (Jackson and Nesbitt, 1993; Dosanjh and Ghuman, 1996), so that any assumption of binary opposition between 'Western' and 'non-Western'

parents must be rejected (Phoenix and Husain, 2007). There is therefore a need to 'unpack' ethnic identity, to understand what precisely it implies for parenting behaviours in particular contexts.

Much past research into fathering has been heavily value-laden, influenced by particular understandings of what fathers should do and why this is important (e.g. Doherty *et al.*, 1998). Such ethnocentric approaches are problematic since they tend towards a deficit model of fathering and the pathologising of behaviours that diverge from those of the majority white group. Furthermore, research aimed at understanding the experiences of minority fathers must engage with structures and processes of racist exclusion that can shape parental attitudes and priorities (Roer-Strier *et al.*, 2005; Phoenix and Husain, 2007). Recognition that fathering cannot be understood by employing a 'mother template' and that actors outside the mother–father–child triad influence fathering is also important.

## Methodology

We adopted a qualitative methodological approach that drew on the principles of critical ethnography. While we gave a central place to the ways in which men described their experiences of fathering, we sought to situate such accounts within an understanding of the broader social structures that constrain and direct people's behaviours. In this way, our approach can be seen to be 'grounded' in the personal accounts of our respondents, but also guided by the theoretical perspectives outlined above. A grounded approach was important so as not to limit our investigation, particularly since so much prior research on fathers has been conducted in dissimilar social settings. Our methods and approach attempted to create 'space' in which respondents could express their own experiences and concerns (Pollack, 2003).

Our focus was on fathers within families identified in the community setting rather than through family support or other services: an intentional counterpoint to work that takes 'problematic outcomes' as its starting point and therefore tends to pathologise minority families. We included fathers of children aged 3–8 years, an

age group that is relatively little studied compared to younger children, and a time when fathers were likely to be more involved with their children than during infancy and more actively engaged in constructing their father role than when children were older. In practice, however, many of the fathers interviewed had children outside as well as within our age range.

Our fieldwork took place in Sheffield (Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslims) and East London (Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslims, Gujarati Hindus and Punjabi Sikhs). Our research team included four female professional researchers supported by a number of community researchers – predominantly fathers who identified themselves as members of one of the four religio-ethnic groups.

While appreciating the potentially fluid nature of ethnic group membership, in practice the research team identified potential respondents for the four religio-ethnic ‘groups’ of interest and then sought to understand what ethnic identities meant for individual parenting as part of the research process. This approach proved relatively unproblematic as individuals, by and large, strongly identified with the labels ‘Bangladeshi’, ‘Pakistani’, ‘Gujarati’ and ‘Sikh’. This is not to deny the existence of significant within-group heterogeneity of experience (as the chapters that follow illustrate). Despite being alert to several potentially important subdivisions within these four groups, our analysis suggested that these finer-grain distinctions did not provide significant analytical purchase and that it was more meaningful within the context of the present study to employ the four categories originally identified.

The study did not include white fathers and this could be seen as a shortcoming. It is important to emphasise that the exclusion of whites does not imply that ethnicity is irrelevant to our understanding of white fathers. We were alert to the dangers of inflating the explanatory power of ethnicity and of problematising the minority groups under study. Giving explicit attention to within- and between-group variation guards against these tendencies, as does our identification of many similarities between our findings and those from prior work with white fathers.

## Data generation methods and analysis

Two phases of data generation were employed. Phase One (July–September 2006 in London and September–December 2006 in Sheffield) aimed to gain a broad understanding of social and economic context, understandings of family, parenting and fatherhood, and relevant local words and phrases. Phase One employed a series of data generation methods including key informant interviews, focus group discussions (mothers and fathers), open-ended interviews with fathers and informal observation (as summarised in Table 1), and involved over 80 informants. Following fieldwork, analysis workshops were held with community researchers and preliminary findings were compiled. This phase also informed interview guideline development for Phase Two and identification of respondents.

In Phase Two, in-depth interviews employing elements of a child life-history approach were conducted. Mothers clearly play a significant part in shaping fathering and it was therefore important to explore their understandings and experiences as well as those of fathers. Our target was to interview ten fathers from each of the religio-ethnic groups in the two sites and a subset of five wives. The recruitment of fathers proved to be challenging, particularly in the case of Gujaratis and Sikhs, who were often found to be working extremely long hours. A variety of networks were utilised. In total we carried out 59 interviews with fathers and 33 with mothers. Tables 2 and 3 present summary respondent characteristics. Respondents were interviewed in the language and location of their choice and most interviews took place at the father’s home. Interviews were digitally recorded (following informed consent), transcribed and, where necessary, translated into English in full with a focus on retaining conceptual equivalence.

Analysis and interpretation of findings were ongoing during data collection. Researchers kept field diaries and held regular meetings and analysis workshops in which emerging findings and ideas were shared. Partway through Phase Two the data was reviewed and some adjustments

Table 1: Summary of Phase One data generation

Tool	Description	Sheffield		East London			
		Pakistanis	Bangladeshis	Pakistanis	Bangladeshis	Gujaratis	Sikhs
Key informant interviews	Varied respondents Semi-structured guide	9	5	3	5	7	5
Focus group discussions	Two audio vignettes to prompt discussion Community venues						
	Fathers Mothers	1 1	1 1	1 1	1 0	1 1	1 1
Father interviews	Very open-ended Tape-recorded and fully transcribed	2	2	1	1	1	1

**Notes:**

- 1 Informal observations were also conducted in community locations in Sheffield and East London and field diaries were kept during the period June–December 2006.
- 2 Key informants included a wide range of individuals with detailed knowledge of the communities of focus including community development workers, teachers, school liaison officers, local business people, religious leaders. Most of these respondents self-identified as being a member of one of the four religio-ethnic groups. However, there were also a small number who self-identified as Asian but belonging to a different subgroup.

made to the interview guide to ensure that further detail could be gathered on issues of interest. In addition, partway through the completion of in-depth interviews, a selection of transcripts were line-by-line coded by two of the researchers and a draft memo template designed. The template was piloted on a further set of transcripts before being finalised and transferred onto an Excel spreadsheet for ease of data organisation. The template was then used to guide a holistic analysis of each of the in-depth interviews. Excerpts from the interviews, interpretive commentary and contextual information were then entered into the relevant sections of the template for each respondent. This approach was adopted in preference to a code-search-and-retrieve approach since it was felt to be more efficient and better able to integrate contextual factors. There was a particular concern to avoid over-reliance on respondents' precise spoken words, since there was significant variation in articulacy among respondents. In cases where both the mother and father were interviewed, transcripts were examined side by side by the same researcher and cross-referencing provided additional insights.

Where appropriate we use data from the mothers' interviews as well as the fathers' to illustrate the points being made.

## 2 Being a father: identity, role and responsibility

### Summary points

- Becoming a father was an anticipated event and a fundamental life stage for almost all of the fathers we interviewed.
- At the time of interview all fathers except one held extremely prominent father identities – being a father was a large part of who they felt they were.
- For many fathers interviewed, having children was seen within the context of the wider family, not just the husband–wife couple. Though there was great diversity in the structure and functioning of families, many respondents were conscious of the implications that their childbearing and childrearing had for other family members.
- General attributes commonly associated with ‘being a father’ were responsibility, commitment and pride. Fathers were felt to be responsible for ‘good’ child outcomes along with mothers.
- Although being a father was important to most of our respondents, there was some variation in what men understood to comprise a father’s role and responsibilities.
- Taking responsibility for income-earning and material provision was consistently identified as an integral part of being a father across respondents from all four religio-ethnic groups. However, it was common among our Sikh and Gujarati respondents to view income-earning also as a legitimate (though not essential) part of being a good mother, an opinion seldom expressed by our Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents.
- Being a ‘nurturer and protector’ was also widely regarded as part and parcel of being a father. Many respondents across all four groups felt spending ‘quality time’ to be an important element in this role.
- Linking children to the outside world, in terms of both their religio-ethnic community and wider society, was also widely viewed as an important part of the father’s role for all groups.
- Being a personal care-giver to children was less commonly felt to be an integral part of being a father, and mothers were commonly felt to hold this responsibility in all four groups. However, some men did feel that they should contribute to this dimension of parenting as part of their father role.
- There was evidence that some UK Asian men are struggling to confidently define what it means to ‘be a father’. Many respondents felt ‘unusual’, identified their mother as their parenting role model and referred to being a ‘friend’ to their children. Nevertheless, it was evident across all the groups that fathers were holding on to elements of fathering from a past generation as well as fashioning new approaches.

### Introduction

Exploring what it means to be a father – the identity, role and responsibilities that men (and other significant people) associate with being a father – is integral to our understanding of fathering (Stueve and Pleck, 2003). While identities cannot be taken to determine behaviours in any direct or essential way, an individual’s behaviours are

strongly related to the prominence and form of particular identities held (Rane and McBride, 2000). Modood captures this in his discussion of minority ethnic identities, when he states:

*People act (or try to act or fail to act) the way they do because it seems to them to be living an identity which they believe they have or aspire to have; certain behaviours make sense or do not make sense, become possible or 'impossible', easy or difficult, worth making sacrifices for and so on if certain identities ... are strongly held.*

(Modood, 2004, p. 14)

Prior research that examines the meaning attached to 'being a father' comes from two main fields. Quantitative work, drawing on social identity theory and dominated by social psychologists, has used various tools to measure concepts including identity salience, commitment and centrality (e.g. Pasley *et al.*, 2002). Qualitative work taking a more sociological approach has aimed at understanding the meanings that men give to their father identity and how these are shaped through interactions and experiences as they go about their day-to-day parenting (Daly, 1993; Stueve and Pleck, 2003). Earlier research in the USA and the UK, largely concerned with majority white populations, has drawn attention to shifts over time in societal notions of what a father is and what 'good' fathers should do (Lamb *et al.*, 1987; O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003; Williams, 2008), as well as changes across generations in the ideas that men express about what it means to be a father. Particular themes in recent years have included the high degree of uncertainty and conflict in father (and male) identities (Edley and Wetherell, 1999), the individualised nature of identity formation, and the diversity of forms that father identities now take (Williams, 2008).

This chapter explores these issues among our sample of UK Asian fathers. However, it is difficult to discuss men's fathering identities without also touching upon some of the family and external factors that shape these understandings (McBride and Rane, 1997; Doherty *et al.*, 1998; Fox and Bruce, 2001; Stueve and Pleck, 2003). We explore these influences in more detail in Chapter 5.

## Becoming a father

With the exception of just one respondent, across all four religio-ethnic groups becoming a father was a fundamental, anticipated life stage. This was true even of those cases where pregnancy was unplanned or unwanted at the time. In some cases, respondents referred to cultural or religious expectations to have children and indicated that the question of whether or not to have children had never really been considered by them.

*It was like I've fulfilled another part of my life, if you like. It's built into us.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

*It's a natural instinct. I always sensed that I would have children, yes, sometime in my life.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, degree)

*Well, during the college time period I was never afraid of being a father. No, always looking forward to it. [When] the time comes I would be having family, kids whether it was boy or girl and I was looking forward to it. Never afraid of that.*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 30–39 years, degree)

The majority of our respondents recounted their experiences of becoming a father with strong emotion, referring to the great happiness they felt and their inability to adequately express the feelings of that time. The first birth was reported as a particularly striking life event and many of our respondents had been closely involved with the pregnancy and birth.

*Oh it's an amazing thing. I can't explain actually, this one. You can only feel it and understand it. After you have seen the child, the feelings in the mind, that is something extraordinary, not normal.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

*Oh it were the best time. That was the best time of my life. Yeah, before they came I decorated this house, balloons and flowers and roses and this and that so that were like surprise for my missus when they came in.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

*Well happy. Um, excited. Um, everything. Yeah, it was just different. Do you know what I mean? That's my child and er do you understand? Another little baby in the world and that sort of thing. It's just, you know, you have that sort of happy, exciting feeling.*

(Sikh father, UK-born, 40–49 years, A level equivalent)

For many of our respondents, childbearing and childrearing were seen within the context of the wider family, not just the husband–wife couple. The importance of having a child was often expressed not just in terms of becoming a father but also in terms of its implications for other family members.

*I wanted to give my mum some kind of happiness and stuff, grandkids and that. Once you've got [grand] kids around your home it's a totally different feeling for a mother.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

*It was planned because I wanted to get the children. I knew we was going to have children together but I wanted to have the children, get them out of the way with. [Laughs] So my parents can look after them and me and her can get out and do things together, get to know each other properly.*

(Sikh father, UK-born, 30–39 years, GCSE equivalent)

It is important to stress the great diversity we found in the ways that families were structured and functioned. Relationships between fathers and other family members, including their own parents, were varied, as were the claims and obligations that were recognised. Nevertheless, the majority

of respondents were conscious of the implications that their childbearing had for other family members. Some respondents talked not just about producing a child, but also a grandchild, sister or brother, or cousin. The following contrasting scenarios illustrate this point.

Vijay lives with his wife Suneeta and her parents and they have one 4-year-old son. Both respondents reported that since the son was born he has been cared for almost entirely by Suneeta's mother and father. At the time of the interviews, Vijay reported that he felt that one child was enough but Suneeta told us that her mother was strongly encouraging them to have another child. Her mother intended to play the same heavily involved role in bringing up the second child. Suneeta's aunt, who has no children of her own, is also closely involved in the care of Suneeta's son and lives with them. Though clearly dependent upon a number of factors, their decision-making around whether or not to have another child was influenced by the desires of the older generation for another grandchild and the ready provision of childcare that they offered.

(Gujaratis, father India-born, 30–39 years, ≤GCSE)

Faruq and Khadeja live with their 5-year-old daughter in a part of town some distance from Faruq's relatives. After marriage they wanted to delay having children for several years in order to get to know each other. During this period they were very aware of their relatives watching and wondering when they would start a family. Khadeja feels that the relationship her daughter has with her grandparents and extended family is very important and makes a great effort to keep in touch with her family who live several hours' drive away.

(Pakistanis, father UK-born, 30–39 years, degree)

## Being a father

Despite the widespread sense of fatherhood being an anticipated life stage, there was variation in the timing of men assuming the identity of 'father'.

In some cases, men appeared to take on this identity even before their wife was pregnant, by making preparations in terms of financial stability, suitable accommodation, and the husband–wife bond (‘getting to know each other’). It was clear that some men started to feel like a father from early on during their wife’s pregnancy, assuming responsibility for the well-being of their wife and the unborn child. In contrast, other men reported shock and fear when they first found out that their wife was pregnant, and some felt detached from the pregnancy process, not yet feeling like a ‘father-to-be’. In some cases, gendered expectations were seen to restrict men’s involvement in the pregnancy process and hence their association with their unborn child (see Chapter 5 for more on this and the role of grandparents).

However, by the time of the interviews, for the great majority of our respondents being a father was a large part of who they were.

*That’s my responsibility. It’s my life. He’s ... when you are single, you can do anything you want. But since H, I’m always, as I say, worried about him. I have to go and pick him up, make sure, this and that, all these things.*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 40–49 years, degree)

In only one case did the respondent feel that his identity as a father was weak, and this was explained by the heavy involvement of his parents and other family members in the upbringing of his children.

*To me I don’t think personally yeah that I’m a father yeah, I don’t have that role or the responsibilities and the overheads yeah. Because of the extended family system we have got.*

(Pakistani father, 30–39 years, UK-born, A level equivalent)

Importantly, even those few fathers who had poor relationships with the mother of their child(ren) and reported their negative reactions to the news of pregnancy nevertheless expressed a strong father identity and strong current attachments to their child.

*I just didn’t want to be a father to be honest with you. [Referring to news of pregnancy]*

*I love her to bits. She’s a large chunk of my life.*  
(Bangladeshi father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

*When he was born I resented him, I thought, ‘you have trapped me now, I am finished’.*

*I love him to bits. And I can understand now how it feels, how parents feel when they talk about [their children]. I feel that feeling for him now.*

(Sikh father, UK-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

There was great consistency across respondents in all four religio-ethnic groups in terms of the general characteristics of the father identity that were recognised, namely responsibility (in a few cases linked to a religious duty), commitment and pride.

*You know, you have to stick with. It’s not something that you can just say I’ve done it and that’s it. It’s just a journey you know and you stay along it really.*

(Sikh father, India-born, 40–49 years, degree)

For several of our respondents, their father identity appeared to be all-consuming, to the virtual exclusion of other identities and roles. These respondents were characterised by their evident living of life through their children and a sense of ‘sacrifice’ for their children, something that previous studies have more commonly identified with Asian women (see, for example, Jeffery *et al.*, 1989; White, 1992). More often, however, the fathers we interviewed retained other identities alongside that of ‘father’, particularly worker, husband, son, student and community member, and there was no obvious relationship between the salience of a man’s father identity and that of other identities. Chapter 5 explores the ways in which these other roles and responsibilities supported or undermined men’s fathering inputs to their children.

## The fathering role and responsibilities

Four major dimensions of the fathering role emerged from our interviews, though there was variation in the way in which responsibility for each of these was assumed:

- material provider;
- nurturer and protector;
- link to the outside world;
- direct care-giver.

Here we suggest that the distinction between ‘retrospective’ and ‘prospective’ responsibility (Williams, 2006) may be useful. Retrospective responsibility is linked to the notion of ‘What is a person responsible for?’ and is closely connected to receiving blame when things go wrong and praise or pride when things go well. Overall retrospective responsibility for child outcomes was frequently evident in fathers’ narratives. Responsibility, duty and commitment were broad attributes that almost all respondents, both mothers and fathers, associated with ‘being a father’. Two ways in which many fathers indicated their sense of retrospective responsibility were, first, when they talked about not wanting their children to have anything to blame them for in later life, and, second, their anticipation of their children’s future achievements.

*I think the fruits of your reward are when they get a bit older and you know, and how they perform in say, school, and just generally, and that’s when you can say, well, you know at least I’ve tried, and I’ve done well, and I’ve told them right from wrong.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

*I’d like to leave, not a legacy yeah, but I’d like to leave other kids behind yeah who I’m sure can be productive individuals to society, yeah. Productive individuals for humanity.*

(Bangladeshi father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

*If after that, if he or she wants to get on the wrong path then it is up to them. In future, they will not be able to say that I did not get that thing from my father and that is why I have taken to doing this or I did not get enough from my mum. At that time he or she will say I got everything from my parents but went on the wrong path all by myself. It’s their fault.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

In contrast, prospective responsibility is tied up with the actions that a person, by virtue of their role, ought to be doing or attending to (Williams, 2006) and so links more closely to particular parenting inputs. In the discussion below we identify ways in which retrospective and prospective responsibility was assumed by fathers (and mothers) for the four different dimensions of the fathering/parenting role that were most prominent in our interviews.

### Material provider

The material provider dimension of father identity was largely uncontested across all of our respondents and for several men was the most prominent part of being a father. Furthermore, this dimension was often underpinned by religious understandings, particularly for our Muslim respondents. As will be seen in Chapter 4, the actual arrangement of income-earning differed considerably across the four religio-ethnic groups, but despite this, it was rare for respondents not to consider income-earning as part and parcel of what it means to be a good father, even among those men who were not currently working.

*When the child needs something ... I think in my opinion, you fail as a father. If your child wants to do something and if you can’t provide that, you are failed ... as a father.*

(Gujarati father, UK-born, 30–39 years, GCSE)

*Oh yeah, yeah it is definitely, that is the father’s responsibility actually so yeah in that sense but I never actually thought about it until you mentioned it. It’s not something I consciously*

*think about if you know what I mean. A lot of things are not consciously thought about.*

(Bangladeshi father, UK-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

*I believe that as being a man I should be earning the bread on the table.*

(Sikh father, UK-born,  
30–39 years, GCSE)

Despite this commonality across groups, there was some evidence, particularly in the Sikh and Gujarati families, that the income-earner role was being incorporated as a legitimate (though not essential) dimension of being a ‘good mother’ as well as of being a ‘good father’. Nevertheless, the retrospective responsibility still seemed to lie firmly with men. That is, while Gujarati and Sikh mothers might be expected to seek ways of increasing household income, it appeared they would not be held accountable or blamed if income fell short or the children went without necessities.

In contrast, income-earning was clearly linked to being a father, and not to being a mother, among most of our Bangladeshi and Pakistani families. For instance, several men were the sole income-earners despite their wives being better qualified and therefore potentially able to earn a higher income. Where Pakistani or Bangladeshi mothers were working this was usually regarded as something for their own fulfilment, or the result of dire circumstances, and not as an expected contribution to the upbringing of the children. Indeed, there was the potential for women’s work outside the home to be seen as a threat to being a good mother, particularly if the hours of work impinged upon direct contact time with children. These apparent differences between the groups in the current place of paid employment within the mothering role are supported by previous research that has identified large differences in female employment rates post-childbearing between Indian (Hindu and Sikh) women and Bangladeshi and Pakistani women (Ahmad *et al.*, 2003; Salway, 2007).

### **Nurturer and protector**

Though less clearly defined than that of material provider, the ‘nurturer and protector’ dimension

related to promoting the child’s well-being and development, and ensuring the production of a ‘good citizen’ (honest, respectful and self-sufficient) and, in most cases, a ‘dutiful child’. Key characteristics of this dimension of the father role included: awareness of and monitoring the child’s development, progress and behaviour; ensuring the child is guided in the right direction and knows right from wrong; provision of adequate support for the child’s development (in various spheres as detailed in Chapter 4); and protection against adverse external influences. One man summed up this dimension of being a father as follows:

*Giving time to the children, patience, looking after them, being close and involved.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

While some respondents felt that a father’s responsibility is greater than a mother’s in this area and that fathers are better able to control and ensure good child development, this dimension was more commonly seen as integral to both ‘being a father’ and ‘being a mother’. Both parents were felt to share the responsibility for the production of a ‘good citizen’, and hence to share the blame if things go wrong.

*I don’t think we ever really finish the job because we should always be there for them if they need our support.*

(Bangladeshi mother, Bangladesh-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

It was also common for respondents to feel that both the father and the mother should actively provide inputs to this dimension of parenting, though there was significant variation between families in the specifics of what fathers took on within this broad role dimension.

While most respondents felt that a father should be playing a ‘nurturer and protector’ role within the 3–8 year age range (since this was the time when children spend increasingly long periods away from home), some felt such responsibilities were not very significant until secondary school age, when the risk of external influences was perceived to be far greater. Chapter 4 presents in detail the types of behaviours and inputs that

were associated with this dimension of the father role. However, we note here two interrelated central themes that characterised many of our respondents' understandings of what this dimension of 'being a father' means.

The first, referred to as 'quality time', 'one-to-one' and 'family time', expressed the notion that to be a 'good father' means spending time in direct contact with, and providing focused inputs to, his children. The second was an understanding expressed by many fathers that being a 'nurturer and protector' implied providing their child with love and friendship and establishing a close and open relationship (see also Chapter 3).

### **Link to the outside world**

Respondents' descriptions of their own childhood often emphasised this dimension, with fathers being associated with trips outside, visits to relatives and presents from far-off places. Though associated with fun and excitement, this role was also linked to introducing the child to people and practices and providing the child with a place within the wider religio-ethnic community, particularly for boys.

Our respondents, both mothers and fathers, illustrated the way in which they were concerned to produce children who would not just respect and be respected within their religio-ethnic community, but who were also equipped to function well and take advantage of the opportunities of 'mainstream' society. Being able to weather racist exclusion was a prominent theme in several of the interviews. This was a dimension where both men and women shared retrospective responsibility, but where men carried certain prospective responsibilities.

*I want him to have a good academic qualification but that's not more important to me than him being confident to deal with things even today. That's what I want to instil in my son. It's just to have confidence and that's a vital role my dad had on me. Just to give me a man's confidence to deal with things and issues.*

(Sikh father, UK-born, 20–29 years, degree)

*Yeah, we do do different things [my husband and I]. But it all comes together doesn't it? You know, he has the outside life, taking them out, and I've got the house. It works out well.*

(Pakistani mother, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

### **Personal care-giver**

Being a personal care-giver to children was less commonly understood to be an integral dimension of 'being a father' than the aspects mentioned above. In the majority of cases across all four religio-ethnic groups, mothers seemed to hold a sole retrospective responsibility for the adequate personal care of their children. This was evidenced by mothers being found at fault if children were poorly turned out or looked unwell. Even where fathers were engaged in high levels of day-to-day personal childcare, mothers appeared, in most cases, to retain the responsibility for related outcomes.

Nevertheless, there was evidence of a surprisingly large number of fathers feeling that they *should* be contributing to direct care-giving. Men who expressed these feelings always spoke in terms of a shared responsibility with their wives and often expressed a desire for their wife not to be overburdened. These were commonly, though not always, men whose wives were contributing to income generation.

*During the time of her pregnancy I did not have a job. I used to work part-time before but I stopped that during this time, because ... you know, we have to look after the children at home and things like cooking and other things need to be done.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

There was, however, evidence of this dimension of the fathering role being contested. Some mothers sought to present personal care-giving tasks as part of the 'nurturer/protector' role and thereby legitimise their husband's greater responsibility for them. Some men distanced themselves from such a role by explaining other men's involvement as individual proclivity, rather than an accepted part of what fathers should be doing. Older relatives, particularly men's mothers, were sometimes active

in challenging fathers' involvement in personal care-giving; and several men, who embraced this dimension of being a father privately, concealed or downplayed their contributions in public. These themes are taken up in Chapter 5.

### **'Being a mother' or 'being a friend': uncertainty and lack of father role models**

Recent research with white fathers in the UK has emphasised their reflectiveness, seeking to make sense of what it means to be a father in the modern world (Dermott, 2003; Williams, 2008). Our own respondents presented a more mixed picture, with some fathers being highly reflective and deliberative and others being much less self-conscious, describing their fathering as coming 'naturally'. However, across almost all interviews men were able to discuss different ways of 'being a father' and to draw contrasts with past times, illustrating that being a father is under scrutiny in public, private and also professional arenas. A particular theme that stood out was that of generational change versus continuity, and the extent to which current father identities and associated roles are modelled upon, or actively opposed to, past patterns of being a father.

Many of the fathers across all four religio-ethnic groups highlighted the limited direct contact they had had with their own father as a child. It was common for men to describe their fathers as working hard, being away from home for extended periods and being a somewhat distant figure. Several of our respondents had spent extended periods of their childhood in a different country from their father, others reported that their father had died when they were young, and some had been brought up by relatives.

*No, I can't say he was involved with us too much. Our mother had a lot more say than our father, and the first eight/nine years we went abroad. My father was here, so we didn't see much of him. And that is, so I think, I think our relationship with our father is different to what I've got with my children, guaranteed. Absolute different, absolute different.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

*I am not sure I did have much of a very big relationship with my father really because he wasn't, he wasn't there really ... When I was very little he came over to England [and we] came much later. So, in that sense, I didn't have any fathering to, to a large degree, when I was little.*

(Sikh father, India-born, 40–49 years, degree)

That said, many men clearly felt that their father had had a significant presence in their lives, so that limited direct contact was not necessarily taken to imply that their father was unconcerned about their upbringing. Rather, men identified the sacrifices that their fathers had made for them and the investments they had made in terms of material provisioning. Furthermore, several respondents, both mothers and fathers, reported that their own father had been very close, highlighting the dangers of over-generalising a 'traditional' form of fathering among the preceding generation.

*I remember like. My Abba [father] was very good, a very good person. And I can say that throughout our childhood he was very affectionate and took great care of us ... I have learnt from my father. The thing that I have learnt from him is to love and be affectionate [maya] towards my children.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

In terms of providing a role model for current fathering, most of our respondents identified elements of their own father's approach that they would like to emulate as well as parts that they rejected. Dimensions of being a father that respondents identified as worth preserving most often included: being a good material provider; paying attention to child development in terms of religion, family values, educational attainment and good manners/respectfulness; and also providing love. Things that were to be modified included: spending more time in direct contact with the child; having a closer and more open relationship; and better equipping the child to do well at school and take advantage of wider opportunities in UK society – all elements of the 'nurturer and protector' role identified above.

Some fathers were also explicit about their mothers being a source of inspiration and guidance for their own parenting. One of our Pakistani fathers described how his own father died when he was nine and that he tries to emulate the 'trust, love and kindness and the sort of friendship' that his mother showed to him. One Bangladeshi father expressed similar feelings:

*My father did the job of earning, but things like looking after his son, like hugging, playing, these things he has not done, these things were done by my mum, so I follow my mum a lot more.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

However, several respondents felt that they did not have role models to draw on, and that they were in the process of fashioning their father identity in their own particular way. It was also common for men whose understanding of being a father encompassed elements other than material provisioning (particularly quality time, a close relationship and aspects of personal care-giving) to express the sense that they were unusual. This was particularly the case among our Bangladeshi and Pakistani respondents. Many men referred to their father identity, or aspects of their role, in terms of 'being a mother' or 'being a friend', suggesting that they found it hard to reconcile the role they were adopting with their ideas of what it means to be a 'father'. Though it would be inaccurate to portray the fathers in this study as facing 'ideological dilemmas' (Edley and Wetherell, 1999) it was evident that some were struggling to confidently define what 'being a father' meant for them.

These feelings of being atypical and of forging new identities in isolation strike a chord with Williams's (2008) findings among white British fathers. But, interestingly, our fieldwork suggested that father identities embracing dimensions of 'nurturing and protecting' and even 'direct personal care-giving' were not, in fact, so unusual. It seemed that perceptions of a 'traditional' Asian fathering ideal were persisting despite the existence of a variety of forms of fathering in practice. A number of factors may contribute to this situation, including: the fact that fathering is,

to a large extent, enacted in private; some fathers tend towards concealment of 'non-traditional' fathering identities and behaviours; and there are significant obstacles to change so that the shift in father identities may be more pronounced than the shifts in actual fathering inputs (Chapters 4 and 5).

## Conclusions

The above findings have illustrated the very prominent place that being a father had in the self-identity of the majority of the men we interviewed. There was considerable consistency across the four religio-ethnic groups, and across age, migration and educational status, in the ways in which men talked about what it means to be a father. In particular, most men saw their fathering role as important and actively claimed associated responsibilities that transcended those of material provisioner, though this remained an essential dimension.

*Everybody is equal, the way the mother advises, or the way a mother should give advice, the father should give it in the same way I mean. Same responsibilities, both have equal responsibilities.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, ≤ GCSE)

*I think [the father role], it's as important as mother to be there, it's a joint role. It's not just one can do it, you both have to be there. It's a two job not a one man job. It's teamwork. I would say so.*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 30–39 years, degree)

That said, there was evidence of considerable differences in the realm of personal care-giving. While several men told us that contributing to personal care-giving was part of what it means to be a father, others distanced themselves from this dimension of parenting. Thus, despite a strong declared emphasis on shared responsibility and the need to work as a team to ensure good child outcomes, significant gendered differences in parenting roles and responsibilities persisted.

Though some recent work among majority white men has suggested that the income-earner role is a less salient dimension of father identity in modern Britain than in previous generations (Dermott, 2003; Williams, 2008), Lewis's (2000) review of fathering research overall tends to present a very similar picture to that presented above.

# 3 Experiencing fatherhood

## Summary points

- The majority of the fathers interviewed aspired to and had close and loving relationships with their children.
- Many respondents explained their desired relationship in terms of being a ‘friend’, and actively distanced themselves from what they saw as the ‘typical Asian father’ whom they characterised as a distant and authoritarian figure to be respected.
- Fathers (and mothers) in all four religio-ethnic groups described their desire to foster a close relationship not just in terms of personal fulfilment, but also in terms of the protection it would afford against adverse child outcomes (‘going astray’).
- Though the fathers we interviewed often identified parenting as ‘hard work’, the majority felt that the rewards greatly outweighed the costs and sacrifices. This was felt to be particularly the case for children in the 3–8 years age range under study, which was associated with having fun, being able to chat and share interests, and taking pleasure in the child’s development.
- Many of our fathers talked of enjoyment and fulfilment. Children were identified as a source of pride, happiness, entertainment, stress relief and feeling young.
- However, some fathers expressed a huge sense of responsibility and associated worry, and a few identified their fathering

role as a source of negative feelings and stress.

- Some found direct personal care-giving tiring and frustrating. Pressures to provide materially and also allocate time for direct contact with children were felt to be stressful by some fathers.
- Most respondents felt confident in their ability to fulfil their fathering role and believed that their contributions were valuable to their children’s development. Where fathers felt less sure of their performance this usually related to the amount of ‘quality time’ they were managing to give.
- Despite the strong emphasis on closeness in the father–child bond and fulfilment through fathering expressed, many (though not all) respondents believed mothers have closer relationships and stronger bonds with children. In some cases, these understandings were underpinned by religious teachings and/or beliefs about ‘natural’ differences between men and women.

## Introduction

Fatherhood research has tended over the years, despite some early exceptions, to focus predominantly on the doing of fathering rather than on the experiencing of fatherhood by fathers. While motherhood has often been considered a life-changing event, the consequences of becoming and being a father for men’s lives and well-being have been comparatively overlooked. However, recent studies have suggested that men’s

commitment to children through fathering, and the types and extent of inputs that are provided by men to their children, is influenced not only by how important being a father is to a man's sense of self, but also by the satisfaction that men get through performing their fathering roles (for example, Fox and Bruce, 2001). Further, it is important to understand the implications of being a father for men's own well-being. The present chapter explores these issues for our Asian fathers.

## Father-child relationships

Our interviews with both fathers (and mothers where available) suggested that the majority of fathers aspired to, and in many cases had, close and loving relationships with their children. Most fathers across the four religio-ethnic groups described an ideal of intimate, close relationships with their children. Fathers talked about having a special relationship, distinguished by openness (both sharing of experiences and a lack of concealment of information) and love. Fathers expressed their strong emotional attachments to their children and the positive feelings associated with a loving relationship. Fathers told us how it felt good being called 'Abba', 'Abu' or 'Daddy', and how they took pleasure in their child resembling them, or taking after them in certain positive traits, or learning from their own example. Fathers clearly enjoyed their current close relationships and very much wanted these to continue on into the future.

*It's probably one of the best things you can have. Loving somebody and to have that love there and somebody to love you back.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

*Sometimes I just talk to him and I talk to him about real adult things just to sort ... 'cause he's my son I can sit there and I say 'what do you reckon?' He don't give me a reply 'cause he ain't got a clue what's going on but that's my happiest times 'cause I've got my partner there. He's my like. He's my blood, do you know what I mean? He's mine, he's my boy.*

(Sikh father, UK-born, 20–29 years, degree)

A large number of respondents explained their desired relationship in terms of being a 'friend', and several distanced themselves from what they saw as the 'typical Asian father' whom they characterised as a distant figure to be respected but not communicated with. This mirrors Dermott's (2003) and Williams's (2008) findings among white men.

*I mean what I'd say is I think me and my father ... I mean my father was a really, really strong, a strong man, he was a very strong disciplinarian and I think that there was an element of respect bordered on the line of fear for my dad. And I think that that's very typical for a lot of Asian men of my generation. Which unfortunately has its strengths and also has its negatives ... It's a good discipline, respecting your parents and your family. But in a negative sense there's almost an unnecessary gap between parents and children from Pakistani and probably say for the Bengali community. So you almost fear your dad, you know, you fear getting told off by him, you fear getting sort of scolded if you did badly.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 40–49 years, degree)

*I think instead of a father, I would like to become more a friend to him than a father. So that he can approach to me, he can talk to me about anything.*

(Gujarati father, UK-born, 30–39 years, GCSE)

*Fathers' relationship with children should be like that of a friend, I think this is good ... it's best ... very good if you are like a friend, then the child will be able to tell lot of things as a friend to the father and the father would be able to explain many things to the son in a friendly manner.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 20–29 years, ≤GCSE)

Fathers (and mothers) across all four religio-ethnic groups described the rationale for fostering a close relationship not just in terms of personal

fulfilment, but also in terms of the protection it would afford against adverse child outcomes. Fathers, particularly those who were UK-born to migrant parents, referred to how they had actively hidden things from their own parents, or felt unable to share problems and worries. Above all, fathers reported wanting their children to be able to communicate freely so that they turn to them for advice rather than to others who might lead them down the wrong path.

Several respondents made reference to gender in their discussions and descriptions of father–child relationships, but there was no consistency in how they felt having a son versus having a daughter impacted upon the relationship, particularly during the age range of focus (3–8 years). There was evidence of some degree of son preference among a minority of respondents, but this was not a major theme, and most respondents across all four religio-ethnic groups expressed satisfaction with the children they had, or a preference for both boys and girls. One Bangladeshi father spoke enthusiastically about the way he can relate to his son and enjoy activities together like watching TV and going out on special trips. He reported enjoying his special ‘father–son chats’ and described his son as ‘another one of me!’ However, other respondents felt that their daughters were special ‘Daddy’s girls’ and that they had ‘better links’ with daughters than with sons.

## Rewards and sacrifices

Though the fathers we interviewed often identified parenting as ‘hard work’, the majority of narratives suggested that the Asian men in this study felt that the rewards of fathering greatly outweighed the costs and sacrifices. The 3–8 years age range was associated by many fathers with having fun, being able to chat and share interests, and taking pleasure in the child’s development. It was commonly identified as more interesting than infancy as well as being a time when a father could play a more involved role, and a less worrisome period than secondary school and the teenage years. It was clear that the majority of our fathers were gaining pleasure through the *current* experience of fathering and not merely anticipating future rewards. Many of our fathers talked of

enjoyment and fulfilment and their reports were largely mirrored in what wives (where interviewed) told us about their husbands (where interviewed).

*The closer you are involved the more you’ll enjoy, the more they will love you.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

*I enjoy myself a lot! He is my adorable son! Definitely!*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 40–49 years, degree)

*It’s just amazing. It’s the best thing that can happen to you really.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, degree)

*I love hearing that he’s a well-behaved, good-looking boy. You just feel so powerful. You feel great. It’s the best thing in the world.*

(Sikh father, UK-born, 20–29 years, degree)

These positive feelings of fulfilment and reward were associated both with direct interaction with the children (such as playing in the park or taking them out for a meal) and with the sense of being a ‘good father’. Observing and monitoring the child’s progress and development clearly brought satisfaction to many fathers, both being dimensions linked to the ‘nurturer/protector’ role. A related area that was commonly mentioned was the satisfaction and pride felt when children are respectful and well-mannered, behaving appropriately in the company of relatives or members of the wider religio-ethnic community. This aspect related to the father’s role as a link to the outside world. There were also examples of fathers expressing fulfilment and satisfaction through providing well financially for their children, for instance seeing them well-dressed or being able to take them on trips. Some fathers also expressed enjoyment through the provision of personal care.

*No. I feel proud when I'm talking to someone, oh I feed him or I change his nappy, I feel good ... Yeah. I always tell them. Like when he was little I used to do it. Yeah I share with my other friends who are married or unmarried. It's a nice experience. As I say, I'm enjoying every moment.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

There were, nevertheless, some fathers who identified their fathering role as a source of negative feelings and experiences. While for some this indicated ambivalence and a complexity of feelings associated with the highs and lows of parenting, a minority of fathers appeared to find fathering particularly difficult. For some, this related to the 'constant demands' at home to provide direct personal care or interact with the children which they found tiring and frustrating. For others, the downsides related primarily to the huge sense of responsibility and associated worry. A few fathers found the pressures to provide materially for their children to be stressful.

*Living in this country. Because it's not our country, it's quite difficult because we have to manage everything properly. If anything is missed then the whole chain will be broken. Money-wise, home-wise, the children, I mean care, look after, my studies, her [wife's] studies. I mean all these things are interconnected about being here. If we had been in Pakistan I won't have any problem I think, I will have more support.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 30–39 years, degree)

*A typical day is just get up, get ready, go to work, come home and er, children are sleeping or stuff. It's gone wrong somewhere, got to sort it out. And er, or, you know, there's always something to do, something like children's got karate or swimming or stuff you can do, so you're busy with that. Running around, trying to sort that out for them. We've got shopping, clothes, food, everything, you know. Like I say it's all family. And um, for yourself, don't get time, just to sit down, not any more. Or if you*

*do try and make time to sit down then it's not fair on your other half and then the pressure starts building up and causes arguments. So there's nothing you can do.*

(Sikh father, UK-born, 30–39 years, ≤ GCSE)

Several fathers also felt over-stretched and guilty at not being able to devote sufficient 'quality time' to their children and struggling to balance competing demands, primarily from work and other family members. These fathers expressed their desire to fulfil their own and their partner's expectations of being closely involved in their child's upbringing and felt that they were not only missing out on short-term enjoyment but also risked losing the closeness with their child that they wanted in the longer term.

*I used to sit next to her cot and look at her because she was asleep and I didn't want to wake her up. It wasn't nice. I thought I wasn't being involved and I wasn't seeing her grow up and that's where I went wrong with my parents because my father used to work all the time and I never saw him and I thought I am not going to do the same with my children. [During period of long working hours]*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, degree)

Negative experiences that some men associated with being a father also related to the impact having children had on other dimensions of their life. Some respondents bemoaned the limited time and activities that they were able to enjoy together with their wives as well as with friends and in leisure pursuits. Other respondents highlighted the way in which their fathering responsibilities impacted upon the time available for pursuing their individual aspirations for higher education or career advancement. These themes were, however, relatively uncommon.

Other family members and circumstances outside the immediate father–child relationship could also significantly affect the man's experience of his fathering role, either supporting or undermining his sense of fulfilment and

achievement. This theme is explored further in Chapter 5.

## Confidence and competence

The study explored men's confidence in performing their fathering role as well as the extent to which men (and other significant people) felt that their parenting contribution was important, since these factors were likely to affect both men's own fulfilment and rewards from parenting, as well as their willingness (and opportunity) to provide specific fathering inputs. Our interviews revealed differences in the extent to which fathers felt confident and competent in their fathering roles, though no particular patterns emerged across the four religio-ethnic groups.

It was common for fathers to speak positively about their fathering role, both in terms of feeling comfortable and confident to perform it and in terms of the contribution they felt it made to their child(ren)'s life and development. In several cases, fathers were also confident in stating that their contribution as a father was directly beneficial to their wives, by being supportive and taking a 'teamwork' approach. Several fathers spontaneously compared themselves positively to other men, as well as their own fathers. They even talked about offering other men advice on how to be a 'good' father, illustrating their belief that they were doing well in their fathering role. These positive comparisons tended to focus on spending time with children, being close and open, and seeking enjoyment and fulfilment through being with one's children.

*I think she [child's mother] realises that I'm good. Not blowing my own trumpet. She wants me to have an input as a father and I have a good input in his life.*

(Sikh father, UK-born,  
20–29 years, degree)

*Yeah, I feel quite proud, I think I do the right things.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born,  
36–39 years, A level equivalent)

*No, I think when compared to others, I am doing better than others.*

(Bangladeshi father, UK-born,  
30–39 years, A level equivalent)

A number of fathers acknowledged that their parental role and specific inputs to their children were distinct from those of their child's mother, and in some cases that their contributions were much narrower in scope. They nevertheless felt that their inputs were beneficial to the child's development and well-being.

*I think it's very good for H that she's got two different approaches really.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

Even so, a minority of fathers in all four religio-ethnic groups expressed a lack of confidence in their performance as fathers.

*I don't know how much I have done. On many occasions I have not been able to do everything for him. But within myself I have these thoughts [of what I should be doing] ... God knows! I mean I try, but I feel I should do better, do even more for the children.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born,  
30–39 years, ≤ GCSE)

*Everybody cannot do everything for child. [You] cannot do that. We try our best, simply. We try our best. But, it is very difficult.*

(Gujarati father, India-born,  
40–49 years, GCSE)

Where fathers most often felt inadequate related to their ability to spend protected 'quality time' with their children.

*I feel under a lot, under more pressure now than I think it were when I were a child with my parents. I could understand when my dad went to work, I could understand certain things ... He [son] embarrasses me sometimes you know, I mean saying 'daddy taking us seaside*

*it's nice and sunny outside' and all sorts of stuff like that that I'd love to do, you know what I mean. Fulfil or take him out more.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

There were, additionally, a minority of fathers who worried about their inability to adequately fulfil their material provider role, and this could be a source of guilt and stress.

A lack of confidence and perceived competence was more commonly expressed in relation to specific behaviours and inputs than in relation to being a father generally. This tended to relate to elements of the personal care-giver role. For instance, it was common (though by no means universal) for men to express a lack of confidence in relation to direct personal care-giving, particularly to babies and young children. Some men did not feel confident going outside the house with more than one young child at a time; several would only look after their children alone for short periods; and several were not confident to prepare food for their children, or had a very limited repertoire.

*Actually I find it a bit difficult [laughs], I am not used to it so, I can't do nappy, I can't change nappy as well. [Laughs]*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, GCSE equivalent)

*I mean I gave him a bath in the evening but because he was so tiny I didn't feel comfortable so it was usually my wife or my mother what have him.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

In these cases, it was common for men's wives to concur with their husband's assessment of his skills and competence.

However, these perceived incompetencies were not generally linked to a sense of not being a 'good' father by either men or their wives. This illustrated how the care-giver role was not widely regarded as integral to being a father and that women recognised other important dimensions of their husband's fathering role.

It was also apparent that particular men had areas of parenting that they felt more or less confident in, and that there were often areas where men deferred to their wives' superior skill or knowledge (see Chapter 5). There were, however, no common patterns, these things being related to individual sets of skills, experience and preference rather than to notions about what fathers or mothers are best at providing.

## A mother's love

Despite the strong emphasis on closeness in the father-child bond and fulfilment through fathering, many of our Asian fathers felt that fathering and what men experience through fatherhood is distinct from mothers and motherhood. In several cases, respondents drew on a notion of 'natural' or 'biological' differences between men and women in their parenting inclinations and abilities and the empathy, understanding and love they can give to a child.

[Talking about separating from his son's mother]  
*I knew that he needs his mum and, like all children need their mum, probably more than me. He'll always have access to his dad but dad's always more financial than love, mum provides the caring thing. It's always nice to get on with your mum, you feel safe don't you?*

(Sikh father, UK-born, 20–29 years, degree)

*The main responsibility falls on the mother because the way a mother can nurture the child, fathers cannot do that ... He loves mum the most. Mother has the most love ... Mother is naturally better.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

*Mothers mean a lot more to maybe, most of the kids ... I mean the father is not as sympathetic, and you know, naturally man is a bit more aggressive than a mother is. Mother is always very soft touch, you know.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

Some respondents drew on religious teachings to explain their understanding of difference between mothers and fathers. For instance, in our Phase One focus group discussion with Bangladeshi fathers, a participant voiced a commonly mentioned tenet of Islam:

*A father could never match the nurturing of a mother ... In our religion a mother is given more priority, Prophet said that a mother deserves most love first, three times and then fourth person is the father.*

Similarly, one of our Sikh fathers explained:

*A father's love is ordinary, a father. I mean a mother is more. If you look at, go according to the Gurubani. Then guru is first – 'guru is my mother, guru is my father'. Meaning, they are the first teachers. What the children will become, how our thinking is. Mother's name is spoken first so mother must be bigger isn't it? The mother has given it birth. What, what, what has the father done there?*

(Sikh father, India-born,  
30–39 years, GCSE equivalent)

However, in other cases mothers' greater attachment and commitment to their children was linked more to the gendered division of responsibility for income-earning.

*Particularly the fathers have got more financially the responsibility, to give the financial support. But the mother, basically looking after, she used to give more time but because she can, because father is giving more time earning money. So he's out.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

## Conclusion

The great majority of our Asian fathers aspired to and had close and loving relationships with their children. Many respondents drew comparisons between this dimension of their fathering and that of their own father, or an imagined 'typical

Asian father', who was seen as somewhat distant and authoritarian. In this way, our findings mirror those of recent work with white British fathers that has emphasised an increasing ideal of intimacy between fathers and their children (Dermott, 2003; Williams, 2008). A further strong theme in our interviews was the enjoyment and pride gained through the day-to-day experiences of fathering. However, fulfilling fathering commitments and responsibilities, particularly juggling income generation and direct contact time with children, was a source of worry for a significant proportion of our fathers. Though generally confident in the value of their fathering inputs to their children, some of our respondents did lack self-assurance in some aspects of parenting, notably personal care-giving to small children, and several worried about not providing sufficient 'quality time'. Also, despite the closeness that many fathers had in their relationships with their children, it was still common for respondents to feel that a mother's bond was superior.

# 4 Extent and types of fathering contributions

## Summary points

- Fathers contributed to their children's upbringing in ways that involved direct interaction, but also by indirect means, via mothers and other people, and via role modelling.
- The majority, though not all, of our Asian fathers contributed to their children's upbringing through paid work and other material provision. There was, however, variation in the income-earning pressures felt by fathers and the hours devoted to work.
- Despite not being primarily responsible for personal childcare, a large number of fathers regularly contributed to feeding, bathing and other childcare tasks. Examples of fathers providing sole personal childcare were found across all four religio-ethnic groups. Mothers, however, usually retained responsibility for this area.
- Most respondents wanted to raise children who were both respected and respectful members of their own religio-ethnic community but also successful participants in UK society. Many parents, however, identified threats to these outcomes and perceived wider UK society as 'risky' for their children in various ways.
- Inputs that were felt to be important in terms of 'nurturing and protecting' children related to: supporting educational achievement; providing social, cultural and religious resources; supporting emotional development and discipline; promoting a safe environment; and provision of family.

- Across most of these 'nurturing and protecting' domains there were few clear patterns in paternal versus maternal inputs, and significant variation across families in the specific inputs provided.
- Fathers who worked long hours outside the home were not necessarily absent from personal childcare tasks. However, where men had limited direct contact with their children this time was more commonly devoted to focused, 'quality time' inputs such as playing and reading together.
- Despite many areas being 'shared' between mothers and fathers in many families, mothers often provided significantly greater inputs in terms of (i) discipline and boundary-setting, and (ii) short-term planning, organising and scheduling.

## Introduction

What fathers do with and for their children will be affected by ideas of what it means to be a father and what fathers should be doing (Chapter 2), as well as fathers' experiences of fathering (Chapter 3) and various external constraints and supports to fathering (factors explored in Chapter 5). However, the inputs made by fathers to their children will also depend upon more general notions of what is required to bring up a child successfully.

Family research has developed various models to examine what men do with and for their children. Lamb *et al.*'s (1985) much-cited three-part conceptualisation of paternal involvement (engagement, accessibility and responsibility) alerted researchers to the need to be aware of contributions other than those involving direct contact, particularly organising and planning.

More recent work has reiterated the inadequacy of dividing fathers' inputs into financial and material provision and direct childcare. It has usefully sought to expand the range of activities and inputs that are recognised as contributions to children's well-being and outcomes (Palkovitz, 1997; NCFE, 2001; Stueve and Pleck, 2003). Further, while much past literature has focused on comparing the amount (and type) of inputs provided by fathers as compared to mothers (and commonly concluded that mothers' contributions are far greater), it is also pertinent to examine the type and extent of inputs that fathers provide in absolute terms.

The present chapter seeks to describe the type and extent of contribution (or 'input') provided by fathers to their children and to present these findings within the broader context of what fathers and mothers understood to be desirable child outcomes and necessary childrearing inputs.

## Domains of parenting and modes of paternal input

In Chapter 2, we identified four dimensions to the father's role that were assumed, to a greater or lesser extent, by our respondents: material provisioner, personal care-giver, nurturer and protector, and link to the outside world. While the first two of these mapped quite straightforwardly onto particular sets of behaviours, the latter two were broader and implied a set of diverse and interlinked behaviours and inputs. In this chapter, we consider these in five broad areas:

- supporting educational development and academic achievement;
- providing social, cultural and religious resources;
- supporting emotional development, providing discipline and guidance;
- protecting and promoting a safe environment for the child;
- provision of family.

The extent and type of inputs provided by fathers within each of these domains were found to vary

greatly, reflecting in part differential allocation of tasks between mothers, fathers and other carers, but also different understandings of what type of inputs are required and attainable. It was noticeable that similar inputs were not always understood in the same way. Some people would label a particular behaviour as something that is done for the child while others might see it differently. For example, the distinction between household maintenance work and personal childcare was blurred. Some respondents saw cooking children's meals as household work and commonly identified this as a wife's duty; other respondents saw it as an input to the child and something that a father could legitimately be expected to do.

Our interviews indicated that fathers adopt a diversity of ways to provide inputs to their children. *Direct* inputs included face-to-face engagement, remote interaction using the telephone and, less commonly, written communication, such as leaving notes for the children when they returned from school.

*I like to show him, this is the way to do it, and generally teach him to improve. Yes, at present, I go to the school, we look after them alongside their school. We look after them, like take them and bring them back from school, helping them with their homework ... When I take them to school in the morning and I find that there is no one on the computer chair, then I get my son on the chair and ask him to click on something and also show him how to start the computer.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

*No, during the day, when I am at work, we have three breaks. So, in the breaks I call them three or four times ... When I am not around at home from 4 to 5 o'clock, at that time too I call them. Whenever I miss them I phone them.*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

In addition, fathers provided significant inputs by *indirect* means including: information-gathering (for instance, in relation to schools or health issues); decision-making (for instance, in relation

to whether a child should attend out-of-school activities); monitoring (for example, checking over school marks and progress); planning and organising (for example, arranging trips to visit relatives).

Several fathers who were working long hours away from home reported this mode of contributing to their children's daily lives.

*I mean first of all to keep an eye on what he is doing and what's his outcome. If he spends a good time in the school. What is his result. I mean to say that what's [on] his mind and if he needs some [guidance]. I think to keep an eye on the children is a very important thing.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan born, 30–39 years, degree)

*Me and [wife] take decisions. We say things like we have been here for seven years, we will stay here for another 2–3 years and after that we will go to India ... We talk about these things.*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

A further important mode was *role modelling*, which involved behaving in a particular way to inculcate desired behaviours or values in the child. For example, a Gujarati father articulated how he is providing religious educational inputs:

*Interviewer: And so, have you started your child going to religious education classes or you started teaching him about religion at home at all?*

*Father: Nothing! He just sort of picks up from you. Because if you pray to god everyday, your child will see you, I mean.*

(Gujarati father, UK-born, 30–39 years, ≤ GCSE)

Finally, many fathers were found to provide inputs to their children *via other family members*, particularly the mother and grandparents. This mode was used to access information about the child for monitoring purposes as well as to identify needs, and direct or delegate tasks

to be performed by others. For example, one father reported how, if the weather is good, he telephones from work and asks the grandfather to take the child to the park. Another described the way he works via his wife to input into the decision-making regarding his children:

*V [mother] does it all, but we discuss. Like, A did this today, this one has done this, is it good? What do you say? What should I say to the teacher? And then I say that if they have said this, you tell the teacher, this and this. I give her some guidance as to what she should do. If I don't have the time I ask her to tell them everything. And she says, yes, everything will be done.*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

Fathers varied greatly in the extent to which they deliberated over their contributions to childrearing. Some interviews suggested a great degree of motivation and creativity in the ways they used these different modes to provide inputs to their children, while others appeared to slip into patterns of fathering with very little forethought or reflection. Some fathers, who at first appeared to be rather uninvolved in their children's lives and to be providing limited inputs, were, on closer inspection, found to be using modes other than direct interaction to make contributions to their children's upbringing.

Across most parenting domains the majority of fathers tended to combine modes, thereby providing a complex of inputs to their children. Table 2 provides illustrations of some of the inputs in each parenting domain that were provided via the four different modes described above.

We turn now to describe in more detail the types of inputs that were considered necessary and important and how these were provided in different families.

## Material and financial inputs

Not surprisingly, the majority of our fathers and mothers considered providing adequately for their children in material terms to be very important. Fathers often saw this contribution as including not

Table 2: Examples of specific fathering inputs reported by mode across the four dimensions of the fathering role

Dimensions of the fathering role	Parenting domains	Examples of specific inputs/activities by mode of input			
		Direct (face to face, phone, letters, notes)	Indirect (decision-making, monitoring, planning/organising)	Role modelling (acting, behaving, speaking)	Via mother or other actors (directing/delegating)
Material provider	Material and financial	Shopping with the child	Providing income for child's needs Allocation of resources Identifying needs Saving for future		Supporting the mother in her work by sharing household work, working flexibly
Care-giver	Care-giving	Bathing and dressing Putting the child to bed Cooking for the child	Arranging child's medical appointments Planning child's day		Monitoring child's diet through mother
Nurturer and protector	Emotional support and boundary setting	Listening to the child and encouraging her Providing information and guidance Explaining rules	Recognising child's emotional needs Finding out age-specific information	Being in control of own emotions Exercising discipline	Finding out from mother about child's activities/behaviour
	Educational	School drop/pick-up Helping with homework	Finding out information about schools Planning house move to access schools	Reading Having educational aspirations	Advising mother on what to ask the teacher
	Social, cultural and religious resources	Telling religious stories Taking child for cultural activities	Monitoring child's dress, ways of greeting people Organising for mother-tongue classes	Practising religion Expressing a strong cultural identity	Asking grandparents to teach religion and culture to the child
	Provision of family	Providing child with sibling/s Teaching child to live with extended family	Organising child's visit to relatives Treating siblings equally so that close bond develops	Maintaining relationships with extended family Fulfilling family obligations	Sending the child with mother to visit relatives back home/locally
	Provision of safe environment	Providing direct child supervision so that child is at home and not in outside childcare	Monitoring school environment to protect the child from racism, bullying		Monitoring relatives' behaviour towards child through mother
Link to the outside world	Social, cultural and religious resources	Taking child to mosque, gym, library and other outside places	Making arrangements for visit back home	Maintaining social networks Being on mosque committees	Identifying cultural activities and asking mother to take the child

only income for necessities but also other material needs such as good housing, a garden and toys. The inputs described also often included making savings for the future, particularly a marriage fund or an education fund. Fathers also saw appropriate allocation of resources as associated with this domain. The majority of our fathers were in work and reported providing materially for their children. Where men were out of work, they still recognised

income generation as an integral part of what it means to be a father (Chapter 2).

Fathers also often described how providing adequately for their children could have implications for their ability to provide other parental inputs. One Sikh father, who was the sole income-earner in his family, had been living away from his two daughters for employment reasons for the previous three years.

*For me. My problem is. If I had this much money and everything, I would never have come here. Because of money. To make a good life for the kids. You know how much dowry they ask, this and that. I have to take all this into consideration. My aim is that they can have a good life and be able to stand on their own two feet.*

(Sikh father, India-born, 30–39 years, ≤ GCSE India)

There were some apparent differences between our four religio-ethnic groups in terms of aspirations for income-earning and the types of material inputs that were considered necessary. The most notable differences were in relation to expenditure on education. A majority of our Gujarati and Sikh fathers expressed the need to provide income to ensure good educational opportunities, particularly via the use of private schooling. While these income-earning imperatives were not entirely absent from the Bangladeshi and Pakistani interviews (with some families having moved to more expensive areas in order to access ‘better’ state schools and a few talking about private schooling), they did, however, seem to be less common and intense. Pressures to earn higher incomes implied long working hours for many Gujarati and Sikh fathers.

## Personal care-giving

Our fathers’ and mothers’ interviews included many examples of day-to-day care-giving such as bathing, supervising meals, sorting out children’s clothing and attending to health needs. The majority of respondents across all four religio-ethnic groups appeared to place great emphasis on the importance of children being well turned out, well fed and healthy.

Despite the fact that the personal care-giver role was not commonly considered to be part and parcel of a father identity (Chapter 2), in practice many of our fathers were involved in providing these inputs. In many cases, fathers’ contributions in this area were represented as being a ‘help’ for the mother and were often ad hoc rather than being routine, non-negotiable inputs.

*Yeah, I might [get them ready] and take them to school, but then again that depends on if I’m up and I’ve not gone somewhere.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

Also, several fathers reported inputs in this domain via *indirect* modes more than *direct* inputs, for instance information-gathering for, and decision-making about, the child’s various day-to-day needs.

Nevertheless, there were examples of fathers who currently (or had previously) provided sole direct personal childcare on either a full-time or part-time basis. This involvement in direct personal childcare was particularly common among our Gujarati and Sikh fathers, but was found across all four religio-ethnic groups.

Rasheed had three children including a 10-month-old baby. His wife suffered with migraines, and Rasheed described how he had provided almost all the direct childcare to the children since his wife became pregnant. Rasheed’s wife described him as ‘being just like a mum’.

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

Ravi and his wife were both working over 30 hours a week but organised their work shifts in such a way that one parent was always at home with the child. Ravi clearly provided all the personal care to his child on a day-to-day basis during the week. Both parents’ interviews suggested that Ravi is extremely proactive in identifying and meeting his child’s personal care needs. He reads up on health issues and makes decisions about what is best for his child’s health. He cooks and makes sure that only healthy food is eaten and pays attention to the type of clothes his child is wearing.

(Gujarati father, UK-born, 30–39 years, ≤ GCSE)

Even so, there were certain areas of care-giving where fathers’ inputs were uncommon, particularly nappy-changing, cooking for the child, and washing, ironing and sorting out children’s clothes. Factors restricting these inputs are discussed further in Chapter 5.

There were also some fathers whose interviews revealed their very negligible contributions in this domain, the majority of whom considered personal care-giving to be solely the mother's role. Nevertheless, many respondents identified this as a domain that is undergoing change with more and more fathers sharing personal care-giving inputs with mothers.

## Nurturing, protecting and linking to the outside world

As noted in Chapter 2, a prominent theme across all four religio-ethnic groups was the perception that UK society presents many obstacles to successful parenting and that there are significant dangers that children may 'go astray'. Fathers, and mothers, commonly wanted to raise children who were respectful and respected members of the religio-ethnic community (or at a minimum the extended family) and who were also well-equipped to take advantage of the opportunities of wider UK society. However, there were also common concerns relating to drug and alcohol use, criminality, poor educational performance and lack of career prospects, premarital sexuality/intimacy, a breakdown in respect for the older generation, a lack of commitment to the extended family, and experience of racist abuse and discrimination.

*Oh, yeah, I mean there's too much influence from, there's too much peer pressure. [Unclear] it's always been there. Um, I'm worried about when she grows up and starts to finally be, not a girl, more a lady, now. You're worried about that period. Um, because, then there's going to be other influences. You've got boyfriends and stuffs happening then, yeah.*

(Sikh father, Kenya-born, 40–49 years, degree)

*We don't want him to indulge in this culture you know.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 30–39 years, degree)

Though common across all four religio-ethnic groups, the need for fathers and mothers to

'nurture and protect' was particularly strongly expressed by Bangladeshi and Pakistani respondents, and was often used to explain why women were taking a full-time home-based role and men had made particular work-related decisions that allowed them time with their children.

*Yes, that is there, it's natural, because after seeing the environment and surroundings of today, I do have fears about what will happen. That he should not pick up any bad habits, things like, where he goes, with whom he goes.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, ≤ GCSE)

*Children need to respect their elders. The environment here is completely wrong, topsy-turvy.*

(Pakistani fathers' group discussion, Pakistan- and UK-born, 20–49 years)

Specific inputs within this broad area can be organised into five domains, as described below.

### Supporting educational development and achievement

A desire for children to achieve well academically, and recognition of the importance of a father's contribution to this success, was very common across all four religio-ethnic groups. The majority of fathers were found to be making inputs to their children in this domain.

Fathers' contributions often included *direct* inputs such as: providing intellectual stimulation, for example by telling stories; inspiring the child and building their confidence through chatting and taking them out to places of interest; and encouraging the child to study and helping with the completion of homework. *Indirect* inputs that were commonly mentioned included: creating the right environment for homework; attending parents' evenings; identifying good schools and taking steps to gain entry; and monitoring progress. Inputs *via others* included: taking the children for extracurricular activities such as music lessons; engaging private tutors; and supporting

the wife to provide direct educational inputs to the child. However, many fathers did not see themselves as role models in this area but rather aspired to their children achieving more than they had done academically.

Both mothers and fathers were commonly felt to have responsibilities in relation to educational success, so that if a father was not providing inputs this was not necessarily considered irresponsible or a failure to be a 'good' father. In addition, there was variation across respondents in terms of the extent and type of inputs that were felt to be necessary and appropriate for successful child outcomes, as well as the types of aspirations parents held for their children. There was a lack of consistent patterns of paternal (or maternal) inputs, with individual circumstances and preferences largely dictating behaviours. The two following quotations from UK-born Pakistani fathers illustrate the diversity of involvement in children's education:

*Well, education wise, hopefully they do go to a good school, and education does come first as well in the sense that you know, I do make sure that my daughter does her homework, try and help her, and then once they've done that then they can do anything.*

*Interviewer: Is that your role or is it your wife's role or is it a combined thing?*

*Do you know, to be honest, I'm going to be honest, put my hands up, it's more her role than mine, but I'm coming in to it. Because I believe when they're younger you've got to let them do whatever they want and you know, some people differ in that, and now she's getting her homework, you know, I do help her.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

*That is really important for me and my wife, pushing the education side of things, yes ... I think taking her out and showing her, showing her different things has really, really helped [her development]. Because I started off really at a young age with her taking her to museums and things and she's picked up a lot of things ...*

*And, I do read to her when she goes to sleep most nights.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, degree)

Thus, while some fathers clearly saw themselves as a 'teacher' to their child, others portrayed themselves in a supportive or encouraging role. The following excerpt from a Bangladeshi father's interview further illustrates how some men sought to supplement the quality and scope of what was taught at school (as well as providing indirect inputs in this area).

*[My daughter] has got a private tutor to teach her one hour a week. An English teacher comes and I don't teach her English. The reason is 'cause my accent, because it will be deep. I don't teach her English ... I read book, I do I teach her Islamic teachings and I do teach books as well. I teach, I do maths, writing I do. 'Cause her teacher's writing is not, I don't like that. And I like good hand writing. So, I teach her now writing.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

A second important area of variation was the extent to which children were engaged in organised activities with other instructors, such as music lessons and private academic tuition. Several fathers reported working longer hours in order to be able to afford to pay for a private tutor for their children, thereby potentially reducing the amount of time for direct father–child interaction.

### **Providing social, cultural and religious resources**

The provision of social, cultural and religious resources was a topic of discussion in the majority of our interviews. Most fathers felt that they should be actively inputting into their child's upbringing in this domain, but again, as with educational development, both fathers and mothers commonly shared responsibility, resulting in great diversity in how inputs were provided in practice.

Despite broad, commonly expressed concerns, there was significant variation across fathers (and mothers) in the extent to which particular inputs were considered important, as well as some

degree of ambivalence and uncertainty as to what should be prioritised. The majority (though not all) of our respondents felt strongly that the religious instruction of their children was important and that their children should acquire both religious knowledge and a self-identity as a follower of their Hindu, Sikh or Muslim religion. However, there was more variation in terms of whether the acquisition of mother-tongue language skills was considered a priority and what types of inputs parents (and fathers in particular) should give in terms of shaping the ethnic or cultural identity of their child. While some respondents felt very strongly that their child should develop a strong ethnic identity and a sense of difference from the majority white British population and other ethnic groups, others were more ambivalent and emphasised the importance of their child gaining a 'British' self-identity either alongside, or even in preference to, a minority ethnic identity.

*He needs to be confident in walking into Gurudwara, he needs the harmonium lessons, the English lessons. They get it all in Gurudwara, our community's fantastic, they're so into children. The Gurudwara just up the road, it's got Punjabi language school, it's got a gym for kids. Our community's geared totally to educating our children and instilling Sikh values in them and that and he needs all that.*

(Sikh father, UK-born, 20–29 years, degree)

*My opinions have changed over time, I think she needs to know about Asian language as well yes. I do think it's important, yes. I didn't in the beginning, no. I didn't think she needed it really but I think as she's getting older you realise that she will need it. If you think about her roots really and then it just fits into place that she will need to know her own language as well.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, degree)

*He calls himself English, he's not Pakistani, he says. He actually says that to me, 'I'm English, you're Pakistani!' I goes, 'all right, OK son'. 'Cause he's born in England and he says he's*

*English ... But I says, 'look, ethnic minority I'm born in Pakistan, so therefore you're a Pakistani as well' ... End of the day, I said to him, 'you're British'. That's all it is. I won't really say you're English or Pakistani 'cause um, I says to him you're British.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

*Knowing who they are. Not having to be strictly wrapped around the concerns of religion. But, just knowing that they're Sikhs, rather than uh, being put together with the rest of the Indian community. Yes, we're Indians, but we're Sikhs as well. And, knowing that you're Sikh. I think that's important, yeah.*

(Sikh father, Kenya-born, 30–39 years, degree)

A large proportion of our Muslim respondents emphasised the distinction between culture and religion and placed greater weight on the retention of Islamic values and Muslim identity across generations. Nevertheless, many also emphasised the importance of passing on Bengali, Punjabi or Urdu language skills and cultural resources.

*I'll make him emphasise he's a Muslim rather than Pakistani. You know I would say you're a British Muslim rather than a Pakistani Muslim.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

*You know cultural doesn't mean anything ... being a Muslim is the most important thing.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

*If she learns Islamic culture, Islam is suitable anywhere. This is like universal culture. But Bengali culture's not because um, obviously I want to teach my daughter Bangla because it's like a language because we speak it. And also if she knows Bangla then she will, when Bangladeshi relations, my mother and all, they speak Bangla ... My identity, I'm a Muslim. I'm*

*not a nationalist. My world basically is where I live.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 40–49 years, degree)

*He will learn about Bangladesh but before he must learn about this country. Because this is his country, he will live here, grow up here. He will be British Muslim, not Bangladeshi.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

In practice, we found that paternal contributions included both inputs aimed at preserving valued cultural norms and those that were intended to protect children from perceived undesirable influences of the ‘majority culture’.

Fathers’ inputs included teaching the ‘mother tongue’, religious education, instruction in food preparation, observing traditions, cultural etiquette such as greetings and how to show respect to elders, and informing children about the way of life and environment ‘back home’. Role modelling was an important mode for most fathers, for instance demonstrating religious behaviours by visiting religious places, observing fasts, praying at home and showing children how to greet and interact with visitors. A common direct mode that was reported was the telling of religious and cultural stories.

However, there was variation across families in terms of whether children were engaged in formal religious or language classes. While some parents opted to provide language and religious skills themselves at home, others sent their children to community centres and mosques, often significantly impacting upon the amount of time fathers and children could spend together. Many Muslim fathers described their children’s weekday routines as being very busy with mosque lessons taking up much of the evening. Among our Sikh and Gujarati families it was common for children to attend religious and language classes for a half-day at the weekends.

In order to protect children from external threats to religio-cultural values, several fathers reported monitoring and restricting external influences through various mechanisms such as sending them to faith schools or not leaving

children in after-school care. Many felt that this type of parental input would need to increase as their child became older and exposed to a wider range of external influences.

*To make a child a good Muslim in this country is really hard work [koshto] ... Ideally we would like a madrasah where they could learn both English and also Arabic.*

(Bangladeshi mothers’ group discussion, both UK- and Bangladesh-born)

However, here again there was variation in the extent to which fathers prioritised these inputs. For example, one Bangladeshi father spoke at length about the negative influences that he perceived in UK society; he already took many steps to shield his 6-year-old daughter from undesirable influences and shape her in the Islamic tradition that he ascribed to, for instance by not allowing her to attend birthday parties, not having a television but rather letting her watch selected DVDs, encouraging her to dress modestly and be aware of her body, and closely monitoring what she is learning at school.

By contrast, another Bangladeshi father was less concerned about the negative influences of UK society and had no intention of sending his sons anywhere other than the local comprehensive which he said had been ‘good enough for me’:

*Teenagers will do what teenagers will do. It’s like they say, ‘dogs will be dogs and cats will be cats’, know what I mean? Course of nature. Let them enjoy teenage. I went through my teenage years. Let them go through theirs.*  
[Laughs]

(Bangladeshi father, UK-born, 30–39 years, degree)

Several respondents talked more specifically about the need to adequately prepare their children for active and successful participation in UK society. Inputs in this area included: ensuring the child is fluent in English (including use of idioms and so on); providing the child with experiences felt to be typical of the majority, e.g. holidays and trips; and building confidence and aspirations.

*Because I don't want my R [daughter] to speak Gujarati in the school. Even I know she doesn't understand English at all at that time. Because Gujarati is not in this country ... everybody does not understand Gujarati you know. After nursery, when she goes to primary school, would the teacher will be Gujarati? It will be an English teacher. This is England, first language is English, it's not Gujarat.*

(Gujarati mother, India-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

*We never went on any holidays or day trips with our parents because of the time commitments that they had. So we try to ensure these, on any days that we can, I'll do it. So, this Sunday we went to [name of park] and did some bike riding as a family, took them out. But I do a lot of these things, I want to do lots of these things. 'Cause one, I enjoy them and I think that they enjoy them and also at the same time they'll not feel insecure when they go to school and their peers are saying oh I've been here and I've been there and I've been here. Know what I mean? ... And I think things like this are really, really powerful. So, at the end of the day this is the society we live in. We have to rub shoulders with individuals.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born,  
40–49 years, degree)

*That's something always back of my mind that maybe teachers are not seeing her the same as the other children ... or not expecting her to do so well because it's her second language ... With ethnic minorities the rules are different in school isn't it? If they don't do so well as white children. It's not expected of them. But we want her to do well, we want her to achieve, you know.*

(Bangladeshi mother, Bangladesh-born,  
20–29 years, A level)

Since fathers often played a stronger role than mothers in terms of linking to the outside world, fathers were often the ones who took children out and about, taking advantage of local facilities like libraries and leisure centres and generally introducing children to the society around them.

### **Emotional development, support and boundary-setting**

As noted in Chapter 3, the importance to both mothers and fathers of having close and open relationships with their children was a major theme in the interviews. One motivation for this was the desire for children not to hide things from them and therefore not to be 'led astray'. Being close and open with children was also felt to contribute to their emotional development. As well as happiness, respondents identified a number of attributes that they felt were important to develop, including empathy for the less privileged, a sense of responsibility towards others and a sense of service.

*I think they [parents] should look after children. Children should be well. And amongst us South Asians this should happen more ... Because of not being looked after very well the children get diverted, they become bad. And the only reason I think is that children do not listen to their parents later on in life because when the children were young they did not care well for them.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born,  
20–29 years, A level equivalent)

Role modelling and direct inputs, especially focused 'quality time', seemed particularly important in this area. Some fathers reported a very high degree of inputs aimed at providing emotional support and guidance through talking to the child about their day, being aware of the child's activities and friends, finding out age-specific issues and applying them for the welfare of the child, and instilling aspirations. Other fathers' interviews contained expressing warmth and love for the child, but lacked concrete examples of guidance and emotional support. The majority of fathers from all four groups reported being involved in and valuing playing with their children (e.g. football), taking the child on outings, interacting with the child, sharing meals and going shopping.

A surprisingly large number of fathers reported limited *direct* inputs in the area of discipline. Though fathers often talked about what they regarded to be good and bad behaviour and the importance of teaching their children right from wrong, they were often reluctant to engage in

direct reprimands or the imposition of restrictions on their children.

In some cases the limited direct intervention related to an understanding that the child was still too young to be constrained and reprimanded and that this would come naturally with increased maturity. For instance, one Pakistani father described how his wife and other people thought of his son as being unruly but that he disagreed and believed that young childhood is a time for fun and freedom. A number of other fathers expressed the opinion that children need guidance but must also be allowed to try things out for themselves and this led them to have a more hands-off approach to discipline.

However, fathers' reluctance to be the disciplinarian more often seemed to relate to a fear that boundary-setting would compete with their desire for a close and loving 'friend-like' relationship. In contrast, mothers seemed to be more confident that the strength of their bond with their children would not be upset by providing strictness and routine. Indeed, several of the wives we interviewed expressed dissatisfaction at their husband's unwillingness to provide discipline to their children: as one Bangladeshi mother put it, 'he wants to be the friend and I'm the mother!'

*Mum is strict with him, Mum I would say, she's strict with him so she disciplines him. In my case, we are frank, we speak like a friend. I mean, I am not too strict with him.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

*It's friendly, not too strict. I think my wife sets more boundaries than me, yes.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, degree)

### **Protecting and promoting a safe environment**

In addition to concerns regarding threats to religious and cultural values, many parents, both mothers and fathers, expressed general concerns about risks to their children and the need to promote a safe environment. It was felt that parents needed to provide a secure, peaceful and non-discriminatory environment at home as

well as protecting the child from negative, harmful influences externally.

*I just feel it's dangerous out there and I would not let them go out on their own, even my kid who, he's 12, I have never ever let him go out to the shop on his own.*

(Pakistani mother, UK-born, 30–39, A level equivalent)

In most cases, respondents felt that risks would increase as their children got older and that there would be a greater need for monitoring of behaviour and influences. Parents talked about a desire to know where their children are, what they are doing, who they are keeping company with, and whether there is any threat to them, particularly in terms of racial abuse and bullying and exposure to drugs.

*The only thing I'm worried about is that I hope he doesn't go into a different direction you know like peer pressure at schools and things like that. You know what I mean if he don't mix with the wrong crowd and go into drugs and things like that.*

(Sikh father, UK-born, 40–49 years, A level equivalent)

More generally 'protective' inputs identified were: choosing the nursery/school; choosing the area to live in; chatting with the child daily about their routine; protecting the child from other people who can have negative effects; and escorting the child to and from school. As with other domains discussed above, there was great variety in terms of the specific inputs that fathers reported providing and it was common for both mothers and fathers to contribute to this area, particularly by working as a team to share information and discuss issues.

### **Provision of family**

The importance of family ties and the desire for children to be well-integrated into family networks was a common theme across our interviews, and was often linked in fathers' responses to religious or cultural values. Fathers often expressed a sense of interdependence between family members so that being an integrated member of the wider

family would mean both obligations and a source of support for their child in the future.

Many fathers explained how they treat their children so that the siblings remain close and will support one another when they grow up.

*I mean brother and ... he got the two sister. So whenever they need him or they need her ... make sure they stick together. In difficult time or may be in good time! Make sure they all together all the time!*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 40–49 years, degree)

In some cases, respondents were also explicit about hopes that their children would in future support them and live with them, a further reason for instilling the importance of family cohesion.

*When my grandmother was alive she never had a house. We used to keep her for a month or two then my uncle in Birmingham then my other auntie in Birmingham then one in Leeds they used to take it in turns a few months, everyone.*

*Interviewer: That's very interesting. Would you expect that of your children?*

*Respondent: We would want, we would want that yeah. What we would expect is another thing but we'd love to, you know. This is the kind of the nitty gritty family system we would want to have. That's why we emphasise with the extended family system.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

*[I'm] getting old. Yeah! Same is like I did for my father mother! You know, thousands miles away my home, still I remember my mother and father. So, make sure they do not forget me! What I have bought for them, how I have brought them up you know in this country!*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 40–49 years, degree)

Several fathers also reported a role for themselves in the marriage of their children, indicating their assumed responsibility in terms of perpetuating family across the next generation.

Some fathers reported facilitating linkages with relatives in the UK, as well as 'back home', so that the child could develop bonds with close relatives and have a sense of being part of a wider family. Many respondents contrasted the upbringing of children in the UK with that in their ancestral homes where children would receive inputs from a far wider set of adults and would have greater day-to-day interaction with cousins and other relatives. There were, however, some situations where fathers had sought to distance themselves and their children from family members perceived to be a bad influence, or to promote a different style of upbringing.

*My family, with my family, if I don't take him there [India], he's not going to see anybody. He doesn't know in future, he won't know who is my uncle, who is my granddad and who is my cousin. He will never know his family. So, I have to go.*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 40–49 years, ≤ GCSE)

In many cases, the provision of family and promotion of family values were achieved via role modelling, though this did often involve direct engagement between fathers and children, as, for example, when fathers took children to visit relatives (a common weekend activity) or sat down to have family meals together.

## **Fathering arrangements: extent of inputs across different domains**

Above we have described the large variation in the types of input that were provided by families in terms of material provision, personal care-giving, and particularly in relation to 'nurturing, protecting and linking their children to the outside world'.

Table 3 seeks to capture the diversity of fathering practices that we found among our sample. Our interviews suggested six different fathering arrangements that we label (in part drawing on respondents' own terms)

as ‘mothering’, ‘lead parenting’, ‘co-operative parenting’, ‘proactive fathering’, ‘provisioning’ and ‘marginal fathering’. The table refers to fathering ‘arrangements’ rather than ‘types’ since we recognise the danger of downplaying variations in individual fathering behaviour over time and circumstances (Marks and Palkovitz, 2004). Nevertheless, this is a useful way of describing the diversity in fathering arrangements that existed within and between the religio-ethnic groups. A number of points are worth highlighting.

First, in common with other work, we found that among fathers who were working full-time there were cases where they made significant inputs to personal care-giving as well as those where fathers made much smaller contributions. There were also cases where fathers were not working but nevertheless did not contribute significantly to personal childcare. Clearly then, men’s involvement in personal childcare is not simply dictated by logistical incompatibility with income-earning, particularly where school-aged children are concerned. Our interviews revealed various ways in which some fathers managed to combine contributions. For instance, in several Gujarati and Sikh families both the mother and father worked and their hours of work were arranged so that each parent took on personal childcare tasks for some parts of the week.

Second, the contributions of fathers to ‘nurturing, protecting and linking to the outside world’ deserve comment. Again, these contributions seemed largely unrelated to a father’s income-earning role, with examples of both full-time workers and non-workers contributing significantly in this area, as well as some non-workers being largely inactive. Where fathers worked long hours outside the home it was more common for them to contribute inputs in this area than in personal care-giving, particularly if their wife was not working or working part-time. Many men seemed to prioritise ‘quality time’ when they had the opportunity to be in direct contact with their children. In several cases, though the actual time devoted to such inputs was very limited, fathers nevertheless appeared to have close relationships with their children and to be well-informed of their children’s lives and development, often making creative use of indirect inputs. In terms of specific inputs, as noted above, there was

little sign of consistent patterns with respect to mothers’ versus fathers’ inputs, with much being dependent upon individual preferences, skills and circumstances.

That said, there was some evidence of differences between mothers and fathers in the extent to which they engaged in planning and organising. While many fathers were actively engaged, usually along with mothers, in longer-term strategising and decision-making, it was more common for their wives to take the primary role in day-to-day, and week-to-week, scheduling.

*I think [wife’s] a bit more advanced than me. She helps them out a lot more ... So she’s trying to keep track and makes notes and you know this day we’ve got to go here and that’s happening and ... She’s more on top of them things than me.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

These differences seemed to be common regardless of the way in which income-earning was arranged, so that they did not relate purely to women having a more home-based role that allowed greater flexibility and opportunity for making plans and arrangements (though this was a relevant factor in some homes).

We found examples of the different fathering arrangements described in Table 3 within each of the four religio-ethnic groups. The first two fathering arrangements, ‘mothering’ and ‘lead parenting’, were relatively uncommon across all four groups and more often than not were contingent upon special circumstances and/or a very high level of motivation in some fathers. Similarly, ‘marginal fathering’ was unusual across all four groups but we found a minority of cases among our Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents. However, with regard to the remaining three fathering arrangements – ‘co-operative parenting’, ‘proactive fathering’ and ‘provisioning’ – there was evidence of some variation in prevalence across the different groups. ‘Co-operative parenting’ was more common among our Gujarati and Sikh respondents than among the Bangladeshi and Pakistani families, while ‘proactive fathering’ and ‘provisioning’ were more common among our Bangladeshi

Table 3: Diversity in fathering arrangements

	Fathering arrangements	Meeting material needs	Providing personal care	Nurturing, protecting and linking to the outside world	Substitutability of inputs by fathers and mothers
1	<b>Mothering</b>	Father not working due to childcare Mother working (or single father)	Father full-time sole childcare	Father provides a range of inputs to all parenting domains	All inputs substitutable except material needs
2	<b>Lead parenting</b>	Father working part-time due to childcare  Mother working part-time or not working	Father part-time sole childcare	Father provides a range of inputs to all parenting domains	All inputs substitutable by father. Mother may/may not substitute material needs
3	<b>Co-operative parenting</b>	Father working Mother working (Similar time commitments)	Father and mother share care-giving. May timetable inputs against each other and/or use other childcare	Father provides a range of inputs to all parenting domains but <i>direct</i> inputs can be time-limited by both parents	All inputs substitutable
4	<b>Proactive fathering</b>	Father working full-time Mother working part-time or not working (a few cases also full-time worker)	Mother full-time/part-time care-giver Father ad hoc inputs and occasional sole care May use other childcare	Father provides a range of inputs to all parenting domains. High use of <i>indirect</i> inputs and inputs <i>via mother/other actors</i> , plus time-limited but child-focused direct inputs	Little substitutability in care-giving domain but some substitutability in other domains
5	<b>Provisioning</b>	Father working full-time Mother not working	Mother full-time care-giver Father rarely involved in sole care-giving. Ad hoc 'help' to mother	Father provides few inputs in most domains. But, often longer-term <i>indirect</i> inputs	No substitutability in material needs and care-giving domains. Little substitutability in other domains
6	<b>Marginal fathering</b>	Father not working unrelated to childcare Mother may be working or not	Mother full-time care-giver. May arrange for support of other carers Father rarely involved in sole care-giving	Father provides few inputs in most domains	No or very little substitutability of inputs

and Pakistani respondents. These differences seem largely to relate to differences in the place of employment within mother identities that were discussed in Chapter 2. The fact that our Gujarati and Sikh fathers involved in co-operative parenting were less likely to think of themselves as 'unusual' than similar Pakistani and Bangladeshi fathers suggests that our sample reflects wider patterns within these groups.

## Conclusions

Despite the many common themes expressed in relation to both what it means to be a father (Chapter 2) and what sorts of child outcomes

are desirable, there were large differences in the actual inputs that fathers provided to their children. Though the great majority of our Asian fathers provided for their children in financial terms, there was wide variety in their contributions to personal childcare as well as the various domains that make up 'nurturing, protecting and linking to the outside world'. While some couples were 'specialist' in their inputs, having clearly defined paternal and maternal inputs, others were more 'generalist' with both the mother and father contributing across the range of inputs and substituting for each other at different times. In part, this reflects the fact that both mothers and fathers held responsibilities in these areas so that there was great flexibility in

terms of what was considered an ‘acceptable’ arrangement. However, there was also evidence of a variety of understandings around what sorts of inputs children need and how these should be achieved.

Furthermore, the vast array of inputs that are required for successful child outcomes highlights the complexities that parents faced in terms of making choices and balancing inputs. For instance, how should a parent decide whether to spend time sitting and reading with children or preparing a healthy meal for them from scratch? While it is beyond the scope of the present study to examine the implications of such choices, it is clear that various dimensions of short- and long-term child welfare, as well as the well-being of fathers and other family members, are potentially affected.

Clearly, this is an issue for all families. However, the minority religious and ethnic status of our Asian fathers appeared to present some particular dilemmas and complexities. Equipping their children with desired religio-cultural values and resources implied an additional set of inputs that majority parents do not need to provide. The provision of such inputs could potentially preclude other types of input, as, for example, when children spend extended periods in language or religious lessons rather than spending time with parents.

In addition, many of our Asian fathers felt the need to provide inputs for their children aimed at counteracting racial exclusion and disadvantage. For some migrant fathers, their own lack of skills and experience within UK society meant that they felt the need to provide additional inputs, such as English language tuition, so that their children were not disadvantaged compared to children of white British parents.

A further point worth emphasising is that there were many different ways that fathers contributed to their children’s upbringing and were involved, or had a strong presence, in their children’s lives. Several fathers who worked long hours away from home nevertheless exerted an important influence on the children. Though some of these fathers felt that they did not fulfil their ideal of the ‘involved’ father, they used a range of methods to try to maintain close relationships with their children.

Notwithstanding some apparent differences between the four religio-ethnic communities in fathering arrangements, our findings revealed that individual fathers could move between fathering arrangements depending on external factors and the way in which specific inputs were negotiated within families. Chapter 5 describes in more detail the complex of factors that were at play in shaping the form that fathering took in particular families at particular times.

# 5 Individual, family and wider influences on fathering behaviours and inputs

## Summary points

- The inputs that fathers provided to their children tended to vary over time and space.
- Though income-earning was seen as an integral part of the fathering role, at a practical level it constrained some fathers from providing other types of inputs to their children.
- Paid work conflicted importantly with other childrearing inputs where (i) men had low-paid jobs with very little flexibility, or (ii) men had significant career aspirations and invested significantly in their worker identity.
- Several gendered norms relating to 'appropriate' male behaviour constrained some fathers' involvement in particular childcare tasks, notably those relating to personal hygiene.
- The transnational nature of many of our families meant that fathers had often spent significant periods of time living apart from one or more of their children, with important implications for the inputs they could provide.
- Where mothers were working fathers were generally more involved in daily care-giving activities. This pattern related not only to the practicalities of who was available to do what, but also to shifts in ideas of what they should be doing for their children.
- Mothers were often powerful in shaping the types of inputs that their husbands provided to their children.

While some mothers were ambivalent about fathers having a wider role and greater involvement, most nevertheless encouraged their husbands to have a close relationship and 'quality time' with the children.

- Fathers appeared to be more involved with their children and to provide a wider range of inputs when the husband-wife relationship was close and mutually supportive, though this could still mean highly gendered contributions.
- Children were found to actively shape their fathers' contributions, often by demanding one-to-one attention.
- Grandparents, particularly paternal grandparents, were found in several (though by no means all) cases to importantly shape the amount and type of inputs that fathers provided to their children.
- Attitudes towards fathering within the religio-ethnic community were identified by several respondents as constraining the ways in which men could act as fathers to their children. In particular, adoption of a house-husband role was felt to receive widespread condemnation, especially if the mother was working. Some men reported concealing their behaviours or avoiding 'Asian areas' when looking after their children alone for fear of negative reaction.
- Family support services appeared to have very little influence on the fathering practices of our Asian fathers. While many were aware of Sure Start and other local provision, most felt no need of such

support and many perceived the provision on offer as unattractive. There was widespread use of religio-ethnic community resources for children's development but these activities tended to involve children separately from their parents rather than provide opportunities for fathers and children to interact.

- Diverse attitudes to paid childcare were expressed. Where paid childcare outside the home was perceived negatively this could mean significant involvement of fathers in day-to-day childcare when mothers too were working. This pattern was most common among our Gujarati and Sikh families with some adopting working patterns to allow one parent to always be with the children.
- A father's personal prioritisation, creativity and motivation were important in determining the extent to which many potential obstacles actually constrained provision of child inputs in practice. Some men were very proactive in finding ways of being involved with their children.

Chapter 4 illustrated the wide variety of types and modes of inputs that our Asian fathers contributed to the upbringing of their children. We turn now to consider in more detail the factors and processes that influence what a father does with and for his children.

Previous studies of fatherhood have helped to scope the wide variety of potential influences that may play a part in determining men's fathering behaviour at particular times in particular contexts (for example, Lamb *et al.*, 1987; Morgan, 1998; Lewis and Lamb, 2007). In addition, recent research has highlighted three specific areas that seem to be particularly important: the father–mother relationship (Cummings *et al.*, 2004; Pike *et al.*, 2006); shifts in men's and women's employment patterns; and men's personal motivations and agency (Doherty *et al.*, 1998). This chapter explores these and other factors in relation to the UK Asian fathers in our study.

## Being, doing and experiencing fatherhood

Fathers in our sample often described how their relationships with their children had evolved over time, and how their understandings of what it means to be a father developed through interactions with their children, their wives and other people. Wives likewise often illustrated that their ideas of what it means to be a father, and their expectations of their partners, had changed over time, often in response to particular circumstances or external events. There were numerous examples of men's identities, experiences and fathering inputs being quite divergent in relation to their different children. For those respondents who had had several children over a long time period both individual circumstances and the wider societal context had changed considerably over their childbearing career, with consequent implications for how they fathered their different children. The following examples illustrate these dynamic processes.

A Sikh father had not envisaged himself as a 'hands-on' father and expected that his sole responsibility would be to earn money. At the time his first child was born he and his wife were living with his parents. His mother and wife took care of everything and his mother did not think it appropriate for him to be at the delivery. However, later on he and his wife moved out into their own house. Since establishing their separate household, his wife has consistently challenged his idea of what it means to be a father and drawn him into a much wider range of fathering inputs. Now he arranges his work so that he is available to look after the children regularly and is involved in all aspects of childrearing.

(Sikh father, UK-born, 30–39 years, ≤ GCSE)

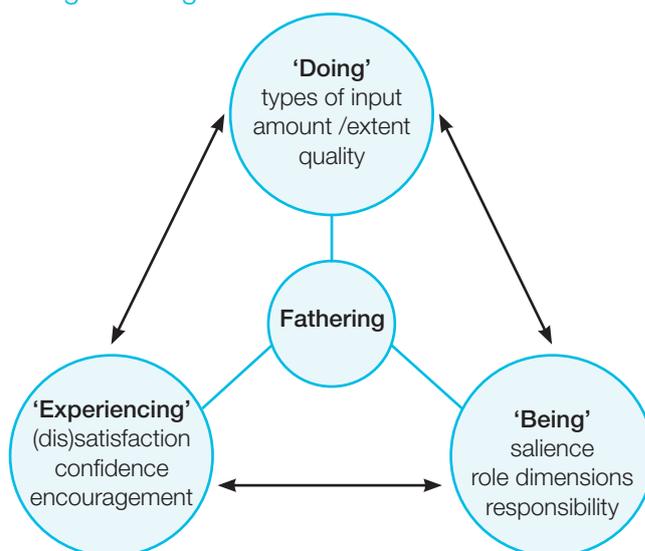
A Pakistani father described the way his involvement with his twins was radically different from his involvement with his first-born child, and how a range of circumstantial factors led him to expand his notion of what 'being a father' meant and pulled him into a more hands-on role:

*You've got to appreciate we had our eldest when we were both very young, it was difficult then you see, but now we've got twins you haven't got a choice you've got to help! [Laughs] ... So for the first few months I would look after one and she would look after one and we'd take it in turns with the things ... My mother, well, she was abroad actually, my mother couldn't help much. [Laughs] I mean, when there are two crying at once what do you do? [Laughs] You haven't got a choice. No matter what anybody says. You don't look at other people what they're saying ... I mean, like I say, the past ten years. When the first was born it was different then but after when these were born it was totally different 'cause obviously men are more involved with children, see what I mean. I think in my parents' time they were like more difficult times see 'cause the parent, the man had to go out to work to earn the living and the mother look after the kids at home, the children. That happened for so long obviously, but as times moves on like er, things change!*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 40–49 years, A level equivalent)

Factors external to fathering can exert their effect through one or more of three elements of fathering, affecting men's sense of what it means to be a father, how men experience their fathering role, or what men are actually doing with and for their children. However, since these elements are interrelated there will often be a 'ripple' effect, with the other elements also being affected (Figure 1). For instance, in the examples above, the immediate effect of the changed circumstances was on what the fathers were doing, as they were pulled into spending more time with their children and providing a wider range of inputs. However, over time the fathers often came to think of these activities as part and parcel of what it means to be a father and to gain enjoyment through fulfilling them. The enjoyment gained through performing childrearing tasks, particularly those involving direct interaction, often seemed to act as a strong motivator to men to reassess their fathering and to claim a more active involvement in their children's lives. In addition, some men reported how they

Figure 1: The interplay of being, experiencing and doing fathering



gained confidence in performing a wider range of child inputs and a belief that their contribution was important to the well-being and development of their child. Our interviews revealed many examples of these interrelationships, illustrating that rather than thinking of fathering behaviours as the outcome or end point of other processes, the doing of fathering must also be seen as an input to the way men experience and understand what it means to be a father.

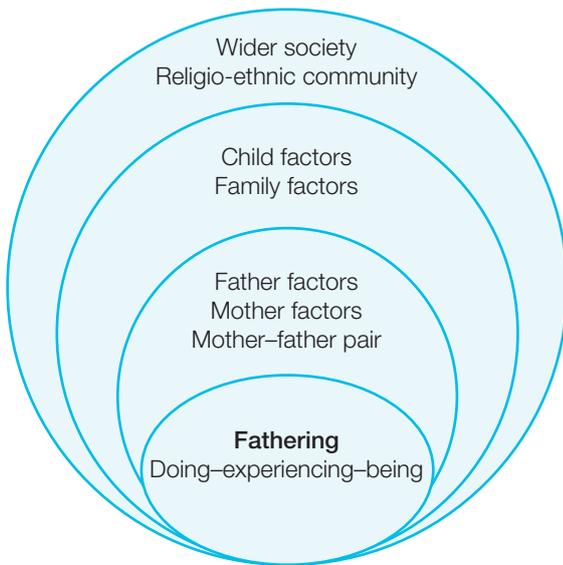
In further discussing these influences on fathers, this chapter will follow the model shown in Figure 2, which identifies father factors and mother factors as the most proximate influences on fathering. However, we also highlight the importance of considering the mother–father pair, in that father factors and mother factors interrelate and cannot be understood in isolation from each other. At the next level we identify family factors and child factors, and finally we include two more distant sets of factors that provide the broader context within which fathering occurs: community-level factors and wider society.

## Father factors

### Competing identities and responsibilities

Fathers commonly held other salient identities alongside that of being a father and these implied particular roles and responsibilities. As already noted in Chapter 2, the most important of these

Figure 2: Influences on fathering



– both in terms of the range of fathers to which it applied and the size of the effect that it had – was that of worker.

While income-earning cannot be seen in opposition to fathering, but is rather an integral part of this role, nevertheless, at a practical level, work often implied prolonged periods away from the home, thereby limiting direct interaction with children and also constraining the time and energy available for other childrearing-related activities, such as planning and information-gathering. Furthermore, the prominence of the material provider role as a characteristic of ‘good’ fathers meant that work commitments were frequently cited by men and women as a legitimate reason for a limited range of other inputs to children. Though many fathers said they aspired to having ‘quality time’ with their children, they often felt that work commitments limited their ability to fulfil this dimension of their role.

The terms and conditions of men’s employment were significant here, with some respondents reporting very flexible employers and others having little latitude. New migrants and those with insecure rights of residency were often particularly restricted in their options for adjusting working patterns to allow them to provide other inputs to their children. A number of fathers who had entered the country on work permits found that being tied to a particular job in a location far from their family restricted their ability to be involved. Long travel times to work were an issue for several other fathers too, making it difficult to

see children either in the morning or the evening during the week.

*I am one of the lucky ones because I have a good 9–5 job so you can do it. But a lot of the parents, especially fathers you know who have to work six to seven days away from home and can only come home one day a week, you know? Remember that they are not bad fathers in a sense but that’s their lifestyle and that is their job.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

Income-earning activity did not, however, always undermine other types of fathering inputs. Much depended on how men arranged their time and the extent to which they prioritised other kinds of fathering inputs (see below). However, being a worker was also motivated by other concerns and linked to an identity separate to that of ‘father’ for most men, so that decisions like working longer hours and taking better-paid promotions further from home could be motivated by personal aspirations for a higher standard of living and professional achievement, as well as a commitment to being a good material provider for the family.

### Gendered norms and expectations

In Chapter 2 we discussed how understandings related to the father identity shape people’s ideas of what fathers should and should not be doing. But it is also important to acknowledge the way in which these understandings intersect and relate to broader notions of gender-appropriate behaviour and gender relations: of being a man and a husband. Three themes were particularly evident in our interviews.

The first related to notions of impurity and the importance of men avoiding contact with ‘polluting’ substances. Prior work has indicated that although pregnancy is not in itself considered a ‘polluting’ state among Asian cultures, it can be considered shameful for a man to show too much interest in his wife’s pregnancy (Jeffery *et al.*, 1989; Mumtaz, 2002). Childbirth can be considered both polluting and shameful for men. A number of our respondents reported very limited involvement in their wife’s pregnancy or the birth of their child and

explained this in terms of pregnancy and childbirth being 'ladies' business'. It was noticeable, however, that these sorts of restrictions tended to occur where older relatives were more closely involved, reflecting both a stronger adherence to 'traditional' gendered norms and the fact that alternative, female support was available to the pregnant woman. However, in other cases, men did not appear to face these gendered restrictions.

*We believe in close family tie-ups so I won't say I was much involved in the pregnancy but yes I would more ask her what should I be doing and what do you, she wants me to do rather than I was aware of what I should do, things like that so because the way traditions work in [India] particularly after seven months she goes to her parents' place rather than staying with us. I didn't want that to happen but her doctor was close by to her parents' place so we decided to do that so after seven months she was almost with her parents anyway.*

(Gujarati father, India-born, 30–39 years, degree)

A concern with impurity was also evident in the apparent taboo around men engaging in nappy-changing, cleaning vomit and other tasks that bring them into contact with 'polluting' bodily fluids. In one case, this barrier to the father's involvement in personal care-giving was explained in explicitly religious terms, since the father was an imam and needed to retain his state of ritual purity. However, in most cases there was a less clearly articulated, general sense that this type of contribution was inappropriate for men. One Pakistani father who is unemployed because of ill health and has three children, including one disabled child, told us:

*You can say that. At times T gets into a problem and vomits, the other one does something at 10 o'clock at 2 o'clock at night. Their mother is continuously on duty. At times bed is spoiled. Then she has to clean the bed.*

*Interviewer: So she handles the vomit, you don't do it?*

*She does it, no I don't do it. Mother is such a figure that when children are little, only she can look after the young ones ... most of the role is of mother, changing nappies, cleaning vomit etc.*

Similarly, a Sikh mother explained that her husband never engaged in changing her children's nappies:

*He used to have to honour what his parents said otherwise they would disown him ... he has never changed the nappies and he would never ever change them. He wasn't allowed. It's not the done thing. It's not something you do.*

(Sikh mother, UK-born, 30–39 years, GCSE)

A second prevalent gendered theme related to fears of improper sexuality. Several respondents expressed concern at the inappropriateness of fathers bathing and dressing their daughters. In a few cases, this extended to the personal care of female babies, but more often related to girls aged four, five and above.

*That [a father caring for a daughter] never happens in our community [mausra]. It's the same in Pakistan. It's not acceptable for fathers to see their daughter's private parts. My uncle never washed his kids in a whole week [when his wife was ill]. I had to go all the way there to do it for him ... They don't want to see the daughter naked. it's not in our religion.*

(Pakistani mothers' focus group discussion)

A further manifestation of concerns about improper sexuality was the restrictions some men felt in entering 'female space' and interacting with unrelated women at children's centres and playgroups.

Third, household maintenance tasks, such as cleaning, washing and cooking, were largely viewed as female tasks, associated with being a wife. Indeed, some behaviours – such as the acceptability of a wife washing her husband's clothes but not vice versa – could be understood as powerful symbols of men's superiority in the gender hierarchy. However, the gendered nature of household maintenance work could also create ambiguity in certain tasks such as feeding children

or washing children's clothes. A Bangladeshi father illustrated this fine line between acceptable and unacceptable male involvement in 'household work' when he described his mother's reactions to his doing the washing up:

*She thinks I'm a brilliant father. Husband-wise she thinks that I'm, I probably do a bit too much, so that's where the clash is.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

Some fathers appeared to transgress the gendered barriers to involvement in certain childcare tasks covertly, concealing their behaviours from those who would not approve. However, others openly challenged some of the restrictions, thereby seeking to transform these 'norms' of behaviour.

### **Place of residence**

Although our sample included mainly respondents who were currently married to the mother of their children, place of residence was an important factor for several respondents owing to the transnational nature of many of the families. For instance, one Bangladeshi father's first child was born in Bangladesh before his wife could gain entry to the UK and he did not see him until he was over a year old. Similarly, another Bangladeshi man's wife remained in Bangladesh with their first child for an extended period and he did not live with this daughter until she was 6 years old. One of our Gujarati fathers had left his wife and young daughter in India in order to come to the UK and work to improve their financial position. This meant that he did not see his daughter for several years. At the time of interview one of the Sikh respondents was working in the UK to earn money while his daughters remained in India. Several of these examples illustrate how some men prioritise their income-earning role over other types of inputs and feel compelled to take up employment opportunities to further the material security of their children.

### **Education and confidence**

A further 'father factor' concerned the level of education that respondents had attained. Two areas stood out as particularly significant. The

first related to the provision of religious education. Among Muslim respondents, those who were better educated (or whose wives were well-educated – see below) seemed more confident in their ability to provide religious guidance at home and less likely to send their children to Quran classes after school. This decision had significant implications as daily attendance at religious classes after school severely reduced the time that children could potentially have spent with their fathers when they came home from work. The second area related to the support and guidance that fathers gave to children in their school work. Men with poor education, particularly those who had migrated to the UK as adults, commonly expressed feelings of inadequacy and gave little direct support to children with homework, though some sought other ways of supporting their child's education, including paying for additional tuition, instilling aspirations, encouraging them to study, or taking children to and from school (an activity that several men felt was symbolic of the importance they gave to their child's educational achievement). However, the better-educated men did not generally appear to have greater confidence in their fathering abilities or the importance of their contribution than those with less education, nor were there clear patterns of involvement by education or skill level.

### **Priorities, creativity and motivation**

Men's own priorities, creativity and motivation appeared to be very significant in shaping the inputs they provided for their children. For instance, in relation to balancing income-earning responsibilities and other types of inputs, some men had found creative solutions while others seemed resigned to accepting that their work precluded active involvement with their children. For instance, two of our respondents reported working the same shift pattern, leaving home mid-afternoon and returning from work late at night. However, while one father reported always getting up in the morning to have breakfast with his children and then returning to bed for extra sleep, the other said that he always slept in beyond the time that his daughter went off to school and therefore did not see her at all during the week.

There were also cases across all four religio-ethnic groups where fathers had clearly prioritised

childrearing inputs other than income-earning, sometimes in response to the mother's or child's ill health, but sometimes because these other inputs were felt to be more important.

A Pakistani father described how he had tried to get his work shift changed to allow him more time with his family but his manager told him he would have to arrange a swap with another colleague himself. At the time, he was working an afternoon shift (2–10pm) and wanted to change to a night shift:

*So why I prefer [working] nights I used to do two while ten. You drop your son or daughter off to school and that's it! You're living same house but you can't see your son or daughter same day. Like ten o'clock it's go to bed. So we call that shift 'dead man shift'! Yeah, for family person is very difficult.*

Eventually he managed to persuade someone to agree to let him work the night shift by informally retaining the same hours on paper so that the other man also retained the night shift bonus, around £60 per week.

*Now I finish six o'clock [in the morning]. So when he [my son] come back three o'clock, three while ten we can talk, we can play, we can do a lot of things. When I go to work ten o'clock that time he goes to bed, before that sometimes. So it's good.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

As noted in Chapter 4, a number of non-resident fathers also displayed great motivation and creativity by using the telephone and indirect means to maintain an active presence in their children's lives.

Variation in agency, creativity and deliberation was a more general theme in the interviews. It is clear that similar patterns of fathering behaviour can result from different sets of circumstances: in some cases reflecting very active claims to involvement by men, in others more passive practical solutions, and in others intervention by the wife (see below). While variation in agency and creativity can be seen in part to be a personal trait, it is also linked to the range of possibilities

that individuals are exposed to: the options that they recognise. A number of fathers reported how conversations at work or interactions with people outside their family had made them reflect on their fathering and introduce changes, usually in the direction of greater involvement and more direct contact time.

Other individual characteristics of men including their health status and their interests could also be influential in producing specific patterns of involvement, but these were more idiosyncratic and related closely to the combined set of father–mother resources, skills and interests discussed below.

## Mother factors

### Mothers' employment

In common with earlier quantitative work (Ferri and Smith, 1996), our findings support the assertion that mothers' employment status can significantly influence men's fathering. This seemed to relate not only to the practicalities of who was available to do what, but also to shifts in men's and women's ideas of what they should be doing for their children. Though there was little sign of men being relieved of the responsibility for financial well-being, there was clear evidence of several fathers being more actively involved in personal care-giving, and more likely to feel that they should be doing these tasks, when their wives were also working. There was also some evidence of men taking on more of the planning and managing associated with the role of 'nurturer and protector'. One Pakistani mother described how she encouraged her husband to be more actively involved because she wanted to get back to work:

*With the first child he was away a lot with work and everything and so initially, we just got off to ... I felt I did things better and he didn't know, and because it was just one child I could manage and because I was at home. Whereas with the second child I wanted to go back to my education and work and I wanted him to be more involved, and I think I encouraged it.*

(Pakistani mother, UK-born, 30–39 years, degree)

Nevertheless, some mothers were working and yet also retained sole responsibility for personal care-giving. Fathers in these families held particularly narrow understandings of what it meant to be a father and avoided taking on any direct care-giving tasks. The mothers had adopted other strategies, particularly relying on female relatives, to provide the necessary care to their children, which in turn could reinforce the father's absence from these dimensions of childrearing.

### **Mothers' expectations of fathers**

In many of our families the mother's expectations and attitudes towards her husband as a father significantly shaped fathering. We found evidence of several mothers feeling ambivalent about the father's active involvement with their children, and cases of women acting as gate-keepers, thereby restricting, or at a minimum shaping, men's involvement in childrearing tasks.

In some cases, the exclusion of the father appeared unconscious and linked to a gendered division of roles and responsibilities that was taken for granted. In other cases, mothers' behaviour was consciously motivated by several related concerns including: a desire to protect their own mothering identity and visible contribution to the household; a desire to retain control of activities that they found rewarding or enjoyable; and a desire for tasks to be done 'properly' (linked to some women's perception that men lack competence in many areas of childrearing and cannot be trusted).

[Rather than] *letting him get the praise for helping me I think I'll do it myself. You know, like a lot of things, I prefer to do it myself ... What would I do [if he did all of these things too]?!*

(Bangladeshi mother, UK-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

Many mothers held high expectations of their husbands in relation to income-earning so that they did not necessarily support decisions that meant fathers had more time or flexibility to contribute to their children's upbringing, especially if earnings were affected. Mothers could therefore contribute to fathers feeling that they had to prioritise income generation over other inputs.

Yet we also found many examples of women actively pulling their husbands into a wide range

of activities and seeking to increase their sense of responsibility and also personal fulfilment via fathering. A number of wives gained obvious pleasure in seeing their husband enjoying his fathering role. Women were particularly active in reinforcing the notion that a good father spends time engaging in focused activities with his children, and should have a close relationship with them.

*I tried to encourage him more to, you know, pick them up more and stuff because the way I see it is that children don't stay children for very long. You need to enjoy them as much as possible. Cuddle and kiss them as much as you can while they still let you! [Laughs]*

(Bangladeshi mother, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

However, there were mixed responses by fathers to their wives' proactive behaviour. While some were encouraged to think of being a father in ways that incorporated a wider, more involved role, others persisted in seeing their additional involvement as 'helping their wife' and resisted accepting additional responsibilities.

### **The mother–father pair: co-parental factors**

Notwithstanding the significant influence that some women were found to have over their husband's fathering inputs, it was apparent that father factors and mother factors interacted and could not be understood in isolation from each other. The organisation of childrearing tasks and the contributions made by fathers were very much dependent upon the combined set of skills, experiences and preferences that the two parents brought to the family. Moreover, the transnational nature of many marriages meant that fathers and mothers often had quite distinct skill sets.

For instance, the academic background and language skills of the two parents tended to influence fathers' inputs in relation to their children's education. Where a mother was UK-born and educated and the father born and brought up in South Asia, it was likely that the father would play a less prominent role in relation to attending parent–teacher meetings, liaising

with school, reading to children and helping with homework.

*So with stories, like this and that, so it's easy, it's easy for her. Plus another thing I can tell you truth, like if my accent is different. Sometime I say 'ay' maybe say 'ar' and sometime you know the phonic this and that. But sometime I tell my missus teach me also because I want to teach him, you know what I'm saying?*

*So that's another reason I don't [help with homework]. [My wife is] better than me yeah.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born,  
20–29 years, A level equivalent)

*Yeah, I think I would've been um, a lot more laid back if he was, if his personality was a bit different. If he was a bit educated. But the fact that he isn't I feel as though sometimes I need to be in the driving seat, I need to make important decisions ... I've always wanted a husband that would protect me and look after me rather than me doing, rather than it being vice versa but I feel where he's working long hours I have to be in that role when he's not around. And it's just the way life is and I've accepted it now. You know, I have to just face up to it and accept it.*

(Sikh mother, UK-born,  
30–39 years, GCSE)

Moreover, the ways individual men and women understood what it meant to be a father or a mother were clearly not set in stone and tended to develop through mutual interaction. Talking about her husband becoming increasingly involved in care-giving to their child, one Pakistani mother expressed her surprise:

*I didn't expect it 'cause both me and my husband do come from traditional families, you know traditional in the sense that the women don't go out to work, the fathers are the main breadwinners and things like that. And the traditional wife and husband roles. So I did find that, I did find that quite weird ... I think he was definitely taking that initiative but having looked back I think now, I think the way I am now I would more or less expect that. [Laughs] Whereas then, whereas then I was sort of at the stage where I was getting out of the way of traditional thinking and getting more into my own independent lifestyle where I'd be thinking, yes, my husband should be helping me and we should be equal and things like that.*

(Pakistani mother, UK-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

In a contrasting example, one Sikh mother explained how her expectations of her husband as a father and partner had to be adjusted over time since he could not fulfil various dimensions that she had hoped for:

The husband–wife relationship itself was also important. Fathers who had close and loving relationships with their wives seemed to be more involved in direct care-giving than those with more distant relationships. Close relationships could also encourage greater involvement because wives sought to facilitate husband's involvement, particularly in 'quality time', seeing it as beneficial and rewarding for both the child and the father. There was also evidence of husbands and wives encouraging each other to acquire skills and competence in different arenas and sharing experience, so that they were more confident in providing a wider range of inputs to their child(ren). These couples seemed to be characterised by mutual appreciation of each other's contributions. At times, however, a close relationship could also lead a wife to 'protect' her husband from involvement in childrearing tasks that were constructed as 'work' rather than 'pleasure', such as direct personal care. Yet a close relationship did not necessarily mean that both parents took a 'generalist' role contributing across the range of childrearing inputs. There were some couples where husband and wife had very distinct, 'traditional' parenting roles who expressed great affection and respect for each other.

Moreover, while a close and loving husband–wife relationship did appear to support father involvement in a wider range of inputs, men who had poor relationships with their wives did not necessarily withdraw from their children. There

were examples of men going to great lengths to retain their involvement, motivated by affective ties and fulfilment, but also a strong sense of responsibility and commitment towards their child.

## The influence of children

Children themselves actively influenced their parents' ideas of what a father should be and what a father should do, and the expectations that people held regarding appropriate fathering were dependent upon various child characteristics.

While many respondents identified the focus age range for children in our research of 3–8 years as a time when fathers should be helping to lay the foundations for the child's development, some felt that a father's key contribution came later during secondary school when children would be exposed to a wider set of external influences, with a greater need to 'monitor' their behaviour and progress. There was also evidence from a number of respondents that children perceived to have special health or developmental needs were felt to warrant greater amounts of input from their fathers, particularly in terms of direct physical care and one-to-one time, and that the mother could not adequately support the child without this paternal input.

In a number of families, we also found evidence of differences in the relationships between fathers and children according to birth order. Though often determined in part by changing family circumstances, some families had adopted deliberate strategies to vary their investments in individual children with a view to achieving different outcomes, for instance 'reserving' one child for a focused religious education. A pattern that was common was for parents to treat their eldest son differently from younger siblings, providing greater privileges but also expecting him to take greater responsibilities (such as supporting them and younger siblings financially). Variations in children's temperament and personality also appeared in some cases to lead to quite wide variation in the relationships and involvement that some fathers felt they had with different children. However, this acceptance (or even engineering) of diversity in sibling experiences seemed to be less marked

among our current generation of fathers than in their descriptions of their own childhoods.

There were also numerous examples of children actively shaping their father's contributions. In some cases this related only to specific inputs (such as reading bedtime stories). But children could also have a more pervasive influence, thereby supporting or undermining a father's involvement in particular areas. In most cases, the examples we found were of children demanding paternal attention and time, and several fathers contrasted their children's expectations with those that they had had of their own fathers.

*He voiced his disapproval, he lost his rag a little bit sort of shouting saying 'You no go to the [special] shop anymore' ... then he said really angry 'You no take me out any more!' So, you know, obviously I took a few days off here and there ... He'd been looking out the window with an angry face as if to say 'traitor', see what I mean. So that weren't, that didn't feel good, you know what I mean? ... He always asks me to get him ready anyway. Soon as he gets up he shouts 'Dad!'. He always wants me to do it, even if [wife] is available, she's like a second choice.*

(Bangladeshi father, UK-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

*He always wants Daddy to make breakfast. Everything! 'I want daddy to do it!'*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born,  
30–39 years, A level equivalent)

## Grandparents and the extended family

Our interviews suggested that members of the extended family, and particularly grandparents, can have a significant stake in childrearing, both because they have an interest in child outcomes themselves and because the allocation of time and resources to childrearing can impact on other priorities that affect their well-being. It was, therefore, not surprising to find grandparents

across all four religio-ethnic groups influencing fathering inputs in some families through a number of routes. Where grandparents exerted a significant effect, it was most often the paternal grandparents that were influential with a tendency to constrain the range and extent of fathers' inputs to their children. But in some cases grandparents were found to encourage a wide and active fathering role and in many others they were not particularly influential in this regard.

### **Childrearing contributions**

In some families, particularly among the Gujarati and Sikh families we interviewed, grandparents provided significant amounts of childrearing inputs themselves. Such contributions could influence fathering by substituting directly for fathers' own inputs, as well as by encouraging a general sense that children are well cared for so that fathers were less proactive in seeking opportunities to provide inputs. Grandparental inputs could be ongoing, as where families had adopted an extended household structure or where they lived in close proximity, or could be intermittent with grandparents making multiple lengthy stays (coming from other parts of the UK or 'back home') to provide support. In a number of families, grandparents provided the bulk of daily care-giving and supervision of children as both the mother and father were working for extended periods outside the home. In other families, grandparental inputs were more selective, focusing for instance on religious or cultural knowledge.

Respondents identified both positives and negatives of extensive grandparental input. While some recognised the way in which grandparents freed up their time for income-earning, fathers, and many mothers, felt that grandparents could undermine a father's role and the degree of responsibility that he took for his children. In several cases, fathers reported that they had never provided certain inputs to their children, particularly relating to personal care-giving, because they 'had never needed to' because either their wife or their mother had always been around to do these things.

*I just feel he would've been a lot more involved if it hadn't been for her [mother-in-law].*

(Bangladeshi mother, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

However, there was diversity, with many of our fathers reporting relatively little grandparental input in the upbringing of their children. Some fathers indicated that they would not wish to 'burden' or impose upon their own parents in this way, while others drew attention to the way in which they felt that the legitimacy of the older generation intervening in the upbringing of children has declined over time. In several cases respondents contrasted the UK setting with what they felt was the norm 'back home': the former being dominated by the mother–father parenting pair within the nuclear family and the latter by a much more corporate style of childrearing involving numerous adults in the guidance of the younger generation. In addition, the (perceived) capacity of grandparents to provide direct care (and other inputs) as well as varied logistical issues contributed to the wide variety of arrangements in practice.

### **'Appropriate' fathering**

Grandparents were also sometimes active in shaping notions of what it means to be a father and in encouraging what they saw to be appropriate fathering behaviours and discouraging those felt to be inappropriate.

Though clearly linked to broader gendered norms discussed above, grandparental undermining of fathers' active involvement in childrearing tasks (particularly direct personal childcare) must also be seen in light of the conflict that can exist between the parent–son (and particularly mother–son) and the husband–wife relationship. A father's contribution to direct childcare (and even to other types of childrearing) was often seen as him helping his wife to do 'her work' and a reflection of the affection he has for his wife. This could be seen as a threat to his commitment to his parents, and particularly his mother. Some of our mothers were explicit about this family dynamic. One respondent was adamant that her husband had been brought up by his mother in ways designed to make him highly dependent and incompetent so that he would not seek to establish a separate household after marriage. Some mothers and fathers also described how the father was barred from involvement in particular child-related inputs by his own parents, particularly where they were living together. Indeed, in a number of cases conflicts

of this type had led to couples moving out and setting up home separately.

*It was quite difficult because he could see the struggle I was going through yet was unable to help me unless we were together and they weren't with us ... When the in-laws were there he wouldn't even [put them to sleep]. It's not the done thing.*

(Sikh mother, UK-born,  
30–39 years, GCSE)

[Talking about going with his wife for antenatal scan] *The Asian thing is not to get too involved with your wife and your kids. They [his mother and other relatives] just said 'Your wife could have done that on her own, you didn't need to go'. They have had to do things on their own, the wives and the mothers.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

The way in which the extended family system may serve to limit the degree of openness and intimacy between husbands and wives and men's involvement with their children was illustrated by one Pakistani father who described how he found out his wife was pregnant from his grandmother:

*She [wife] didn't tell me, my grandmother told me! ... She [grandmother] just said to me. She didn't actually say to me directly like 'she's pregnant'. She goes, 'Oh look, she keeps vomiting in the morning and she's not well', and things like that, yeah. Then I, you know, clocked on.*

(Pakistani father, Pakistan-born,  
40–49 years, GCSE)

However, grandparents did not always seek to constrain father's inputs and involvement with their children or to undermine their relationship with their wife. As noted in Chapter 2, several fathers identified their mothers as important role models for their current fathering and some reported ongoing encouragement from their mothers to be caring husbands and to play an active role in their children's upbringing.

*This is right, my mother says this all the time. Whatever you do at home, share that with your wife ... My mother says that women are human beings too ... She [your wife] too is working at home, she is not sitting idle at home ... This is a commitment you have done before your marriage. That, as a husband, you should care for your wife. This is a commitment. This is not something big.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

### **Claims over father's time and resources**

In some cases, grandparents also had direct claims over their son's time and resources, forcing fathers to balance these demands and those of their wife and children. A number of our fathers expressed strong attachment and commitment to their parents. A Sikh father described his parents as 'gods' and reported that he contributed 80 per cent of his earnings to them. A Pakistani father told us that he felt that all family decisions needed to take into consideration his mother's well-being and wishes and he talked at length about his three-way commitment to work, his mother and his children. Here again, however, it is important to recognise diversity. Though these factors appeared to have a very large effect in the case of some fathers, many other fathers did not appear to have to respond to significant claims on their time or resources from their own parents.

Though other family members were also identified as important in shaping fathering in some families, their presence was less consistent than that of paternal grandparents.

### **The wider religio-ethnic community**

The degree to which the wider religio-ethnic community had influences over the form of fathering that our respondents enacted varied. While some respondents were deeply embedded in their local community with strong intra-ethnic ties, others had moved out and consciously distanced themselves from the community. In common with our earlier work, we found

ambivalence in people's attitudes towards being a member of their community (Salway *et al.*, 2007; Salway, 2008), identifying both positives and negatives for themselves and the children they were seeking to bring up. The religio-ethnic community influenced fathering (and more broadly parenting) behaviours both via the types of resources it provided and via the prevailing norms and expectations of behaviour.

There was significant variation across our communities and locations (London and Sheffield) in terms of the extent of resources that were available to support the upbringing of children. In some areas, there was extensive provision of language classes, religious education, music and cultural activities, and other support such as homework clubs. In contrast, some respondents, notably the Bangladeshis of Sheffield, felt that there was very little in the way of community-level resources for children and their families. While the high level of support for the religious and cultural development of children can be seen as a strength, and was certainly appreciated by many of our fathers, as discussed in Chapter 4, it may also inadvertently undermine direct contact time between fathers and their children.

In terms of expectations of fathers and fathering, there appeared to be varied messages and shift across generations.

*With young mothers like myself they really admired the fact that he is so helpful. Some were actually complaining back to their husbands. Jealous you know! ... But the elderly women, the grannies they were saying 'Oh my God!', you know, 'Why are you doing all this? If your mother was here she would have been so sad seeing his son doing all this housework and everything!' [Laughs]*

(Bangladeshi mother, Bangladesh-born, 20–29 years, A level equivalent)

A number of fathers were aware of negative responses from members of their religio-ethnic community when men openly took on fathering tasks that were more usually associated with mothers. Activities that received the most disapproval were direct care-giving tasks. Where men stepped out of their income-earning role

(even if only temporarily or working part-time) to provide more direct childcare, this was often viewed particularly unfavourably, especially if the mother was working outside the home instead of the father. This reversal of the 'traditional' division of household responsibility was associated with marital disharmony as well as insufficient attention to the children. These constraints to fathers providing a wider range of parental inputs appeared to be most strongly felt among our Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents (among whom some referred to religious understandings of men's primary responsibility as material provider), though they were not absent from the Sikh and Gujarati interviews.

*[Talking about his involvement with his daughter] Yeah and I do get slated for it a lot you know ... I talk to my friends and they still can't believe that I went part-time to look after her, because it's not the Asian thing to do. They think it's really weird.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, degree)

*In our society if a lady works all the time they'll say the mother is always outside at work and look at the father looking after the children. People don't like it. They don't think it's good. It looks bad, doesn't it? It's bad, isn't it?*

*If a mum works full-time then attention goes way from the child.*

(Bangladeshi mothers' group discussion)

*I feel bad, because the outside people. They, for example, they talk with reference to my wife that she goes to work and you stay at home, whereas you should go for work. So these sorts of comments hurt you.*

(Sikh father, Kenya-born, 40–49 years, degree)

Negative comment and disapproval had led some fathers to conceal their behaviours and inputs and to avoid certain places. Others stated more confidently that they ignored other people and just got on with fathering in the way that they felt was

right. A number of factors seemed to influence this response, including: having a set of friends who mirrored the father's approach; having family members, particularly a wife, who was supportive; positive experiences with the child; being less reliant on community-based ties; and having particular family circumstances that justified their behaviour, such as illness of the wife or child.

In Chapter 2, we noted that the strong prescription upon men to perform the income-earning role for their families was underpinned by religious understandings, particularly for our Muslim respondents. It was noticeable, however, that religious teachings were not commonly used to explain or legitimise other dimensions of fathering. Many respondents talked in general terms of the guidance or strength that religion offered them as a father. There were, however, very few specifics, aside from the general duty to bring their child up within their religious tradition.

*I don't know to be honest. Same as any other religion really. Just be a good example and just look after them. That's it!*

(Bangladeshi father, UK-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

Nevertheless, a small number of respondents did draw on their understanding of religious teaching to justify the father's active involvement with his children and sharing of a wider range of child inputs with his wife.

*My religion says, all half things in your whole life you have to do and your wife half. I mean, really, really. If you get together with your partner you have to do all things half-half. Share. Don't force her to do anything.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born,  
30–39 years, degree)

## Wider society

We have already noted the ways in which our respondents' fathering inputs were shaped by some of the wider influences of UK society, particularly concerns regarding racist exclusion and obstacles to instilling desired religio-ethnic values. Here, we consider the extent to which

services and resources influenced fathering behaviour.

Fathers generally expressed positive attitudes towards their children's schools both in terms of the way in which their child's educational and religio-ethnic needs were met and in terms of their encouragement to fathers. They felt that schools tended to address their communications to 'parents' in general and did not feel excluded. That said, there was little evidence that schools were influential in shaping the types of inputs that fathers provided to their children. Some respondents wanted schools to provide more religious instruction and language tuition so that children did not need to attend after-school classes for these areas of education, and this would then free up more time for other things.

Attitudes to the Sure Start early years programme and other public services for parents and children were less positive, though it seemed that many fathers had not actually made use of them. Indeed, in several cases fathers were poorly informed of local services available. Other fathers were aware that their wives made use of such facilities but did not see a need to do so themselves. In some cases fathers had been put off by the very female nature of these community spaces, or else took their children to enjoy the facilities on offer but did not engage in any way themselves.

*I personally take my children [to local playgroup] and stand aside while waiting. I've been doing that for a few years now.*

(Pakistani men's group discussion)

Few fathers expressed a need for services to support their parenting. Most felt that they were able to access whatever information they needed themselves via the internet, books or friends, or else expressed the opinion that parenting is something that comes naturally and cannot be taught. A small number of fathers felt that guidance would be helpful, particularly on issues such as drugs and relationships, but none had made any attempt to find out about or access any provision.

*I think these are just natural instincts and natural things and people have their, you*

*know, own kind of ideas and mentalities and characters and that is bedded into them. You cannot teach it.*

(Pakistani father, UK-born, 30–39 years, A level equivalent)

Many were also averse to the idea of joining in organised activities with their children, preferring to take their children out on trips themselves or spend time together at home. One father who was the main care-giver to his daughter reported that he had learnt a great deal, and received important support, from Sure Start. However, several others perceived Sure Start and similar services as constraining and boring and felt they could have greater flexibility and fun if they did their own thing with their children. Fathers who were active in spending time with their children very rarely reported doing activities jointly with other fathers (aside from spending time with the extended family). Indeed, several fathers we interviewed said that it had never crossed their mind to go out with other fathers but thought that such an activity would be enjoyable.

*Respondent: Yeah, yeah, it's really helpful there, my wife regularly goes there ... I told her, go, peace of mind that one. Go chat with the Bengali people. They spend some nice time with the Sure Start.*

*Interviewer: What about in relation to the activities they have for dads?*

*Respondent: I think it's enough. I think. My theory, if I go my own. I go any park with my kids. This is the main thing actually. It's more interesting things if I go myself. If I go with you, yeah, I have to always. Some rule. Restrictions. And if I go myself I can do anything. If my kids shout, 'Dad I want these things' I can catch it up and give it to him straight away. If I go with any organisation, I can't do things. That's the main thing. I think if you go yourself it's good.*

(Bangladeshi father, Bangladesh-born, 30–39 years, degree)

For most of our fathers, the locally available family support services had no obvious impact on the way they were fathering their children.

A final area that deserves comment relates to paid childcare. Whether or not couples used paid childcare (through nurseries or out-of-school clubs) could have significant implications for fathers' engagement in childrearing tasks on a day-to-day basis, particularly where their wives also worked. Many respondents, particularly our Gujarati and Sikh parents, seemed to actively avoid paid private childcare, preferring to arrange their work commitments so that one or other parent was with the children, or to make use of unpaid family members. A desire to avoid private childcare was also a factor that encouraged some women to remain outside the labour market until their children were of school-going age. This avoidance seemed to relate to both a lack of confidence that available childcare was appropriate to their child's religio-ethnic needs (and a concern that young children would not be able to inform parents what happened when outside the home) and a desire to avoid costs. In addition, there was a feeling that it is better for children to be at home and that women's work is less a target for criticism if it does not result in children being cared for by people outside the family. However, some respondents reported positive attitudes to paid childcare, identifying advantages for their child's development as well as in terms of reducing the workload for mother and father. In such cases where paid childcare was used extensively, the mother's entry into employment did not imply a significant increase in the father's childcare contributions.

## Conclusions

Our Asian fathers' inputs to their children were shaped by several of the factors that have been found to be influential in recent work with majority white fathers, in particular the mother's employment status and the quality of the mother–father relationship.

In addition, particular understandings relating to appropriate and inappropriate paternal behaviour (sometimes explicitly underpinned by religious beliefs) could also be an important influence. These understandings tended to promote the father's income-earning role and to sideline him from other types of inputs, particularly those that relate to personal care-giving.

Although paternal grandparents, and other members of the religio-ethnic community, were powerful in some cases, acting to limit the type of involvement that men had with their children, there was great diversity between fathers in the extent to which these religio-ethnic influences significantly shaped fathering behaviours. Some fathers were confident to challenge such norms and to seek to transform the content and meaning of fathering.

Constraints relating to work commitments were also perceived and responded to differently by different fathers. While some fathers saw little option for combining their working role and other inputs to their children, others were proactive in finding ways of contributing to, and keeping involved with, their children's lives. The interplay between interacting with children, gaining enjoyment and confidence through such interaction, and seeing such interaction as part and parcel of being a father, was clearly evident in many of our fathers' interviews. These findings support Doherty *et al.*'s (1998) assertion that fathers themselves play a pivotal role:

*... in appropriating or discarding cultural and contextual messages, in formulating a fathering identity and developing fathering skills with their own children ... and in dealing collaboratively with their children's mother.*

(Doherty *et al.*, 1998, p. 289)

The fathers in our study seemed to be largely doing this in the absence of any direct support or encouragement from formal services.

# 6 Implications for policy and practice

## The policy and practice context

Since 1997 and the election of the Labour Government, families have been a major focus of UK social policy. An array of new legislation, policy and practice initiatives have followed that aim at early intervention to support families and children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with the main concern being to ameliorate the impact of family breakdown, lone parenthood and resulting child poverty. Fathers have received attention within this broader policy agenda. As early as 1998, the government consultation paper *Supporting Families* recognised that ‘fathers have a crucial role to play in their child’s upbringing’ (Ministerial Group on the Family, 1998, p. 37). However, early experiences with interventions such as Sure Start (Lloyd *et al.*, 2003) and family centres (Ghate *et al.*, 2000) highlighted the failure of many services to effectively engage men and the need for carefully considered approaches to meeting fathers’ needs. Furthermore, Lewis’s (2000) review of research concluded that policy-makers and professionals continued to ignore the positive contributions that fathers make to children’s upbringing and focused too narrowly on men’s economic inputs. Lewis argued that there was still ‘little serious discussion about what policy-makers and service providers can actually do to support men’s parenting’ (Lewis, 2000, p. 7). Similarly, early evaluations indicated that family support initiatives such as Sure Start were often struggling to engage minority ethnic families and thereby failing in their duty to address ethnic inequalities in service access and welfare outcomes (Craig *et al.*, 2007).

Recent policy and practice guidance does, however, seem to be responding to the need to recognise and support fathers’ non-economic contributions to their families and to provide concrete strategies for better meeting men’s needs, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds (see DCSF, 2007; DfES, 2007).

There are some significant attempts to develop innovative approaches to delivery of parent support as well as to test and disseminate effective evidence-based practice via resource kits and training tools (see, for example, the Parenting Implementation Project; and the *Sure Start Children’s Centres Practice Guidance*: DfES, 2006). There is increasing recognition that family support services must: signal strongly that they are there for both fathers and mothers; be responsive to fathers’ interests, needs and schedules; tackle negative attitudes and cultural stereotypes that constrain fathers’ roles; foster positive attitudes towards diversity and difference; embed anti-discriminatory practice within their work; and effectively consult with fathers from all religio-ethnic backgrounds (DfES, 2006). While this rhetoric recognises the importance of fathers in children’s lives, at the local level such commitments have yet to be routinely translated into practice (Page *et al.*, 2008). The findings of the present study are discussed below in light of this evolving policy and practice environment.

## Policy and practice implications of the findings

As described in Chapter 1, the study employed a series of qualitative research methods to generate understanding of Asian fathering roles and contributions, as well as the various influences that shape these and how fathers might be better supported. The research was carried out in East London and Sheffield between May 2006 and April 2008. Phase One employed a range of tools (key informant interviews, focus group discussions, interviews and observation) and involved over 80 informants. In Phase Two, in-depth interviews were conducted with 59 fathers and 33 mothers.

In undertaking this type of qualitative work that aims at gathering a rich understanding from a small number of respondents, there is a danger

that broader generalisations are compromised. In particular, it may be that the fathers who came forward for interview were systematically different from those who were not included, perhaps having a stronger interest in parenting and greater involvement with their families. That said, the tables in Chapter 1 illustrate the substantial body of evidence that was generated during the study as well as the diversity in education, employment and migration status of the fathers who took part. Furthermore, the findings illustrate a significant variety of experiences across many aspects of family life and parenting, thereby giving us greater confidence that where consistent patterns emerged across the sample these are likely to reflect the wider populations. Nevertheless, in drawing out lessons for policy and practice we are mindful of the risk of over-reaching our data.

## Understanding and responding to religio-ethnic diversity

Past work has highlighted the ways in which family support services often fail to sensitively meet the needs of minority religio-ethnic groups. In particular, a lack of understanding of minority cultures and religions can lead to both the pathologisation of minority family values and practices (and particularly to condemnation of behaviours without awareness of the wider cultural and/or socio-economic context) and a tendency to stereotype, leading to erroneous assumptions about individual needs and preferences (Atkin, 2004; Atkin and Chattoo, 2007).

Our findings further underscore the great family diversity that exists within ethnic groups. First, and most important, no single, typical model of Asian fatherhood stood out. Across all four religio-ethnic communities of focus we found great variety in fathering practices. Furthermore, many of the themes highlighted are echoed in research with white majority fathers, including the persistent emphasis on fathers' income-earning role, the constraining influence of gendered stereotypes and the widespread expectation that fathers will be 'involved' with their children (Lewis, 2000). Asian fathers have much in common with fathers from other UK ethnic groups. There is a need to challenge the 'othering' and homogenising of minority ethnic fathers that can occur through the

design of services and the attitudes of practitioners (Atkin, 2004; Atkin and Chattoo, 2007). This recommendation is also supported by our respondents' reported experiences with services.

The importance of recognising diversity within and similarity across ethnic groups does not imply that religion and ethnic identity have no relevance to Asian fathers in how they parent their children. Our findings highlight a number of areas (some of which have been noted in other recent research with minority families, e.g. Barn, 2006) where policy and practice could do more to support fathers. First, the transmission of language, religion and cultural identity is important to many minority ethnic parents and felt to be a struggle in the context of UK society. Second, protecting children from, and providing them with the attributes to cope with, racial disadvantage is a significant concern for many fathers. Third, the transnational nature of many minority ethnic families presents particular constraints and can mean long periods away from children for some fathers. Fourth, childcare arrangements and fathering inputs must often be understood within the context of the wider family, and particularly the contributions of grandparents. Fifth, though in practice diverse interpretations exist, practitioners must recognise that individual fathers may understand and legitimise their fathering practices in terms of particular cultural norms or religious teachings. Sixth, some Asian fathers, particularly those that are migrants to the UK, may require additional support to navigate services. Low levels of English language competency and lack of familiarity with systems can combine with feelings of difference to exclude men and their families from information, resources and opportunities.

Practitioners should be sufficiently culturally knowledgeable to ask the right questions. However, the emphasis must be on offering choice and non-judgemental support. As Atkin and Chattoo note, the challenge for family support services is to develop a 'reflexive practice, enabling professionals to respond to the needs of people from minority ethnic populations without recourse to homogenised notions of culture, religion or community' (Atkin and Chattoo, 2007, p. 379).

## Supporting 'involved' fatherhood and encouraging greater direct interaction

The current UK policy focus on facilitating closer father-child bonds, greater direct interaction and a wider role for fathers fits well with the aspirations voiced by many of the respondents in the present study. Our findings suggest a number of ways in which policy and practice might further support men towards more involvement in their children's lives.

First, more needs to be done to break down persistent gendered stereotypes and to promote positive images of men in diverse parenting roles. Lewis (2000) notes how, despite fathers taking an increasingly 'hands on' role within families, prevalent values and attitudes continue to emphasise men's economic contributions and to undermine their other inputs. Our own findings indicate that many of the fathers who were contributing across the range of parental inputs and playing a highly involved role felt that they were 'unusual' and that they lacked role models. Furthermore, we found that some Asian fathers face significant resistance and disapproval when they transgress the boundaries of 'appropriate' fathering behaviour, particularly from older generations. In fact, our findings suggest that such involved fathering was not exceptional, but that a tendency for men (and others) to downplay their contributions may serve to perpetuate an outdated fathering stereotype. There is a need to support such fathers so that their feeling of being highly unusual (and in some cases rather isolated) is lessened and to challenge behaviours and attitudes that act to constrain men's parenting options. There is a need to normalise and legitimise high levels of father involvement.

Few of our respondents had used family support services and for many this non-engagement reflected a lack of information about what was available. However, among those who were aware of local centres and services, many perceived the provision on offer to be unattractive. Our findings suggest that if services want to draw men in greater numbers they must provide an environment that is perceived to be worthwhile and flexible, rather than constraining, judgemental,

patronising or simply irrelevant. Introducing men to ways of engaging with their children that they themselves find fulfilling and which they perceive as promoting their children's positive development is likely to encourage fathers' engagement with services (Fagan and Palm, 2004). Our findings suggest that activities that promote desired child outcomes, such as educational attainment, positive religious and ethnic identity, Asian language competency and respect for community and authority figures, would be of interest, rather than 'parenting skills' per se which are perceived to come naturally. Many of our respondents did take their children to activities held at local ethnically-specific community centres, indicating that fathers will engage with organised services where they perceive them to be beneficial.

A further important factor to consider, however, is that family support facilities (Sure Start centres, local playgroups and drop-ins) are commonly perceived to be female space, as found for family centres (Ghate *et al.*, 2000). Several of our fathers identified such resources as valuable precisely because they were 'safe' environments where their wives could interact with other mothers. While an issue across all ethnicities, the entry of fathers into facilities that serve mothers may be particularly serious for some Asian fathers and mothers. Indeed, efforts to expand existing services to include fathers could be counterproductive in terms of child and family well-being if they inadvertently lead to a reduction in service use by some women. This is not normally found to occur, but monitoring would be worthwhile.

Our findings support recent calls for increased partnership working with community-based organisations and places of worship (DfES, 2007). We found many examples of fathers taking children to participate in activities at local ethnically-based centres and these would appear to present opportunities for engaging fathers in other parenting-support activities and encouraging greater involvement.

However, it is also clearly the case that many men who do not take up any formal services nevertheless are competent parents and heavily involved in their children's lives. This is not to say that fathers would not benefit from greater involvement with services; and services would certainly benefit from being able to observe

individual fathers interacting with their children. However, where fathers themselves are aware of the services on offer and make an informed decision not to participate, our study suggests that these men might benefit from initiatives aimed at providing accessible information directly to them. Possible sources of information include: home visiting, a dads' newsletter (Brotherson and Bouwhuis, 2007), the internet (a source mentioned by some respondents, though it is unclear how widely men access parenting information online), and family-friendly events and local facilities (e.g. libraries and leisure centres) that enable fathers to meet each other in informal settings.

## Supporting fathers' involvement in children's education

In common with other recent research (Barn, 2006) we found that the majority of our Asian fathers placed great value on education and provided a variety of inputs in support of their children's academic attainment. Furthermore, fathers generally reported positive attitudes and experiences in relation to schools and felt that teachers encouraged their engagement. However, it was also the case that some fathers lacked confidence to directly support children with homework and had a limited understanding of the UK educational system. These findings suggest the appropriateness of governmental support to schools to involve fathers and mothers earlier in their children's education (DfES, 2007) and the Extended Schools Initiative. In particular, there is clearly a need to further expand local initiatives that help migrant mothers and fathers gain familiarity with the national curriculum, admission procedures and the school system in general. More flexible timings for teacher–parent meetings, better English language support, clear invitations to each father and efforts to empower those fathers with less confidence to interact with the school are also areas for development. Schools must also respond to the widespread desire of Asian fathers to equip their children to be successful members of both their religio-ethnic community and wider society and the significant obstacles that many perceive within the UK context. Schools must also address the serious concerns that many Asian, particularly

Bangladeshi and Pakistani, parents have that their children are not expected or encouraged to achieve as highly as white British pupils.

## Working with families as a whole: mothers, grandparents and other actors

In common with other research, we found men's understandings of their fathering role and their actual inputs to their children were importantly shaped by mothers (Clarke and O'Brien, 2002). Furthermore, it was clear that many mothers held ambivalent attitudes towards their husbands taking a greater role in aspects of childrearing that they felt were within their domain, particularly where these mothers did not have a working role outside the home. Clearly, any policy or practice efforts to encourage men to take a more involved and varied role must be sensitive to mothers' attitudes and needs, and work with the mothers to ensure they are fully apprised of the benefits for their children and themselves when fathers play a more substantial nurturing role.

In addition, our findings illustrated the significant influence that other family members, particularly grandparents, can have on fathering behaviours in some Asian families. Grandparents, particularly paternal grandparents, were found in several (though by no means all) cases to importantly shape the amount and type of inputs that fathers provided to their children. They influenced fathers' contributions by actively disapproving of or encouraging involvement in various aspects of child upbringing and by providing significant inputs to daily childcare (particularly among the Sikh and Gujarati families).

While at the individual level practitioners must not make assumptions about family structures and relationships, an awareness of the potential role of family members other than the husband–wife pair is essential. Family support workers must recognise and respect alternative ways of meeting family needs and sharing family responsibilities, rather than imposing particular expectations of what a father should be doing.

## Balancing work and home

Lewis's (2000) recent review of research on fathers concluded that 'the terms, conditions and expectations of paid employment stand as the greatest barrier to men's involvement in childcare' (Lewis, 2000, p. 4). Our findings, too, revealed that playing the role of income-earner could limit men's ability to provide other inputs to their children. This conflict was particularly evident for men in low-skilled work with fixed shift patterns, those with long commutes, new migrants tied to a workplace far away from their families and those who were career-focused professionals. In particular, fathers working in small-scale enterprises such as restaurants, shops and places of worship reported that shift patterns, overtime and little paid holiday were problematic with school-aged children. Several fathers were dissatisfied with the way that work commitments encroached on the time they had with their children.

However, it was also clear that some men who worked long hours outside the home nevertheless also contributed significantly to childcare. This was particularly the case where their wives also worked. The 'shift parenting' patterns exhibited by some of the Gujarati and Sikh families were particularly striking. Furthermore, many of our respondents who worked long hours nevertheless managed to maintain a high degree of involvement in their children's lives, often using varied modes and prioritising 'quality time', even if not contributing much to the day-to-day caring tasks.

Government intervention aimed at helping Asian men towards a better work-life balance and more direct interaction with their children must therefore tackle a range of issues including: professional work cultures that valorise long hours; poor working conditions within small-scale enterprises that largely remain outside employment directives; and the pressures that men face from themselves, their families and the wider consumer society to be good earners and accumulate materially.

However, there is also a need for greater clarity in terms of the objectives of such intervention. Our findings suggest that the way income-earning and childrearing activities are organised and balanced within families impacts primarily upon mothers and

fathers – as, for example, where women receive no contribution towards direct childcare tasks from their working husbands; or where fathers feel over-stretched providing both income and other inputs to their children. It is less clear that children miss out on their father's involvement because of their long working hours. This is not to deny that long working hours prevent men (as well as many women) from spending time with their children; clearly they do. However, our findings suggest that the extent of involvement that fathers have in their children's lives is also importantly shaped by understandings of the fathering role, the degree to which fathering is prioritised over other demands, and also the mother-father relationship. The personal enjoyment and fulfilment through fathering, as well as the extent to which men felt their contributions were important, seemed to be particularly influential.

## Childcare provision

Provision of better and more childcare remains high on the Government's agenda and it is recognised that some minority ethnic groups, notably Bangladeshis, are less likely than other groups to take up free childcare places for 3 and 4 year olds (DfES, 2007). Increased use of formal childcare is seen as a way of freeing parents, particularly mothers, to engage in income-earning work as well as providing positive development inputs to children in the early years. However, these advantages are not necessarily recognised by parents. Our study found that some Asian parents lacked confidence in the extent to which available childcare would meet the religio-ethnic needs of their children. Many fathers and mothers preferred a family member to be the full-time carer for preschool children and older children outside of school hours. In the case of our Bangladeshi and Pakistani respondents, it was most common for mothers to take this childcare role. In contrast, in many Sikh and Gujarati families, fathers and mothers adopted a shared, shift approach or depended on grandparents for significant childcare contributions. Government provision of additional free childcare places seems unlikely to attract greater numbers of children from Asian families unless such provision is seen to be culturally

appropriate and beneficial to the child. For many Pakistani and Bangladeshi families there would also need to be a significant shift in perceptions of the desirability of mothers taking up employment outside the home.

## Conclusion

Fathers are still often perceived by practitioners to be difficult to engage, and Asian fathers are seen as particularly problematic. However, this study shows that a lack of engagement with formal family support services in no way indicates a lack of involvement in children's lives. The majority of fathers in the study had close and loving relationships with their children and considered fathering to be a large part of their lives.

Fathers showed many different ways of being involved in their children's lives, but varied in their understanding of what inputs children need and how these should be achieved. Though the majority of fathers provided financially, they varied in their contributions to personal childcare and to nurturing, protecting and linking children to the outside world.

Diverse arrangements were in place in Asian families to manage the tasks of income generation, household maintenance and childrearing. Gendered norms sometimes constrained fathers' involvement in personal childcare. While some fathers saw little option for combining their working role with other inputs to their children, others actively found ways of contributing to, and keeping involved with, their children's lives. They seemed to do this largely in the absence of support from formal services.

Although wider family and other members of the religio-ethnic community had a powerful effect on the behaviour and experiences of some fathers, there was diversity in the extent to which these influences shaped their role. Some fathers were confident to challenge norms and develop their own understanding of what it means to be a father.

This evidence highlights the great family diversity that exists within ethnic groups and the common challenges faced by all fathers. The design of services and attitudes of practitioners must avoid the 'othering' and homogenising of minority ethnic fathers. The findings also raise the question of what 'problems' recent family policy

and practice responses are seeking to address and how relevant these are to Asian fathers. It is clear that interventions are variously motivated by concerns regarding gender equity, children's development, childhood poverty, parental well-being and family stability, and that often these objectives become confused. Interactions with family support workers and other professionals in this study suggest a lack of clarity as to why they are expected to engage men in their activities or what 'problems' they are seeking to address.

While this study clearly identifies areas where Asian fathers, and families more generally, can be better supported, it did not find evidence of widespread disengagement or serious obstacles to positive fathering. By seeking to understand everyday family life among minority ethnic groups in the community context, this research stands to challenge assumptions regarding problematic parenting and help celebrate and support the positive contributions that fathers make to their children.

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# Appendix:

## Qualitative fieldwork

Table A1.1: Summary characteristics of interview respondents: fathers

	Sheffield		East London			
	Pakistanis	Bangladeshis	Pakistanis	Bangladeshis	Gujaratis	Sikhs
Age						
20–29	2	1	2	0	0	1
30–39	7	9	3	6	6	5
40–49	2	0	4	3	4	4
Migrant status						
UK-born	4	2	1	1	2	5
Migrated age < 10 yrs	3	1	2	0	3	2
Migrated age 10–19 yrs	2	1	0	1	0	1
Migrated age 20+ yrs	2	6	6	7	5	2
Education						
≤GCSE/O level	2	4	4	3	4	3
A level or equivalent	5	2	2	1	2	3
Degree or equivalent	4	4	3	5	4	4
Current work						
Part-time	2	5	3	4	2	3
Full-time	7	4	4	3	7	6
None	2	1	2	2	1	1
Occupation						
Semi-skilled/manual	3	4	3	2	4	2
Skilled	3	3	4	2	3	2
Professional	4	2	2	3	2	4
Self-employed	1	1	0	2	1	2
Household type						
Father non-resident	0	2	0	0	0	2
Nuclear	7	7	8	8	6	5
Extended/complex	4	1	1	1	4	3
Children						
1	3	3	0	0	2	1
2	4	5	6	8	7	6
3+	4	2	3	1	1	3
Main interview language						
English	9	6	5	3	6	7
Bangla/Urdu/Punjabi/ Hindi	2	4	4	6	4	3
Total respondents	11	10	9	9	10	10

### Notes:

- 1 All statuses refer to the time of the interview. In some cases these had changed over the period of fathering (e.g. household type).
- 2 Educational qualifications gained outside the UK have been recorded as their equivalent UK qualification.
- 3 Within the group of respondents who were not UK-born there was a variety of migrant statuses including UK citizens, work permit holders, student visa holders, HSM (Highly Skilled Migrants) work permit holders and those without official legal documents to remain in the UK.
- 4 Though some families are 'nuclear', they have extended relatives, most often grandparents living nearby.
- 5 Some interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and an Asian language.

Table A1.2: Summary characteristics of interview respondents: mothers

	Sheffield		East London			
	Pakistanis	Bangladeshis	Pakistanis	Bangladeshis	Gujaratis	Sikhs
Age						
20–29	1	4	1	2	2	0
30–39	4	2	5	3	3	5
40–49	0	0	0	0	0	1
Migrant status						
UK-born	3	1	2	1	0	4
Migrated age < 10 yrs	0	2	0	0	1	0
Migrated age 10–19 yrs	0	2	1	0	1	0
Migrated age 20+ yrs	2	1	3	4	3	2
Education						
≤GCSE/O level	1	3	4	1	2	2
A level or equivalent	1	2	0	1	1	0
Degree or equivalent	3	1	2	3	2	4
Current work						
Part-time	2	1	0	4	2	1
Full-time	0	0	0	0	2	3
None at present	1	4	6	0	1	1
Never worked	2	1	0	1	0	1
Occupation						
Semi-skilled/manual	1	3	0	0	0	0
Skilled	2	2	0	3	2	5
Professional	0	0	1	1	1	0
Self-employed	0	0	0	0	1	0
Household type						
Father non-resident	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nuclear	3	6	6	4	3	5
Extended/complex	2	0	0	1	2	1
Children						
1	1	1	1	1	2	1
2	1	3	2	3	2	3
3+	3	2	3	1	1	2
Main interview language						
English	4	5	3	2	3	5
Bangla/Urdu/Punjabi/ Hindi	1	1	3	3	2	1
Total respondents	5	6	6	5	5	6

**Notes:**

- 1 All statuses refer to the time of the interview. In some cases these had changed over the period of fathering (e.g. household type).
- 2 Educational qualifications gained outside the UK have been recorded as their equivalent UK qualification.
- 3 Within the group of respondents who were not UK-born there was a variety of migrant statuses including UK citizens, work permit holders, student visa holders, HSM (Highly Skilled Migrants) work permit holders and those without official legal documents to remain in the UK.
- 4 Though some families are 'nuclear', they have extended relatives, most often grandparents living nearby.
- 5 Some interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and an Asian language.

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