

Where have All the Children Gone ? - Comparing Mothers' and Fathers' Declarations in Retrospective Surveys

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Abstract

Researchers and policy analysts have emphasised the need to consider the point of view of fathers in child support studies, a difficult task given the questionable reliability of male declaration of children, repeatedly shown by previous studies. This paper examines the extent of male under-reporting of children among parents who were living apart at the time of the General Social Survey on Family, conducted by Statistics Canada in 1995. We first describe how children reported by their fathers differ from those reported by their mothers, and then analyse the factors likely to affect the probability of children being declared by their fathers. The implications of the findings for future research are discussed in the conclusion.

Résumé

Chercheurs et analystes s'entendent aujourd'hui sur la nécessité de tenir compte du point de vue des pères dans les études portant sur la prise en charge des enfants. Cette tâche n'est cependant pas sans difficultés, étant donné la fiabilité moins grande des informations recueillies auprès des hommes qui a été mise en évidence dans les travaux antérieurs. Cet article évalue l'étendue de la sous-déclaration masculine des enfants parmi les parents séparés lorsque l'Enquête sociale générale sur la famille a été réalisée par Statistique Canada en 1995. Nous dressons d'abord le portrait des enfants rapportés par les hommes et par les femmes, puis nous tentons d'identifier les facteurs qui sont les plus susceptibles d'influencer la propension des hommes à déclarer leurs enfants. En conclusion, nous discutons des avenues futures de la recherche à la lueur des résultats obtenus.

Key words: children's under-reporting; non-resident fathers; paternal involvement; survey participation

Introduction

Over the last 30 years, increases in divorce and cohabitation and the declining popularity of marriage have profoundly altered the relations existing between men and women within unions, and between fathers and their children following a divorce or separation. One would have expected these changes to generate a surge of interest in men's behaviour. Yet, the number of studies focusing on men remained surprisingly small throughout the 1970's and the 1980's, even after data from retrospective surveys started to become widely available. One explanation frequently advanced to account for this dearth of research is the questionable reliability of retrospective information on unions and children collected from male respondents (Furstenberg, 1988; Poulain et al., 1991). But, the implicit assumption that family was strictly women's business remained the greatest obstacle; women alone were considered capable of reporting on family matters, such as unions, births, childcare, domestic work, and so on (Goldscheider and Kaufman, 1996).

As long as "marriage" and parenthood remained closely linked, this approach proved quite satisfactory (Kuijsten, 1995). The rise of divorce, however, with its very different repercussions for men and women, has completely invalidated this assumption. For women, divorce has led to a separation of "marriage" and parenthood; in other words, women maintain close relations with their children and provide for them, even after separating from their children's father. For men, responsibilities to children are dictated by their marital situation to a much greater extent. Hence, men will often disengage from their children following a

separation or divorce, and may take on new paternal responsibilities when embarking on a new union with a partner who has children of her own (Seltzer, 1994); they also are more likely than women to form a subsequent union, and to do so more rapidly (Desrosiers et al., 1999; Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1994).

Psychologists and other behavioural scientists were the first to identify the need to focus on the father/child relationship, while examining the impact of changes in adult conjugal behaviours on children's well-being and development (for a review, see Seltzer, 1994). The interest of sociologists and demographers for analysing men's life course experiences and parental behaviour is more recent, stimulated particularly by the growing number of children living in poverty with lone mothers, a direct result of the rise of separation and divorce. Prompted by the needs of policy makers to improve children's economic situation, researchers have started to investigate the conditions under which non-resident fathers continue to fulfil their financial obligations to their children (McLanahan et al., 1994; Seltzer, 1991a). While studies carried out in the United States and Europe have demonstrated a close association between continuing contact of fathers with their children and alimony payments, these studies were almost exclusively based on data collected from female respondents, and only recently have researchers argued for the need to take directly into consideration the point of view of men (Cooksey and Craig, 1998; Goldscheider and Kaufman, 1996).

In Canada, little is known about the level of contact maintained by fathers with children when biological parents live apart. The General Social Survey (GSS) of Family carried out in 1995 collected the first detailed Canadian data allowing us to explore this problem using information on children collected directly from either their father or mother, but not from both of their biological parents. Over ten thousand Canadian men and women, aged between 15 and 80 years, were asked retrospectively about all marital or cohabiting unions, and about each child they had given birth to or engendered, adopted or raised as a stepchild. In cases where the respondent did not live with the other biological or adoptive parent of a given child, information was gathered about the amount and type of contact maintained with his/her child, both by the respondent and by the child's other parent. Data on the geographic distance between the two parent's households, telephone and letter contact, payment of alimony, and degree of satisfaction with various aspects of the situation, were also collected.

Thus, the survey provides data on many of the variables previously shown to be related to the continuing contact of fathers with their children and alimony payments made by them, and allows for the possibility of taking directly into consideration the point of view of both men and women. However, how reliable is the information provided by male respondents compared to that collected from women? And to what extent are the results likely to vary according to the sex of the respondents? These are the questions that our paper aims to address.

Deriving the Sample of Children

Any study of parent/child contact has to be carried out using the child as the unit of observation rather than the respondent, as a parent may not have the same degree of contact with each child, and because many of the relevant variables differ from one child to another - the child's age at separation, for example. To derive our sample of children, we proceeded in two steps. The 1995 GSS collected retrospective information on all the children born to or raised by male and female respondents. For all these children, we know their age at the survey, their relationship (biological, adopted or step child) with the respondent, and whether they were living with both biological parents, and, if not, whether they were living with a step parent. Using these data, we first selected all respondents' biological or adopted children who were aged 0-17 years at the survey.¹

For children who were not living in the same household as their two biological or adoptive parents, the respondent was further asked whether or not the other parent was still alive. By combining this information, we were able to identify a sample of 1308 children, reported by male and female respondents, who were aged 0-17 years at the survey, and whose parents were both alive, but not living together. However, 133 children were excluded from our analysis either because of incoherence in the data, because the child spent little or no time with either parent (and was presumably fostered or in care) or because the respondent provided no information about the non-custodial parent. This left 1175 children, a large enough sample to allow us to look at the family and residential situation of children not living with both biological (or adoptive) parents.

Apart from the obvious advantage of increasing the sample size, we considered that using information from both men and women would prevent a serious bias, common to such studies, introduced by using observations from either an all male or an all female group of respondents. For, although these men and women were not reporting on the same children (i.e. they were not the two parents of the children in the sample), the number and characteristics of children reported by male and female parents should be the same, plus or minus the sampling error. Nonetheless, as research (Poulain et al., 1991; Rendall et al., 1997; Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994) had repeatedly shown a more complete reporting of children by mothers than by fathers, we expected that some bias would be introduced by pooling all biological/adopted children irrespective of the sex of the parent completing the questionnaire. We were not, however, prepared for the size of the discrepancy in the number of children reported by mothers and fathers: instead of finding equal numbers of children reported by men and women, male respondents who were living apart from their children's mothers reported around 40 % fewer children than female respondents (see Table 1). In other words, slightly more than a third of the total number of children in our sample were reported by male respondents (476 of 1308), 356 fewer than were declared by female respondents. This difference was so great that it made us, first, doubt the quality of the data per se and, second, question the relevance of using the

information on children provided by one or the other parent. Locating the source of the discrepancy between men's and women's reports of children and assessing its impact on any analyses based on pooled data are thus the goals of this paper.

Explaining the Discrepancy

In order to ascertain whether or not the discrepancy observed between fathers and mothers was present at a more general level in the survey or was limited to our subsample of children not living with their two parents, we first compared the number of biological/adopted children reported by both male and female respondents, according to whether parents were living together or apart at the survey. Interestingly, the number of children declared by either male or female respondents living with the other biological/adoptive parent is almost identical: 2684 children living with their two parents were reported by their fathers and 2681 by their mothers (Table 1). As we have seen, this is in striking contrast to the distribution of children not living with both parents, confirming the fact that under-reporting of children by men in this survey was limited to those men not living with the mother of their children; precisely those who constitute the group of interest in studies of custody and alimony arrangements.

So what happened to the 350 missing children who, presumably, should have been declared by their fathers? A number of explanations have been put forward to account for similar problems in other research. First, a small proportion of fathers not living with the mother at the time of birth might be ignorant of the existence of the child. A second reason for under-reporting children, often mentioned in the literature, is the tendency of fathers to "forget" children with whom they have no contact (Furstenberg, 1988; Rendall et al., 1997). Thirdly, fathers whose conjugal unions dissolved prior to the retrospective survey may be underrepresented; the difficulty of contacting through household (phone) surveys men who have experienced unstable conjugal histories and, perhaps, greater residential mobility, is partly responsible for this (Rendall et al., 1997; Lin et al., 1998). Lastly, separated fathers might refuse to participate in a survey about children, because of guilt or painful memories associated with them.

Information on the amount of time children spent with their fathers, collected by the survey, offered a point of entry into assessing the relative importance of these diverse explanations, as we expected the latter to affect the pattern of divergence between male and female reports of father/child contact. For example, if either ignorance of a child's existence or absence of contact with a child explain the smaller number of children declared by men, men should "forget" to declare children reported by women as having no contact with their fathers. In fact, if these explanations were entirely responsible for the discrepancy between male and female reports, we would expect to find 350 more children having no contact with their father declared by female than by male respondents. If, on the other hand, fewer children were declared by men either because these separated fathers could not be contacted or because they

Table 1

**Distribution of Biological/Adopted Children, Aged 0 to 17 Years,
Declared by Male and Female Respondents,
According to Whether Parents Live Together or Apart for Canada: 1995**

Sex of Respondents		Biological/Adopted Parents		Total	
		live together	live apart ^a		
Male	N	2684	476	3160	
	%	50.0	36.4		47.4
Female	N	2681	832	3513	
	%	50.0	63.6		52.6
Total	N	5365	1308	6673	
	%	100.0	100.0		100.0

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (Cycle 10) on Family, 1995.

^a For 133 children living apart from one of their biological/adopted parents, all information relating to this parent is missing; these children have been excluded from the following analyses.

refused to participate in the survey, fewer children would be reported by men irrespective of the time spent with them.

In order to disentangle the causes of the under-estimation of children by male respondents in the General Social Survey, we first examine to what extent the discrepancy in the number of children declared by mothers and fathers varies according to the level of paternal involvement, i.e. time spent with the child. We describe and compare the characteristics of children reported by male and female respondents in the following section, and then present a multivariate analysis of the factors that are likely to affect the probability of children being declared by males. The implications of these findings for future research are discussed in the conclusion.

Comparing Fathers' and Mothers' Declarations of Time Spent with Children

Respondents living apart from the other parent of their children were asked the number of hours, days, weeks or months, each of their children spent with them, and with the other parent, during the last twelve months. This data was transformed into a number of days (from 0 to 365) on the microdata file produced by Statistics Canada, and regrouped by us into six time categories.² By including reports from female respondents on the time their children spent with the "other" parent (i.e. the father), and those from male respondents on the time they (as fathers) spent with their children, we estimated the amount of time children spent with their father, as declared by men and women.

Summarised in Table 2, the information pertaining to the time spent by fathers with their children clearly shows that the greatest disparities in numbers of children reported by male and female respondents are found for children spending less than six months per year with their father. Only 70 children (29.5 %) who had no contact with their father during the year preceding the GSS were declared by male respondents compared to 167 children reported by females; about a third of the children who spent some time, but less than two months, with their father were mentioned by males, and two-thirds by females. For children who lived six months or more with their father, however, the gap observed between male and female respondents is smaller; in fact, for two of the three categories presented in Table 2, the results show slightly more children declared by fathers than mothers. This may be partly due to fathers overestimating the time they spend with their children; in the same way, a fraction of the "under-reporting" by males of children in the less than six months categories may be the result of a similar tendency among mothers to overestimate the time they spend with their children.

In general, we can conclude that the minority of men spending at least half the previous year with their children are adequately represented by the survey, are willing to participate in it, and do not tend to "forget" their children. In other words, the under-representing/under-reporting of children by males primarily concerns children spending less than half the year with their fathers; men who had not seen their children for at least a year account for roughly 40 % of the under-declaration of children. All four explanations appear to play some role in male under-reporting of children. Ignorance of the existence of the child accounts for no more than 15% of the under-reporting by males; the number of children born outside a union who had no contact with their father in the year preceding the survey declared by female respondents exceeds those reported by male respondents by only 45. "Forgetting" children with whom they have no contact may account for the remaining discrepancy between male and female reports of children spending no time with their father. The even larger difference for children spending less than two months with their father may be more closely linked both to the difficulty of contacting fathers and to an unwillingness to talk about children with whom they have very little contact. The following pages

Table 2. Distribution of Biological/Adopted Children, Aged 0 - 17 Years, Declared by Male or Female Respondents, According to the Amount of Time per Year Spent with the Father for Canada: 1995

Sex of Respondents		Time Spent with Father						Total ^a
		No Time	Less than 2 Months	2 to 6 Months	6 Months	More than 6 Months	Full-time	
Male	N	70	133	83	59	52	21	418
	%	29.6	31.3	44.4	54.6	58.4	43.7	38.2
Female	N	167	292	104	49	37	27	676
	%	70.5	68.7	55.6	45.4	41.6	56.3	61.8
Total	N	237	425	187	108	89	48	1094
	Δ (n)	-97	-159	-21	+10	+15	-6	-258
	Δ (%)	-37.6	-61.6	-8.2	+3.9	+5.8	-2.3	-100.0

$\chi^2 = 47.951$ $p = 0.001$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (Cycle 10) on Family, 1995.

^aExclude 81 children for whom information on the time spent with the father is missing (25 children declared by fathers, and 56 by mothers).

describe our attempt to identify other distinctive features of the missing children, with the aim of better assessing the nature and extent of biases introduced by including children reported by fathers, mothers, or respondents of both sexes, in our sample.

Comparing Children's Characteristics

Are there characteristics other than time spent with the father that affect the propensity of fathers to declare their children? Or, put differently, are the children declared by their fathers likely to differ from those reported by their mothers, in terms of socio-demographic attributes? We examined the distributions of children reported by male and female respondents for several characteristics often cited as affecting the degree of fathers' involvement with their children. Tables 3 to 5 present those distributions.

Are girls more likely than boys to be under-reported by their fathers? Or, conversely, are they more likely to be reported by their mothers? Table 3 shows no difference in the proportions of girls and boys reported by parents of either sex: slightly less than half (49 %) of the children declared by both male and female respondents are girls. Moreover, while the distribution of children according to the time spent with the father varies with the sex of respondents, as we have seen, there is no evidence of a significant difference (X^2 not significant at the 0.05 level) between male and female reports on the amount of time spent by fathers with boys or girls.

Given that male under-reporting appears to affect principally children spending less than half the year with their fathers, the following analyses are restricted to children falling into this category. Because of the greater propensity of men to see their children on a regular basis once they get older, documented in some previous research (Seltzer, 1991b), we expected the under-reporting of children by males to vary somewhat according to the age of the child at the time of survey, with a more complete reporting on older children. However, the only noteworthy difference affects children over the age of ten: the proportion (30.3 %) of children aged 11-14 years reported by female respondents is much larger than that observed for males (23.1 %), while the reverse is true for children aged 15-17 years (16.1 % versus 22.7 %). It may be that a teenager's growing autonomy allows freer access to a non-resident father; or it may be that fathers who see their children rarely are unaware of their age, though it is not clear why they should tend to overestimate it.

The age of the child at separation also appears to be linked to the probability that fathers "forget" their children. As can be seen in Table 4b, men seem slightly more at risk of under-reporting the children who were aged between 2 and 10 years when they separated from their partner; interestingly, they have better memories at both extremes of the age scale: children with whom they lived until adolescence (i.e. until ages 11-17 years) and those who were very young (less than two years old) at the time of separation (X^2 significant at the 0.05 level).

Table 3. Percent Distribution of Biological/Adopted Children, Aged 0 - 17 Years, Declared by Male or Female Respondents, According to the Sex of the Child and the Amount of time per Year Spent with the Father for Canada: 1995

Sex of Respondents	Sex of the Child	Time spent with father					Total ^a
		No Time	Less than 2 Months	2 to 6 Months	6 Months	More than 6 Months	
Male	Boys	14.0	31.7	22.0	13.8	14.1	51.0
	Girls	19.7	31.7	17.7	14.4	10.9	49.0
Female	Boys	24.0	39.6	19.0	7.2	5.8	51.3
	Girls	25.5	47.0	11.5	7.3	5.2	48.7

For male respondents, $X^2 = 4.188$ $p = 0.523$; for female respondents, $X^2 = 8.932$ $p = 0.112$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (Cycle 10) on Family, 1995.

^aExclude 81 children for whom information on the time spent with the father is missing (25 children declared by fathers and 56 by mothers).

Table 4

Percent distribution of biological/adopted children, aged 0 to 17 years, declared by male or female respondents, according to the age of the child at survey and at separation and to duration since separation for Canada: 1995 (only for children spending less than half the year with their father)

a. Age of the child at survey^a

Sex of Respondent	Age of the Child at Time of Survey			
	0-5 years	6-10 years	11-14 years	15-17 years
Male	22.2	32.0	23.1	22.7
Female	23.5	30.1	30.3	16.1

$$\chi^2 = 8.353 \quad p = 0.039$$

b. Age of Child at Separation^b

Sex of Respondent	Age of the Child at Separation			
	0-1 years	2-5 years	6-10 years	11-17 years
Male	52.9	24.3	15.5	7.3
Female	45.0	32.2	17.7	5.1

$$\chi^2 = 8.061 \quad p = 0.045$$

c. Duration since Separation^b

Sex of Respondent	Duration since Separation			
	0-1 year	2-4 years	5-9 years	10+ years
Male	11.0	24.2	41.5	23.3
Female	16.1	29.7	29.4	24.8

$$\chi^2 = 13.036 \quad p = 0.005$$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (Cycle 10) on Family, 1995.

^a Exclude 4 children for whom the age at time of survey is missing.

^b Exclude 42 children for whom the date of separation is missing.

We could interpret this as lending support to the “unwillingness to talk” hypothesis. Questions of custody and child support, family reconstitution and the like, might be more traumatic for families separating when children are young enough to be still family- rather than peer-oriented, but old enough to have developed important relations with both parents.

Previous studies have also shown that the duration elapsed since separation can affect the likelihood that men maintain contact with their children. Hence, we expected the under-reporting of children by males to increase as time went by. Table 4c shows that it is not the case here. Children are more at risk of being “forgotten” by their fathers during the first five years following separation, and to a greater extent within the first two years following this event. This period might be one of adjustment and turmoil, perhaps a time of great residential mobility, of guilt and/or anger, that could explain the under-reporting of children by males within the first years following a separation.

The type of union chosen by the parents when they first started living as a couple or when they gave birth to the child appears to affect the probability that men declare their children (see Table 5a), but not in the way that might have been expected. While we might have predicted that children born outside a union would be more frequently forgotten by their fathers, quite the opposite appears to be the case. In fact, children born to a couple who married directly are most at risk of being omitted by their fathers.

Previous research has shown the probability of men maintaining contact with their children to be linked to the geographical distance separating their household from that of their children (Cooksey and Craig, 1998); we thus expected the under-reporting of children by males to increase with distance. To our surprise, the percentages presented in Table 5b show the opposite result: children who live within ten kilometres from their father's household and who spent less than half the preceding year with them face a greater risk of not being reported by their father than those residing further away.

Finally, the lower section of Table 5 presents the distribution of children declared by male and female respondents according to payment of alimony by the father. As shown in previous studies (Seltzer, 1994), the payment of alimony appears to be closely linked to the likelihood of fathers maintaining contact with their children. Our analysis clearly confirms this finding. Fathers declared making alimony payments for almost four-fifths of the children with whom they spent less than six months during the year preceding the survey, while female respondents declared that only half of these children benefited from an alimony. In other words, men omit to declare children for whom they make no payments.

In order to identify the factors most closely associated with reliable reporting of children by their fathers, we conducted a logistic regression analysis, in which the probability of children being declared by male respondents (as opposed to female respondents) is the dependent variable. Put differently, this analysis

Table 5

Percent distribution of biological/adopted children, aged 0 to 17 years, declared by male or female respondents, according to the type of union chosen by parents and to the payment of an alimony by the father (only for children spending less than half the year with their father)

a. Type of union chosen by parents^a

Sex of Respondent	Type of Union		
	Not in a Union	Cohabitation	Marriage
Male	36.2	29.4	34.4
Female	28.5	29.3	42.2

$$\chi^2 = 6.231 \quad p = 0.044$$

b. Distance between parental households^b

Sex of Respondent	Distance			
	< 10 km	10-49 km	50-300 km	400+ km
Male	27.1	27.4	21.9	23.6
Female	37.0	24.9	19.1	19.0

$$\chi^2 = 8.143 \quad p = 0.038$$

c. Payment of Alimony^c

Sex of Respondent	Alimony	
	Paid	Not Paid
Male	78.9	21.1
Female	47.1	52.9

$$\chi^2 = 77.365 \quad p = 0.001$$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (Cycle 10) on Family, 1995.

^a Exclude 30 children for whom the date of union chosen by parents is missing.

^b Exclude 59 children for whom the distance between parental households is missing.

^c Exclude 14 children for whom information on payment of alimony is missing.

allows us to evaluate to what extent children reported by male respondents differ from those declared by females, once we control for all variables taken into consideration.

Table 6 presents the parameter estimates of the logistic regression for six different models. The first two models include all children aged 0-17 years whose parents were not living together at the time of the survey, and for whom no information is missing; models 3 to 6 comprise only children who spent less than six months with their father during the year preceding the survey. Within each subset of children, a first analysis is conducted for all children, irrespective of the circumstances surrounding their birth, and a second is based only on children who were born within a union. By excluding children born outside a union, we sought to eliminate children whose fathers might be ignorant of their existence and for whom the causes of under-reporting might differ from those of other children. Finally, only for children who spent less than six months with their father is the payment of an alimony taken into account in the equation (models 4 and 6).³

As expected from the previous analysis, the logistic regression analysis shows no difference in the likelihood of boys and girls being declared either by fathers or mothers: in all models, the coefficient attached to the sex of the child remains small and is far from being significant at the 0.05 level. The type of union at the birth of the child does not appear either to be closely linked to the probability that children are mentioned by their fathers or mothers, once other characteristics are controlled for; only when the analysis is restricted to children spending less than half the year with their fathers does this variable become significant, with children born outside a union having more chance of being reported by their fathers than those born to a couple married directly. It is interesting to note that male respondents who were cohabiting when the child was born do not differ from their married counterparts in their propensity to declare children, once their union collapsed. Finally, the age of children at the time of the survey is not strongly related to their chance of being reported by their fathers or by their mothers either: only children aged 11-14 years appear less likely to be declared by their fathers than are their elders (aged 15-17 years).

The analysis confirms that the amount of time children spent with their fathers in the twelve months preceding the survey is a very strong predictor: even when restricting the analysis to those born within a union, children are clearly more at risk of under-reporting by male respondents if they spent less than two months (as opposed to more than six months) with their fathers in the previous year. The effect of this variable remained strong throughout most models, until the payment of an alimony, a factor strongly increasing father's propensity to declare their children, was introduced into the equation. Spending no time with their fathers no longer significantly reduced a child's likelihood of being reported, once payment of child support was controlled for; however, it is interesting to note that the time factor is still significant for children spending less than 2 months, when compared with those who spent between two to six months (models 4 and 6). This result indicates that loss of contact and absence of alimony payments are closely linked to one another, and tends to corroborate

Table 6 : Parameter estimates of the logistic regressions predicting the likelihood of male respondents to report children for Canada: 1995

Variables ^a	All children			Children spending less than six months with father		
	Born within a union			Born within a union		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Sex of child (girls)	-0.1054	0.0259	-0.1371	-0.0907	-0.0115	0.0708
Age of child at survey (15-17 years)						
Boys	-0.2653	0.0201	-0.1103	0.0694	0.1834	0.3290
0-5 years	-0.2180	-0.0988	-0.3639	-0.2972	-0.2671	-0.2991
6-10 years	-0.3940 *	-0.2129	-0.6690 **	-0.6489 **	-0.5111	-0.5686 *
11-14 years						
Duration since separation (10+ years)						
0-1 year	-0.1126	-0.2122	-0.6192 *	-0.7651 *	-0.8861 *	-0.9732 *
2-4 years	-0.0944	0.1086	-0.4528	-0.4776	-0.1892	-0.2468
5-9 years	0.3556	0.2727	0.2367	0.2566	0.2217	0.2049
Time spent with father (more than 1/2 year)						
None	-1.1644 ***	-1.1260 ***	-0.9826 ***	-0.2757	-0.7592 **	-0.1977
0-2 months	-0.9734 ***	-1.2156 ***	-0.7183 ***	-0.6133 **	-0.7573 ***	-0.7742 ***
2-6 months	-0.3064	-0.5071	b	b	b	b
Half year	0.3126	0.1105	b	b	b	b
Distance between parents (< 10 km)						
400 km or +	0.6889 ***	0.5625 *	0.7407 ***	0.8286 ***	0.5486 *	0.6683 *
50-399 km	0.4808 *	0.6193 **	0.5526 **	0.6188 ***	0.6036 *	0.7860 **
10-49 km	0.4916 **	0.3827	0.4488 *	0.5511 **	0.2205	0.2695
Type of union (marriage)						
None	0.3065	c	0.3088	0.5754 **	c	c
Cohabitation	-0.0355	-0.0434	0.0899	0.1660	0.0951	0.1868
Payment of alimony (no)						
Yes				1.6874 ***		1.7591 ***

Source : Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (cycle 10) on Family, 1995.

^a The omitted categories are in parentheses. ^b In models 3-6, the omitted category is 2-6 months. ^c Not applicable, in these models.

*p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

findings from previous studies showing that fathers who remain involved on a regular basis with their children also tend to be "good payers."

The distance separating both parents' households remains closely related to the probability that children are mentioned by their fathers. When controlling for other characteristics, children who live within ten kilometres from their father face a lower risk of being reported by their father than those residing further away, and this difference remains significant throughout all models. At first somewhat surprising, this result could suggest that fathers living close to their children are more ambivalent about not seeing them on a regular basis, and are thus more prone to either refuse to participate in a survey about children or to "forget" to declare their children.

The duration elapsed since separation (or since the birth of the child, if it occurred outside of a union) also affects the propensity of fathers to report their children, but only for those who spent less than six months with their children during the year preceding the survey. When the analysis is restricted to children seeing their father less than six months per year, children appear less likely to be declared by their fathers if the separation is very recent (i.e. less than 5 years old), though the effect is significant only if it occurred less than two years before. Hence, it could well be that fathers are more likely to be missed by surveys or to be unwilling to talk about their children in the period directly following the separation.⁴

Conclusion

Male under-declaration of children is common to many surveys, but most estimates are small (around 2%) when considered in the context of all births, small enough indeed to introduce little bias into general studies of fertility, family size or structure, and so forth. However, this paper has demonstrated that this is not a random phenomenon, but one affecting a very specific group of children - those who do not live with their biological fathers. This result is consistent with findings from other research (Rendall et al., 1997; Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994).

This paper has also shown that the likelihood that male respondents report their children varies significantly according to a number of characteristics. Hence, males appear more likely to report children with whom they have frequent contact, for whom they pay child support, and who live more than ten kilometres away from their household; they seem, on the contrary, more at risk of under-reporting those children they see infrequently (less than two months) and from whom they have parted very recently. By highlighting the circumstances favourable to fathers declaring their children, we have come some way towards realising our original goal: that of exploring post-separation arrangements of fathers and children. The picture that emerges is a complex one; at one extreme, fathers not declaring children of whose very existence they are ignorant; at the other, fathers reliably reporting on children with whom they maintain frequent

contact and provide financial support. In between, the quality of reporting seems to reflect the degree of adaptation to post-separation changes. Reports are particularly incomplete during the period immediately following separation, when many factors, such as residence, custody, alimony, guilt, family reconstitution and much more, are in the process of being resolved.

Clearly, therefore, the portrait of children not living with their two biological parents derived from retrospective surveys will differ significantly depending upon the sex of the responding parent and the timing of the survey within respondents' life histories. This is all the more problematic given that family disruption is currently a primary focus of research which aims to develop social policies designed to facilitate the process of adaptation to family change in order to improve children's well-being.

Even child-focused surveys are prone to problems similar to those discussed here with respect to adult-based surveys. While they are unlikely to suffer from "under-declaration" of children, they may fall prey to the opposite problem - that of missing parents (generally fathers). For while educational and emotional development can be assessed through contact with the child, conjugal and parental histories are inevitably collected from a parent (most often the mother). Data on a non-resident parent, therefore, is likely to be partial or even completely absent. But, interviewing both parents, the only logical solution, would probably be most impracticable for children whose parents live apart.⁵

Other alternatives clearly need to be explored in future research. Our analysis suggests two issues. On a methodological level, studies trying to better understand the process of locating and interviewing non resident fathers are worth pursuing in order to gather more representative samples of men or to provide adjustments for selection. On a theoretical level, more research is needed if we are to better comprehend how survey participation is linked to the results of survey analyses. Hence, as Lin, Schaeffer and Seltzer (1998) argue, fathers' commitment to children is probably related to a lower level of mobility and a greater willingness to talk about children, and, thus, to a higher probability of non resident fathers to be reached by surveys.

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Endnotes:

1. We thus excluded respondents' step children from the analysis. Through this procedure, we avoid one weighting problem common to children's surveys based on households - that of double counting. Apart from a few children whose father may have been ignorant of their birth and therefore unable to declare them, each child has the same likelihood of double selection.
2. For a few cases, corrections had to be made on the number of days reported by respondents as, for example, some women who declared living full-time with their child (and were thus coded a number of 365 days spent with the child) also mentioned that this child spent a given number of days with his/her father.
3. For children living full-time with their father, the latter would not necessarily have to pay an alimony. The use of this variable in conjunction with the time spent with the father thus becomes redundant.
4. As mentioned by a reviewer, including both the current age of the child and the duration since separation might introduce constraints on the solution, since younger children cannot have had as long a period since separation as older ones. To control for this problem, we conducted the analysis for separate age groups and assessed the effect of duration within these subgroups. Except for lower levels of statistical significance due to lower sample sizes, the results ran in the same direction as those obtained for the whole sample.
5. The Québec longitudinal survey of children (ELDEQ) is currently attempting to overcome this problem by sending a mail-in questionnaire to non resident fathers. We await with interest the results of this experiment.

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